



What is Collectivism, Anyway?

...and when did liberal and leftist get to be synonyms, and elitist to be synonymous with the right?

By Vera Norman

When people compare individualism to collectivism, they say that Americans are individualists and communists are collectivists. They say that collectivism is bad and that individualism is good. I think this is too extreme. There is reluctance to band together for fear of being labeled a collectivist. The label is unwarranted. It comes from not distinguishing between means and ends.

Collective means are different from collective ends. People can band together permanently or temporarily to achieve, collectively, ends which benefit the individual. By means of an insurance pool, we minimize individual risks, by means of friends and neighbors volunteering their time a barn gets raised in one day, by means of contributions to a common fund we finance fire departments, police, highway construction, dams, etc. In these cases, collective means serve individual ends. The benefit is designed for individuals. If a group is benefited, it is as an aggregate of individuals. This is not communism.

Collectivist ends, on the other hand, are ends which benefit individuals only indirectly. They are designed primarily to benefit a corporate entity and only accidentally and incidentally do they serve individuals. Under communism, it is the corporate entity, the State, which is supposed to benefit from the ends. Policies are written to sustain the State. If this coincides with what the individual wants, fine. If not, too bad for the individual. It is the need of the corporate entity—the State—which must be served.

Here is an example to illustrate the difference of a policy or institution designed to benefit individuals vs. designed to benefit the corporation: The University of Georgia is a collectivist enterprise of the citizens of Georgia. But, the benefits are designed primarily for individuals. Students attend the University to

serve their own interests. There is no requirement that at the end of their education they must stick around Georgia to apply their new skills in order to serve the state. If Georgia benefits from the efforts of some of these students educated largely at state expense, this is a side benefit to the state. It is not the main purpose of the educational system of the state of Georgia. The happiness and well-being of the individual is thought, in the long run, to benefit all, but the purpose of education is to benefit the individual, not to benefit all.

This is unlike the educational system in Cuba, or what it was in Poland and other eastern bloc states until recently. There, the expectation is/was that educating students is for the express purpose of creating a stronger, better, richer



State. The education is not for the benefit, primarily, of the individual. It is for the benefit of the corporate entity, the State. If by chance the individual also benefits from his education, this is O.K. (there is no expectation that the State will benefit more from unhappy citizens than from happy ones!), but overall the aim is for the citizen to serve the State and not for the State to serve its citizens.

Why is it important to distinguish collectivist means from collectivist ends? It is important because so many people are trapped into the kind of thinking which makes them associate both collectivist means and collectivist ends with communism. The communists claim both ends and means as theirs. They say utilizing collectivist means is a turning toward communism. This isn't true. Means are different

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Toastmasters: \$148 Member Benefit

Special Offer to FOR Members Only

The Fellowship of Reason, Inc. will refund your Toastmaster® membership dues up to \$148 on the following conditions:

- (1) You must be a member of the Fellowship of Reason, Inc. and remain a member until all conditions are completed;
- (2) You must join a Toastmaster® club after this offer and achieve Competent Toastmaster status;
- (3) You must give an Oratory at Forum; and,
- (4) You must keep and deliver to FOR, Inc. your receipts for dues.

If you comply with these conditions, FOR, Inc. will reimburse you for your actual Toastmaster® dues up to \$148.

Questions? Call Martin: 770-471-9800

About the name "The Eudaimonist"

A eudaimonist (pronounced "yoo-DIE-mon-ist") is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term is derived from the ancient Greek word eudaimonia, which means, roughly, "well-being."

What is Collectivism ... (cont. from Page 1)

from ends. There are, for instance, democracies which utilize socialist (collectivist) means for the benefit of their citizens. We can argue about whether this is ultimately beneficial to their citizenry, but we cannot make the claim that merely because they use socialist means they must be communist wannabees. In order to be communist, they would need a communist ideology. It is not possible to be both communist and democratic. It is possible to be both socialist and democratic.

Communitarianism, the social movement which encourages citizens to take responsibility for overseeing local government, for setting up neighborhood systems to combat neighborhood decay and crime, to volunteer one's time at schools, at local civic meetings, at libraries, etc. is misunderstood because it has been labeled "collectivist". It is collectivist in means, but not in ends. There is no requirement to sacrifice individual satisfactions in order to "serve" the greater good. The individual good, to the degree it is linked with the concerns of neighbors, is what is being sought in Communitarianism. There is no notion of "merging" into the whole. The idea is to get to know individuals, on a one to one basis, to swap services that improve lives, and to create friendships.

