

# Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

September 2004 Newsletter "Advocating Heroic Engagement With Life"

Volume 6, Number 9

**International Section (Received by all local chapters)**

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## Mission Statement

The Fellowship of Reason® is an open, benevolent, and vital rational moral community in which we celebrate our lives, our freedoms, and our philosophy of reason We study ethics.

## On Wonder and Mystery

By David Ziebell

It has often been alleged that people are drawn to religion because of a need to experience wonder and a need to abate fear of the mysterious. It has also been alleged that science is a reaction to religion and as a result science is somehow against wonder and provides a shield against the mysterious. The Fellowship of Reason exists, in part, to "more rationally" deal with the very human need to experience wonder and to address the mysterious. "More rationally" that is, than systems of thought that are based in theistic notions.

I declare, as did Albert Einstein: "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

Let's address wonder and mystery at a level beyond where we were when humanity first observed those issues, beyond mere science or mere religion.

But I'm not just discarding venerated notions like science and religion to be destructive. The baby in the bathwaters of both science and religion is "truth." I'll propose that we need to review our relationship with "truth" to reach a new level of thinking about Wonder and Mystery.

### Reality vs. Truth

I prefer "reality" to "truth," as a point of aim, a target to seek, a relationship to establish. Truth simply completes the knower, while reality requires paying attention even when using confidently-held truths Truth is (merely?) a relationship between what I know, and the way things are Truth, of itself, cannot require of me that I hold it, hew to it, in order to live.

On the other hand, Reality, of itself, requires me to pay attention to it, in order to live. I am called to reality. I use what truth I can grasp in pursuing that calling, but "truth" is not the calling.

## The wonder of knowing our meaning

Each of us knows that some of what we say to ourselves or others has "meaning." What I will say of meaning applies to all kinds of meaning: Denotative, intentional, and purposive

When we make a statement that has meaning to us, the action consists of the following elements: we construct statements about that which we discern from the context and place in the focus, in order to communicate what we propose is a universal relationship between "a statement that can be said" and reality And in so doing, we tacitly accept all that is left unsaid about the context which is part of the basis for our statement This is the tacit triad that I understand in gratitude from Michael Polanyi. There is a final element that relates our action of "making a statement" to what we would call "truth" That is, when we state to ourselves a meaningful statement that we take to be true, we commit ourselves, and our lives, to that meaning I think we should take pride in this wondrous capacity we have. That we decide for ourselves is wondrous

Why wondrous? Because we are each unique in our consciousness. Life is a rare and precious condition in reality. The capacity of conscious life to construct enough knowledge about reality to enable life itself to harness and transform things in reality is so little understood. And because even in the far future when life itself and our conscious processes are better understood, the results of conscious life's activity will still be unfolding, each day new, unique, and surprising.

## The value of mystery

Mystery is the opposite of knowledge Just as I am not called to truth; instead I am called to reality. I am not frightened of the mysterious. Instead, I am called to reality, and aware that reality surprises us, and so I must "pay attention." This is the downside of mystery - since reality has teeth, we should be a bit on edge.

What I love about mystery is that mystery is where growth occurs for our own knowledge At all times, truth completes the knower, like bark completes the tree What is outside the tree is not the tree, this years But next year, another growth ring and newly acquired bark complete the tree. This expansion comes from the interaction of the outside and the inside of the tree: the tree takes in things from the outside, and the tree constructs the new cells. We take in things we don't know, statements we can't commit

to, and from them we construct new statements we can commit to, and thus we grow. Sometimes, we replace old statements with new ones that better state the truth: the relationship between what we say and the way things are. In these ways, we empower our control over the things in reality, toward the end of achieving our own life.

When the tree stops constructing its tree rings, it's dead. I think that since we are biological animals, it is possible for us to survive without growing intellectually. We can take in food and water and construct new skin cells, and clearly when we stop doing that we are dead as animals. What distinguishes us from trees is that we can die intellectually. We can stop expanding ourselves intellectually. We die intellectually when we are closed to mystery.

### **Proclaim from the mountain tops and in the schools**

All the following conclusions can be said without railing about science and religion. So let's get on with it.

We know that each of us is wondrously rare and capable. We know we can communicate with and learn from others that which we are willing to commit ourselves to, and this empowers us and helps others to the extent the communicated meaning is mutual, and individually judged truthful. We live, eat, breathe, and grow in reality in large measure through the benefit of our accrued personal meanings and the available social meanings we choose to accept as true. This work occurs at the boundary between the known and the mysterious. The world is our oyster, and mystery is one of the best parts

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### **Disclaimer**

The opinions expressed in the columns appearing in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the organization. The Fellowship of Reason, Inc speaks only through its Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, and the actions taken by the Board of Trustees as a board and recorded in the minutes of the corporation.

