



## Atheism is Irrelevant

By  
Martin L. Cowen III

I have enjoyed the feedback I received from my essay entitled "Why I Am Not an Atheist" published in the October 2007 newsletter. I will argue in this essay that a person's morality is completely unrelated to his belief or lack of belief in God. I argue that a moral community can be formed only around a common morality, not around one's status as a believer or not.

Whether a person believes in God conveys nothing about whether that person is moral or immoral. The 911 hijackers were all fervent believers in God, yet they were ultimately immoral, ruthlessly murdering thousands of innocent people in the name of God. Members of the Fellowship of Reason, on the other hand, mostly non-theists, are profoundly moral. Organizing a community around this non-essential idea—a belief or not in God—is a hopeless task. Only a rich, commonly held set of beliefs has the possibility of binding a moral community.

The morality of America is, on the whole and for the most part, Christian. My experience is that most atheists are "Christians," too, but "Christians without God." By this I mean that the moral code of most atheists is practically identical with the widely held American Christian morality. What is the practical difference between an atheist who is merely a "Christian without God" and a full-fledged Christian? I declare that there is no practical difference. There is no difference between them *in practice*.

In order to discuss this issue, I state what I perceive the Christian morality to be. I made claims about Christian morality in my essay entitled "Ethics 101" in the February 2008 newsletter.

Among the rules of Christianity are these:

- It is bad to be rich. Matthew 19:24: "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through

the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" An alternative moral view is that achievement and the related consequence, wealth, are to be admired.

- One ought to honor the meek. Psalms 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." An alternative moral view is the strength and courage are to be admired.
- One ought not to judge others. Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." An alternative moral view is that justice is to be admired.
- One ought to love one's enemies. Luke 6: 27-29: "27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. 29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." An alternative moral view is that one's enemies are to be resisted; that justice is good.
- One ought to love one's neighbor like oneself. Matthew 19:19: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." An alternative moral view is that one ought to love one's own more than others.
- One ought to be charitable. 1 Corinthians 13:13: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." An alternative moral view is that one ought to carefully choose and sustain one's own moral values.

### Individual Highlights

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## Atheism is Irrelevant (continued from page 1)

Most Americans, theists and atheist alike, avow that all of these Christian values are their own heartfelt ideals: poverty, weakness, reluctance to judge others, love of enemies, love of the Other, and charity. An alternative moral view consists in these ideals: achievement, strength, justice, courage, love of one's own, and careful attention to one's own business.

If a person thinks like a Christian, talks like a Christian, and acts like a Christian, what difference can it possibly make that he deny or not that Christ rose from the dead and is God.

As I said in the opening, whether one believes in God or not is irrelevant. His chosen moral system is what is important.

The practical manifestation of the profound Christianity of Americans, theist or atheist, is in their attitude toward a Providential God. While atheists claim not to believe in the Providential God of the American Christian faith, like all Christian Americans and most atheist Americans, most atheists desperately *want* a Providential God. By "Providential God", I mean an all-good, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God who is responsive to prayer, who will intervene in the world, and who, ultimately, will not allow bad things to happen to good people.

Before elaborating this point, consider three institutions: Subway sandwich shops, BB&T banking, and Southwest Airlines. These institutions have very definite missions and those missions are to make sandwiches, to provide banking services, and to transport customers by jet from city to city. None of these institutions has as a part of their mission statement "save the world" or "save Miramar from a cyclone." While each of these organizations might spend part of their marketing budget on "public service," their "public service" is a marketing tool. Any other "public service" is a violation of their responsibility to their investors to make a profit. These institutions make a profit by doing their proper jobs: making sandwiches, banking, and flying.

Every person and institution has a limited mission. For example, I can only be a father of two sons, a husband, a lawyer, and essayists. I cannot, in addition to those tasks, be the dictator in Peru, as much as I would like to be. Subway will never get into banking. BB&T will never be flying to Cincinnati. And Southwest will not be making sandwiches. It is a bummer, but true: one can only do so much.