In fact, buying into the notion that collectivist means requires collectivist ends, as the extreme political right has done, implies this: if any collective activity is a function of incipient communism, then we must not do anything to alter the economic or social status. We must leave it entirely alone since any tinkering is, by definition, communist. We have to "laissez faire" everything!

But, this leaves it open to the extreme left to be the party of protest. They can claim (and do

claim!) to be the instruments of social and economic reform. They can exploit this "champion of the underdog" label for their own political ends (and some do!), if we box ourselves into a hands off position by accepting the belief that any kind of social program is akin to "social engineering."

Now that "liberal" has become the equivalent of "communist," the sane and balanced middle which values both freedom and fire stations is reluctant to speak up. Extremists on the right and on the left are the voices most often heard. Since they are likely to be extremely emotional (while accusing the other side of silly emotionality), they act as catalysts to arouse the radicals of both the left and the right and fools who can only catch on to clear-cut oppositions. Thinking, which is sometimes a long and boring process, is dumped in favor of sloganeering and platform humping. In fact, emotionalizing, as long as it's in favor of the correct ideology, is considered spontaneous and therefore, genuine whereas reflecting first on one option and then another is labeled wishy-washy and inconsistent. The idea is to be ideologically so convinced that no decision takes more than fifteen seconds. Debating between alternatives, and/or changing one's mind are suspicious activities.

I would like to see a return to the informed opinion, to the slow reading and reasoned thinking that enables us to recognize the difference between means and ends. I would like to be part of a culture that does away with knee jerk labeling and hot button dancing to the music of the propaganda machine. I want reflection to be more prized than reacting. I want everybody to become part of the "Fellowship" of reason.

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.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc.**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.

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

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Subscription Information

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

You Want this. Trust us.

The mug you have to have.

FOR coffee. FOR tea.

FOR a friend.

\$6 each or 2 for \$10, Contact us at any FOR function (see page 9)

Questions? info@fellowshipofreason.com.



Celebratory Announcements

- Vera has two new grandchildren, Lily and Mia, by way of her son Bill and his partner Stan.
- FORum on Sunday, November 6, 2005, is our 85th consecutive monthly FORum, the beginning of our 8th year, and the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Membership.
- The Fellowship of Reason is growing. This year we've seen an 11.5% increase over last year's membership as reported in the 2005 directory.



Letters to the Editor

Write us at:
Fellowship of Reason
P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107

Or, E-mail us at info@fellowshipofreason.com.

All letters must be signed to be considered for publication.

Concerning the September essay "On Moral Character:"

First quibble: It takes more than one or two of the virtues listed to be a moral character. It is not unusual for someone to display one or more of the virtues listed and still be a very bad person.

Second quibble: there is a difference between good behavior and good character. If I have power, I can induce you by means of the "carrot and the stick" to behave pretty much as I want you to behave. If you conform to the rules merely to save yourself from hardship or to gain advantage, your good behavior would be attributable to expediency and not to moral character.

Third quibble: beyond genetic endowments and experience, (and I don't want to get into a free will argument here), what is there? Nature and nurture are only names for the entire slate of characteristics one is born with and one acquires during one's lifetime. Although I don't believe in any kind of strict determinism, I do think the likelihood of goodness is reduced in those with a lesser capacity for wisdom. When this is coupled with poor nurture, the probability of a good character is seriously diminished.

Fourth quibble: while it is possible that many people are born with the potential to develop a good moral character, it takes training from a fairly early age to develop this. Some people are born without the potential or with a much lesser potential. Others, who don't suffer a deficit in the nature department, suffer one in the nurture department. You recognize this by mentioning how bad parenting, bad governance, are two roots of the lack of moral character. Is it possible for those you label "the little people" (I'm guessing because they lack noble stature) to be characterful? Sure. It's not a logical impossibility, but how likely is it? To talk about possibility instead of probability is to have a very short conversation.

Vera Norman

And more concerning the September essay "On Moral Character:"

By the time we accept the parsing of humanity into groups based on ANY criteria we accept a lie. The lie is seductive. The lie is reassuring because it posits a vector toward truth, or about truth, by which any number of judgments about our own fitness (or goodness, or rightness, or validity, or truthness) can be logically "proven."