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### **Letters to the Editor**

*(Please comment for publication upon matters of interest to you, including the essay in this newsletter.)*

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## **Reflections on Last Month in the Fellowship of Reason®**

*(Please submit matters of interest for this section.)*

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### **Seen and Heard**

*(Please submit matters of interest for this section.)*

#### **“A Hero's Story”**

A person does not wake up one morning and decide to be a hero. A hero simply *is*. Heroism flows from a person's character, like cream rises in milk.

Over the Labor Day Weekend several FOR members retired to the mountains of North Carolina for a well-deserved rest. Among them was Philosophy Tapes hostess Sally. On Saturday, Sally had a hard fall. She enjoyed the rest of the weekend, though in some pain. On Tuesday after she returned to Atlanta she went to the doctor to have her wounds checked. She learned that she had a broken elbow and that her wrist was fractured in two places. Her eyes were black. Her lip cut. And her chin scraped. Add to that the electrical power to her home was out due to Hurricane Francis. Either of these facts (personal injury or power outage) would have been enough for an ordinary person to cancel a party scheduled for Tuesday night. But not for our hero, Sally. Fifteen people, a record number, enjoyed Philosophy Tapes at Sally's house on Tuesday night, listening to a battery powered cassette player, in the light of 50 candles, dining on pizza brought in by Sally's friend and neighbor Suzanne.

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## Local Section: Atlanta Chapter Calendar and Contact Information

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### September Birthdays

September 15 James Hill  
September 18 Bill Murphy

### October Birthdays

October 6 Michael Zimmerman  
October 21 Jerry Pease  
October 21 David Ziebell  
October 27 Steve Stokes  
October 31 Martin Cowen

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### FORum Schedule

- **Sunday, October 3, 2004**
- Sunday, November 5, 2004
- Sunday, December 5, 2004
- Sunday, January 2, 2005
- Sunday, February 6, 2005
- Sunday, March 6, 2005
- Sunday, April 3, 2005
- Sunday, May 1, 2005
- Sunday, June 5, 2005
- Sunday, July 3, 2005
- Sunday, August 7, 2005
- Sunday, September 4, 2005

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### Adult Education

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday at High Noon

Begins at noon before FORum David Ziebell facilitator.

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### FORUM, October 3, 2004: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday

#### Begins at 1 p.m. SHARP!

David van Mersbergen, Vera Norman, Frank Vickers, and David Ziebell present a special program on the Classical Period of Music. Do not miss this spectacular continuation of a tradition begun last year when we learned about the Baroque Period.

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### FOR Toastmasters

Every Tuesday at 8 p.m. Location to be announced. Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800.

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### Invisible College

Invisible College will be on hiatus until the Fall.

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### Philosophy Tapes: 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private audience in the living room of a volunteer on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of each month Free.

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### **Fiction Book Club: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday**

Members and friends of FOR, Inc meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at John and Beth's house to discuss a marvelous book. Beth Holley is the coordinator of the book club 404-754-7519.

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### **Non-Fiction Book Club: 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday**

Members and friends of FOR, Inc meet 11 a.m. on the 2nd Saturday of every month at Chris and Allison's house to discuss a marvelous non-fiction. Allison Byrd is the coordinator of the non-fiction book club 678-585-0406 or Allibyrd@charter.net

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### **Potluck: 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday:**

#### **THIRD ANNUAL BOZART FESTIVAL**

Members and friends of FOR, Inc meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of every month for a potluck supper. Bring something good to eat or drink to share. Our next potluck is the Bozart Festival 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 18, 2004.

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### **Film Night: 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday**

Members and friends of FOR, Inc enjoy a monthly movie night at John's studio using his extraordinary equipment. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, September 23, 2004. Arrive at 6:30 p.m. Doors will be locked for safety! Movie starts at 7:15 p.m. Free.

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### **Pub Night: 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday**

Members and friends of FOR, Inc meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation. FOR's next pub night is Wednesday, September 29, 2004, at 8 p.m.

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### **FOR Symphony: Six Thursday nights in the 2004-5 ASO Concert Season**

Our first concert is at 7 p.m. in Symphony Hall on Thursday, September 23, 2004. Martin Cowen is the coordinator of FOR Symphony 770-471-9800.

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### **Steve Stokes' Philosophy Café: 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays**

Attend Steve Stoke's Philosophy Café at Border's in Buckhead on the second Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m. and at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore in Duluth on the third Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m.

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### **Membership Information:**

- Regular membership: \$35 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2004
- Contributing membership: \$70 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2004
- Lifetime membership: \$700 if paid prior to October 31, 2004

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### **Contact information:**

Visit us on the web at [www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com)

To talk to somebody about FOR call Vera at 404-577-7968 or Martin at 770-471-9800 or Dan at 770-831-3010.

A subscription for 12 monthly issues of this newsletter is \$15 per year.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation and a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation.

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