

The EUDAIMONIST

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The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.



Why I am not an Atheist

By
Martin L. Cowen III

There are limits to human freedom and one of those limits is that we cannot *authentically* choose our religion. We might pretend, but we cannot *authentically* choose. That is not to say that using reason we are unable to persuade ourselves of the correct religion and thereupon choose it. We can do that. But what reason sees—if it truly is reason—is determined not by desire, but by facts. A hypothetical example of *inauthentic* religion choosing is this: I live in a neighborhood of Presbyterians who all go to the local Presbyterian Church. I want my kids to fit in. I want to fit in. While I do not truly believe what Presbyterian's believe (I am a Catholic), I pretend to believe in order to join the Presbyterian Church.

If I personally were to choose my religion (which as I have said I am unable to do *authentically*), I think I would choose to be Jewish. With a name like "Cohen", I am already halfway there. Perhaps I have a Jewish great, great, grandfather. I hope I do. I do have a great friend who is a Jewish grandmother. Does that count? I would like to be Jewish because Jews appear to be survivors. Has any modern human sub-culture, other than the Jewish sub-culture, survived intact for three millennia? I do not think so. I admire the Jewish commitment to family and community. I admire their commitment to education. I admire their work ethic. I would like to be a member of a "Chosen People".

Leo Strauss claims that there is a fundamental difference in the natures of philosophers and religious people. Philosophers, Strauss claims, can face the reality of death with a clear eye. Religious people cannot. Religious people need their death denying myths. A death denying myth is story that claims, rather than ceasing to exist when we die, that another outcome, such as eternal life in Heaven or unity with an Ultimate Reality, is a possibility. Again, this clear-eyed nature is not a matter of choice,

but of nature. We are either clear-eyed on this issue, or not. There is no bridging of this natural divide by reason or otherwise according to Strauss.

Leo Strauss claims that philosophers have always hidden this reality (the clear-eyed view of the philosopher toward death) from the world of non-philosophers for political reasons. Specifically, philosophers seek to avoid persecution or prosecution for heresy or treason. We recall that Socrates was prosecuted on charges of impiety and corrupting the young, convicted, and executed. From the point of view of Athens, Socrates was guilty.

I am interested in the proliferation of books recently on the subject of atheism. I received one such book recently as a birthday gift. The book has very pleasant and clear arguments about why atheism is true. I wonder, though, why was the book written? If the book was written for philosophers, the author is "preaching to the choir". If the book was written for theists, the author is "spitting into the wind". If the book was written to persuade the author himself of the truth of his position or to create a comfortable consensus about his belief, then he is "whistling by the graveyard". Certainly, the book (the genre is currently in vogue) was written for profit. This is a legitimate purpose. Perhaps the book was written for young people who are trying to reason out a position for themselves. This is a legitimate purpose. Perhaps the book was written for political purposes, to raise a doubt in the minds of the religious body politic in order to counter the trend toward theocracy which will be accompanied by increased persecution and prosecution of non-believers in the state religion, whatever that religion happens to be. This is a legitimate purpose.

A disturbing consequence of these books as I see it, though, is religious backlash. Some

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Why I am not an Atheist (continued from page 1)

religious people feel threatened by this literature. Fox News, in particular, profits from stoking the potential conflict between secularism and Christianity. Some religious people's hatred for the "atheist" or "secular" movement is reinforced and enhanced by this literature.

A recent Gallop poll asking, "Would you vote for a _____?" yielded these results:

Category	"Yes, would vote for"
Name	%
Catholic	95
Black	94
Jewish	92
A woman	88
Hispanic	87
Mormon	72
A homosexual	55
An atheist	45

When I created the Fellowship of Reason, I made a choice to stay out of this conflict. My reason is simply that I do not wish to participate in the politics of religious belief. My assumption is that there are many people who do not wish to participate in the politics of religious belief.

While I recognize the usefulness of groups that do protect our First Amendment religious freedoms (the American Civil Liberties Union and the Atlanta Freethought Society, for instance), not everyone is obliged to make politics a priority of his or her life.

Also, *politics aside*, there is no meaningful conflict between religious people and philosophers. And politics is "aside" for all practical purposes. We do live in a multi-

cultural society and a variety of religious and philosophical beliefs are accepted in our society. Consider that Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Wiccans, Pagans, Atheists, and Philosophers all live in perfect peace in America today. All of these groups have members who are perfectly compatible on an intimate social level despite their religious and philosophical differences.

While Catholics and Protestants are historically famous for murdering one another, they now live in perfect peace and harmony. Both flourish. They are not in conflict. My own hope for my personal philosophy is that I too can live in perfect peace and harmony with all other religious people.