Specifically, the lie is: the position that there is (really IS, ontologically speaking) an essence, a real and defining essential aspect, invariant across all possible and all actual cases. The author might want to quibble about whether he is making an essentialist claim. However, I would point out that the essay declares: "Moral character is the manifestation in an individual of one or more of [a finite list of] virtues." The seductive handiness of essentialism allows the author to leave unsaid much that is relevant. Left unsaid are all the details about why this list of virtues instead of some other; what constitutes manifestation; and how would we know (from outside an individual) whether that manifestation did in fact occur within that individual, given that what happens inside an individual quite often stays there.

The facile parsing of humanity into three groups with respect to "moral character" is particularly egregious. The effect of such a claim is the implicit declaration that somehow, we know the truth about moral character; and if you fall into one of the wrong groups, you are definitely wrong about moral character.

This rhetoric tricks us into considering who might be in such groups when we should be considering issues that are more important.

What is useful and important about morality includes: How do we go about framing moral issues in our dynamic and co-evolving universe that includes ourselves, our societies, our technologies, our limitations, our capacities, our futures? How do we go about deciding moral issues under those conditions - the dynamic and co-evolving conditions in which we find ourselves?

As a start, here's my take on "moral character:" "Moral character" is a label for a concept which has the meaning: a somewhat persistent group of regularities in relationships between people and other things, having something to do with the manifestation (whatever that means) of "virtue" (which for a first approximation means good habits for getting along in the world). This is a starting point we can use for our own purposes or for shared purposes with others. In this respect, it is just like any other concept. A concept is a kind of thing that exists only in the mind of a conceiver. It is real only to that extent. It is very ragged about

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Meaning of Membership

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Contact Information

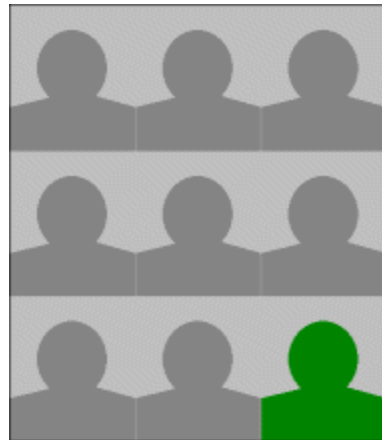
To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Chris at 678-585-0406
Vera at 404-577-7968
Martin at 770-471-9800
Dan at 770-831-3010

In order to enjoy the benefits of the Fellowship of Reason, you need not be a member. All of our activities are free and open to the public. A number of non-members regularly participate with us and are most heartily welcome.

Why then become a member of the Fellowship of Reason?

The Fellowship of Reason exists by virtue of the generosity of its members and friends. People you know contribute money, property, services, and time in order that the value we all enjoy continues to exist. The services by performers at FORum, by executive committee members, by hosts and hostesses, and by planners of events are vital to the existence of FOR. Those volunteer services are, in fact, FOR.



Membership is, simply, a clear statement that you wish the Fellowship of Reason to continue to exist. Membership is not the only way to make this statement. Some non-members are generous contributors of money, property, and services. In fact, we all benefit by the mere attendance of non-members at FOR events.

If you want FOR to continue to exist, won't you clearly say so by becoming a member today?

Insist on yourself. Be original.
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Birthdays

October Birthdays

October 6	Michael
October 12	Dylan
October 21	Jerry
October 21	David Z.
October 31	Martin

November Birthdays

November 2	Mary
November 3	John
November 12	Randy
November 13	Sky

Letters to the Editor (Continued from page 4)

the edges, it could very well be incorrect, and it could very well be expected to change as we get better with using it.

It should be clear from my notion of “moral character” that there are no bright lines of distinction that would enable everyone to be unambiguously placed in one of three sets. It should also be clear that there is a lot of work to be done before making sharp distinctions between people.