Governments, too, have limited missions, or should have. The American Federal Government has three original and philosophically proper missions: the courts, the police, and the armed forces. (See the Federalist Papers for

confirmation of this view.)

Because theists and most atheists alike *desperately want* a Providential God, and because there is in fact no such Person, theists and most atheists must create Him. His Name is the American Federal Government. For American Christians and for American "Christian's without God", i.e. most atheists, the American Federal Government stands in the role of their *desperately desired* "Providential God." For most Americans, theists and atheists, there is no job that Government ought to be denied. Those "governmental" jobs have included saving Terry Schiavo (the brain-dead Florida woman whom the Congress and the President sought to save from a peaceful and timely death), stopping beach lovers in Seattle from making beach bonfires, saving bankers who loaned millions or billions of dollars to borrowers with "no proof of income," no down payments and 100% financing, saving people who choose to live in flood plains from floods, and making sure that rational and responsible adults "save" for their retirement. For the God-loving Christian Americans and the "Christians without God" atheists, the Government stands in for a truly "missing-in-action" Providential God.

According to most Christians and most "Christian without God" atheists alike, there is no mission that the Government is not competent to undertake. Voting takes the place of prayer in this context. "Ask, and ye shall receive." John 16:24. One might as well vote, because I can guarantee this: prayer will not work.

Because the moral difference among atheists, non-theists, anti-theists, and agnostics are so great, we see in American culture today a large number of different groups of nonbelievers, most of whom have almost nothing in common. Even in Atlanta, we have at least ten groups that are perfectly happy to go their own ways, separately from the other non-theistic groups. And this is as it should be. The isolated fact of non-belief is not a community-making attribute. Only a rich and commonly shared moral system, explicit or implicit, can bind a moral community.

So, I guess I have found another reason why I am not an atheist. Unlike most atheists, I am not merely a "Christian without God." My values include these: reason, purpose, self-esteem, courage, moderation, prudence, justice, individuality, autonomy, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and love of my own: family, friends, and moral community. My personal label is "Eudaimonist."

### 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.

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**Lifetime membership:**  
\$700

**Contact Information**

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Martin at 678-641-9321  
Dan at 770-595-6106

# Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group

**ATLAS SHRUGGED  
BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP**  
1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays 7 p.m. Norcross

Why after 50 years is "Atlas Shrugged" still affecting people's lives so dramatically?

I think it is because Ayn Rand challenges our filters, our automatic prejudices about our perceived reality; she calls this our "sense of life."

Through a clearer understanding of this

principle, we can see how we each sanction our own flourishing or our own destruction because of our learned and accepted foundational moral codes. This fuels our automatic responses, which produces our ultimate ends.

Come participate in this discussion only if you wish to be challenged and be, possibly, completely out of your comfort zone. I believe that learning requires a bit of discomfort!

Dan Barber

## Sandy Springs Pub Night

**SANDY SPRINGS PUB NIGHT**  
Second Wednesday of the month  
Five Seasons Brewing, Sandy Springs

Marianna B. will host this second iteration of "FOR Pub" in Sandy Springs. Cannot make it to Manuel's Tavern on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month? Then come to Five Seasons Brewing, in Sandy Springs on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday at 8 p.m. Adult beverages and conversation.

## Your new FOR activity!

Most of FOR's activities, like these new activities mentioned above, are the inventions of our members. Do you enjoy an activity? Would you like to share your activity with friends? Create a new FOR activity and let us promote it here!

## TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF REASON

FOR's first meeting took place on Sunday, November 1, 1998. Our 120<sup>th</sup> consecutive monthly meeting takes place on Sunday, October 5, 2008. I would like to celebrate our **charter members** who have been with us from the beginning:

1. Leanna A.
2. Dan B. (Lifetime)
3. Theresa B.
4. Carla B. (Contributing)
5. Mike B. (Contributing)
6. Scott C. (Lifetime)
7. Linda C. (Lifetime)
8. Martin C. (Lifetime)
9. Edward C.
10. Larry C.
11. Lois C.
12. Carlos F. (Lifetime)
13. John G. (Contributing)
14. Beth H. (Contributing)
15. Sally H. (Lifetime)
16. Ellen L.
17. Dunham McA.
18. Michael N.
19. Vera N.
20. Randy S. (Lifetime)
21. Chris S. (Contributing)
22. Mark S.
23. David v. M. (Lifetime)
24. Frank V.
25. Tom W. (Lifetime)
26. David Z. (Lifetime)

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

# July 2008

July 2008							August 2008						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		<b>1</b>	2	3	4	<b>5</b>				6	7	8	<b>9</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	9	10	11	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	11	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	14	15	<b>16</b>
<b>13</b>	14	<b>15</b>	16	17	18	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	20	21	22	<b>23</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	22	23	<b>24</b>	25	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	25	26	27	<b>28</b>	29	30
<b>27</b>	28	29	30	31			31						

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		July 1	2	3	4	5
		Jack H. bd 7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)				1:00pm Members Only Lake Party 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's house)
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12:00pm FORum (NWUUC)	7:00pm Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group (Norcross)	7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)				11:00am Nonfiction Book Club 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's house)
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)		7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)				7:30pm Potluck (Volunteer)
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	7:00pm Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group (Norcross)			8:00pm FOR pub	David v. M. bd	Steve W. bd 6:30pm Movie Night (John's studio)
27	28	29	30	31		
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)		Ben B. bd		Linda C. bd		

# August 2008

August 2008							September 2008						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30				
31													

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					August 1	2
					Beth bd	7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's house)
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12:00pm FORum (NWUUC)	7:00pm Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group (Norcross)	7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)			Dave D. bd	11:00am Nonfiction Book Club 7:00pm Classic Film Appreciation Course (Steve Whiteman's h
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)		7:30pm Fiction Book Club (Beth's house)	8:00pm Sandy Springs Pub Night (Five Seasons Brewing)			4:00pm Potluck-Pool Party (Ron/Susan Menich)
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	Carlos bd Dunham bd 7:00pm Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group (Norcross)	7:30pm Philosophy Tapes (Sally's house)				6:30pm Movie Night (John's studio)
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Jabbo bd 8:00am FOR Runners (Flying Biscuit)	Holly bd			Tom bd 8:00pm FOR pub		
31						
Nick bd						

## Events

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

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### 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: 678-641-9321.

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### 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 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit (corner of Piedmont and 10<sup>th</sup> Street) follows at 9 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome!

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321.

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### Philosophy Club: 1<sup>st</sup>/ 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

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### 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](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm)

Beth Holley coordinator: 404-372-7378

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### 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. For book selections and more information go to:

[www.fellowshipofreason.com/nonfiction.htm](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/nonfiction.htm)

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### Potluck: 3rd Saturday 7:30 p.m.

Our next Potluck is Saturday, August 16, at Ron and Susan's at 7:30 p.m. Remember it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share.

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### 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, July 24, 2008 at 8 p.m.

Scott Carper coordinator: 404-964-6697

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### 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, July 26, 2008, at 6:30 p.m.

John Grover coordinator: 404-872-4555

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### Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group:

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays in Norcross

Everyone is invited to discuss this epoch shaping book.

Dan Barber discussion leader: 770-595-6106

*Join us for our  
 next monthly  
 FORum:*

**July 6, 2008  
 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

- |           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| • July 1  | Jack H.     |
| • July 25 | David v. M. |
| • July 26 | Steve W.    |
| • July 29 | Ben B.      |
| • July 31 | Linda C.    |

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| • August 1  | Beth H.     |
| • August 8  | David D.    |
| • August 18 | Carlos F.   |
| • August 18 | Dunham McA. |
| • August 24 | Edward C.   |
| • August 25 | Holly L.    |
| • August 28 | Tom W.      |
| • August 31 | Nick W.     |

## 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**

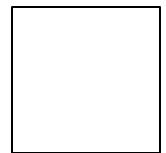
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A Reason-Based Moral  
Community for the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century

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**We're on the Web!**  
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