It is for these reasons that I am a philosopher. I am not an atheist. I do not choose to define myself in terms of others by negation. While it is true that I do not believe in witches, I am not an AWiccan. While it is true that I do not believe in Unicorns, I am not an AUnicornist. While it is true that I do not believe in Fairies, I am not an AFairyist. While it is true that I do not believe in Goblins, I am not an A-Goblinist.

So, please do not call me an atheist. I am not an atheist. The Fellowship of Reason is not an atheist group. I am and we are philosophers. The acronym of the Fellowship of Reason is "FOR". The Fellowship of Reason is *for* the personal flourishing of our members through reason. We are not against others or their systems of flourishing. Each to his own. Live and let live. Let us be friends in our individual flourishing whatever our non-violent and non-fraudulent methods.

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."

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 dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

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

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FOR Merchandise

The mug you have to have.

FOR coffee. FOR tea. FOR a friend.

Mugs are \$6 each or 2 for \$10.



FOR Polo Shirts and T-shirts are also available. Members Price is \$25 for Polo Shirts and \$15 for T-Shirts.

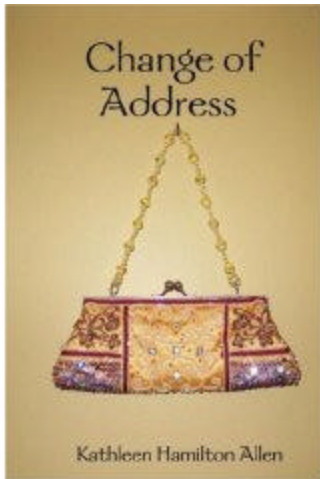
Prices include domestic shipping, inquire for international shipping.

Contact us at any FOR function (see page 9)

Questions? info@fellowshipofreason.com.



Scott Carper's Concise Book Review: Kathleen Hamilton Allen's *Change of Address*



By Scott Carper

During my annual October vacation in the North Carolina Mountains, I selected FOR member Kate Allen's self-published novel *Change of Address* for some light vacation reading. I was not sure what to expect in a friend's debut novel, but since she was so benevolent to plug FOR on her back cover and I had spent \$20 to buy my own autographed version at a recent FORum, I must say I really enjoyed her style and story.

The synopsis is simple – Addie, suburban stay-at-home Atlanta mother of four, suddenly and tragically loses her husband. The story centers on her grief and recovery, while dealing with her own unresolved issues of faith and family that compound her transition to acceptance of her new life and worldview. I won't give away any of the several plot twists which kept me reading on despite my short attention span, but it is suffice to say that Addie's heroic journey concludes satisfyingly.

Also satisfying is Kate's unique utilization of the first person narrative, by the heroine telling her story via email to her departed husband. Of course, there is no supernatural router to the afterlife here. The unsent email for the father of her children is just a vehicle for the heroine to intimately and honestly express her journey.

With the usage of email and other contemporary themes, the novel is a decent unassuming snapshot of today's culture in the Atlanta suburbs. I really got to know and understand heroine Addie via Kate's storytelling. The book is slightly better suited for the female reader and some of the expressed political views added nothing to the storyline, but overall I recommend *Change of Address* to our FOR members and friends who enjoy contemporary and heroic journey fiction.

Kate's book is available in paperback via Amazon or by purchasing directly from Kate.

Meaning of Membership

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

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, why not clearly say so by becoming a member today?

Classic Film Appreciation Course

Classic Film Appreciation Course
By Steve Whiteman

Throughout 2007 FOR member **Steve Whiteman** will teach a free course in the appreciation of classic film and associated early and mid-20th century popular culture. The course is full, but seats may become available to see individual films.

For more information, or to receive e-mail, contact Steve at classic.film@yahoo.com

The movies will be acknowledged classics, the majority from Hollywood's Golden

Age—the 1930s and 1940s—and the rest from other eras or other countries. The program usually will include a cartoon or a short subject, coming attractions, the feature film, and commentary on the careers of key personnel, filmmaking techniques, and relevant history and popular culture. Discussion will follow the commentary.

First and Second Saturdays in 2007
Doors open 6:45 p.m. program starts at 7:30 p.m.

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 770-471-9800

Dan at 770-831-3010

If I Die Tomorrow

By David Ziebell

Here is a truth I can say about my life. You could too, if you think about it.

The original speaker is the fictional character Dr. Ellie Arrowway (played by Jodi Foster in the movie *Contact*.) The experience she directly speaks of was extraordinary in many ways, pushed as she was, by the science infrastructure of the entire earth, into being inexplicably unique.