David Ziebell

Non-FOR activities of interest

- Invisible College, tuition-based philosophy lectures by Dr. Gregory R. Johnson (\$100 for 6 lectures), meets Wednesday's at Vera's house 7:30 p.m. Contact Dr. Johnson at invisiblecollege@mindspring.com
 - Atlanta Freethought Society, <http://www.atlantafreethought.org/>, meets on the second Sunday at 1 p.m. in Roswell
 - The Humanists of Georgia, <http://www.geocities.com/gahumanists/>, meets on the fourth Sunday at 12:30 p.m. in Roswell
 - C.G. Jung Society of Atlanta, <http://www.jungatlanta.com/>, meets at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Atlanta
 - Southern Order of Storytellers, <http://www.southernorderofstorytellers.com>
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October 2005

October 2005							November 2005							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30				
30	31													

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
October 2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12:00pm Adult Education 1:00pm FORum (NWUUC)	12:00pm Deadline for FOR newsletter submissions	7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	Michael Z. bd 7:30pm Invisible College			11:00am Nonfiction book club (Chris and Allison's house)
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
8:00am Reason Runners		7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	Dylan bd 7:30pm Invisible College			6:30pm Movie night (John's studio)
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
8:00am Reason Runners		7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College	7:00pm FOR Symphony	David Z. bd Jerry bd	7:30pm Potluck (Denise's house)
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
8:00am Reason Runners 10:00am FOR Business Meeting			7:30pm Invisible College	8:00pm Pub night		
30	31					
8:00am Reason Runners	Martin Cowen bd					

November 2005

November 2005							December 2005						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5			1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		November 1	2	3	4	5
		7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	Mary bd 7:30pm Invisible College	John bd		
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12:00pm Adult Education 1:00pm FORum (NWUUC)	12:00pm Deadline for FOR newsletter submissions	7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	7:30pm Invisible College			Randy bd 11:00am Nonfiction book club (Chris and Allison's house)
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Sky bd 8:00am Reason Runners		7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College	7:00pm FOR Symphony		7:30pm Potluck
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
8:00am Reason Runners			7:30pm Invisible College	Thanksgiving		6:30pm Movie night (John's studio)
27	28	29	30			
8:00am Reason Runners 10:00am FOR Business Meeting			7:30pm Invisible College			

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit
<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/calendar.htm>

Reason Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the southwestern entrance to Piedmont Park on 10th Street. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit follows at 9 a.m. Walkers and joggers welcome!
 Coordinator is Martin: 770-471-9800.

Philosophy Club: 1st/3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private audience in the living room of a volunteer on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.
 Coordinator is Sally: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

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

Non-Fiction Book Club: 2nd Saturday 11 a.m.

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

Potluck: Saturday, October 22, 2005.

Members and friends of FOR meet monthly for a potluck supper. Bring something good to eat or drink to share. Hostess' choice is a "60's-themed Halloween Party -- Come As You Were!" Be prepared for some 60's-era music and dancing!
(Note change from 3rd Saturday) Contact Denise for location and directions, (404) 250-9647.

Movie Night: Saturday, October 15, 2005

Members and friends of FOR enjoy a monthly movie night at John's studio using his extraordinary equipment. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, October 15, 2005. **(Note change from 4th Saturday)** Arrive at 6:30 p.m. Doors will be locked for safety! Movie starts at 7:15 p.m. Free.
 Coordinator is John: 404-754-7519

Pub Night: 4th Thursday 8 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Thursday **(Note change from Wednesdays)** of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation.
 Coordinator is Scott: 404-964-6697

FOR Symphony:

Six Thursday nights in the 2005-2006

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Concert Season

Next concert is Thursday, October 20, 2005. We meet at 7 p.m. to hear the pre-concert lecture.
 Coordinator is Martin: 770-471-9800.

Call for Submissions

FOR members are encouraged to contribute items for our monthly newsletter, The Eudaimonist. Suggested topics include: the use of reason in daily life; personal improvement; ethics and happiness; friendship; and celebrations of heroes, freedom, science, culture and the arts. Essays/articles 750-1,000 words; book/movie/TV reviews 250-500 words; letters 100-250 words. Submissions are subject to acceptance based on quality and relevance, and may be edited for spelling and grammar, or trimmed for space. Poetry, photographs and artwork are also welcome.

Direct all inquires to Martin Cowen, Newsletter Editor, mlcowen@yahoo.com or call 770-471-9800.

Join us at FORum:

1st Sunday at 1 p.m.

November 6, 2005

Annual membership meeting for election of Trustees immediately follows.

Join us at Adult Education

1st Sunday at Noon

Both events are held on the campus of the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation*

1025 Mt. Vernon Highway,
 NW, Atlanta, GA 30327.

*The Fellowship of Reason is a non-theistic organization that is not affiliated with the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON

Fellowship of Reason

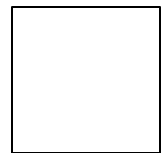
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New Millennium.

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