The extraordinary truth for any self-aware being is the same. Any experience any of us has, when analyzed even by the entire science infrastructure of the earth, contains this same inexplicable condition of uniqueness.

So read the quote below, if you can, without feeling the piercing emotional climax of the movie scene in which it was originally heard.

Feel instead, if you can, the consequences of your relation to the universe and your relation to life and your relation to your fellow beings.

“I had an experience I can't prove, I can't even explain it, but everything that I know as a human being, everything that I am tells me that it was real. I was part of something wonderful, something that changed me forever; a vision of the Universe that tells us undeniably how tiny, and insignificant, and how rare and precious we all are. A vision that tells us we belong to something that is greater than ourselves. That we are not, that none of us are alone.”

Each day we wake belonging to something that is greater than ourselves, as ice belongs to water.

FOR's mission is to promote the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

November 2007

November 2007							December 2007						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
25	26	27	28	29	30		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
							30	31					

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				November 1	2	3
				7:00pm Atlanta Symphony	Mary A. bd	John G. bd 8:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's house)
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12:00pm FORum (NWUUC)		7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	7:00pm Atlanta Symphony		11:00am Nonfiction Book Club (Allison's house) 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's h
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	Randy bd	7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	7:00pm Atlanta Symphony (Leila Josefowicz)	7:30pm Atlanta Opera	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)		7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	Pat G. bd Thanksgiving		6:30pm Movie Night (John's studio)
25	26	27	28	29	30	
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)			Pat bd 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	7:00pm Atlanta Symphony 8:00pm FOR pub		

December 2007

December 2007							January 2008						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	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	31		
30	31												

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						December 1 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's house)
2 12:00pm FORum (NWUUC)	3	4 7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	5 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	6	7	8 11:00am Nonfiction Book Club (Allison's house) 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve)
9 Bruce bd 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	10	11 7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	12 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	13	14	15 1:00pm FOR live HD opera (Romeo et Juliette) 7:30pm Potluck (Martin Cowen)
16 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	17	18 7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)	19 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	20	21 Bill G. bd	22 6:30pm Movie Night (John's studio)
23 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	24	25 Christmas	26 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg's house)	27 Leanna bd 8:00pm FOR pub	28	29 Andrew bd
30 Mike bd	31					

Events

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

FORum: A Celebration of Human Achievement

First Sunday noon
 FOR's premier event. Starting at noon with an InFORmation Hour conducted by Dan Barber for visitors and new members. Meet and greet at 12:30 p.m. The program starts at 1 p.m. and lasts one hour. We enjoy post-program conversation until 3 p.m. when those interested adjourn to The Loop restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program from noon to 3 p.m.

Martin Cowen director: 770-471-9800.

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the southwest corner of Piedmont Park on 10th Street. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit (corner of Piedmont and 10th Street) follows at 9 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome!

Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800.

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

Philosophy tapes are played to a small group of friends in a private home on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.

Sally Hull coordinator: 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. For book selections and more information, go to www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm

Beth Holley coordinator: 404-372-7378

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. For book selections and more information go to:

www.fellowshipofreason.com/nonfiction.htm

Allison Byrd coordinator: 404-372-4089

Potluck / Christmas Party: 3rd Saturday 7:30 p.m.

Our next Potluck is Saturday, December 15, 2007, at Martin Cowen's house at 7:30 p.m. Remember it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share.

Pub Night: 4th Thursday, 8 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Thursday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation. FOR's next pub night is Thursday, November 29, 2007 at 8 p.m.

Scott Carper coordinator: 404-964-6697

Movie Night: 4th Saturday, 6:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at John Grover's photography studio to enjoy potluck and a movie. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, October 27, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

John Grover coordinator: 404-872-4555

*Join us for our
 next monthly
 FORum:*

**December 2,
 2007**

Sunday at 1 p.m.
 (Meet, Greet at 12:30)

Come early for the
**InFORmation
 Hour**

At noon
 Moderated by Dan Barber for
 visitors and new members

FOR FAMILY FRIENDLY
 Children's program
 from noon to 3 p.m.

Birthdays

- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| • November 2 | Mary A. |
| • November 3 | John G. |
| • November 12 | Randy S. |
| • November 22 | Pat G. |

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| • December 9 | Bruce H. |
| • December 21 | Bill G. |
| • December 27 | Leanna A. |
| • December 29 | Andrew S. |
| • December 30 | Mike B. |

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

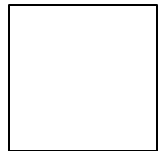
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A Reason-Based Moral
Community for the 21st
Century

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