

The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.



The Potlatch, or What is Community Service?

By
Martin L. Cowen III

Individual Highlights

The Potlatch	1
Invitation to Event	6
March Calendar	7
April Calendar	8
Events	9
Birthdays	9
Celebratory Announcements	10

My county has a dysfunctional government. We are known as the New Orleans of Georgia. You will remember that our former sheriff—thank God he is now a former sheriff—fired 27 deputies at gun point. He actually placed snipers on the roof of the courthouse to oversee the escort of the deputies off the courthouse grounds. We have other government officials who are as effective as our former sheriff was. One of those officials is a judge who has difficulty doing his job. I can understand needing some training when one is new, but this judge refused to preside over any criminal trial during his first year in office. In his place, he hired, using State of Georgia budget funds, a Senior Judge to do his criminal cases at \$600 per day. After a year of that “budget bleed” the State got wise and banned further use of funds to cover his cases. Then, he got sick. He has been off the bench with a plausible “I’m sick story” for many months and is not expected to return to the bench until June. I seriously question whether he will return then. You have not heard about him from anyone else. You will never hear about him from anyone else. But know this: there are many government officials who are providing you as little service as he is at all levels of government, local, state, and national.



Anyway, the citizens of my county suffer because their cases are not heard. One divorce lawyer is reported to have said that he has never received a final order in a contested divorce case from this particular judge.

I heard about this problem and because I have practiced law for 33 years and sat as a judge in the past, I volunteered to do his job for him, for free. His work is serious work. It needs to get done. Somebody needs to do it. I had the free time.

The Chief Judge, to my surprise, was actually interested in my doing this task. He called to discuss it with me. He first sought my assurance that I was not planning to run against any of the incumbent judges. Some thought that I was resume building for a possible run for office. I assured him that I was not. And in truth I am not. He greatly underestimates the scope of my ambition. I might run for President of the United States. Under no circumstances would I throw myself upon a funeral pyre by running for any office in the New Orleans of Georgia.

Ultimately, I did not get the job. A judge, whose permission the Chief judge needed, wanted the job himself. But the “sick” judge dislikes the judge whose permission was needed, and so he will not be allowed to do the job. Also, that judge, and all of his minions, ARE running for higher office and would be resume building for that purpose.

My point in telling that story, other than to brag, is to open my discussions of Community Service.

The judges were highly skeptical of my motives. They doubted that I was volunteering out of a spirit of community service, or altruism. They suspected I had a political motive: resume building in order to run against one of them.

In the letter in which I volunteered, I disclosed my motives. I specifically identified honor as my motive. My exact words were: It is a great honor to be a judge. I also identified community service as a motive. The job needs to be done. Somebody has to do it. I can do it.

The Potlatch, or What is Community Service?

continued from page 1

These, I think, state the entire motive for community service in my case: honor, pride, and the possibility of satisfying of a need within my sphere of interests.

Before talking more about community service, let me talk about Objectivism's rejection of altruism.

The Objectivist *Lexicon* defines altruism as follows: "The basic principal of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value."

Understand this: the rejection of altruism is a rejection of the CLAIM BY OTHERS that you owe them something in the absence of contract or relationship. Objectivism rejects the CLAIM of altruism. Objectivism does not reject acts of kindness, benevolence, or generosity.

So, in my case, had a received a call from the Chief Judge in which he said: "Martin, you have a moral duty to give free service to the county. We are not going to pay you, but we want you to cover for our new, inexperienced judge, by sitting in his court, day after day, for free, and hear cases."

My experience of that claim would be mostly negative.

If a beggar were to say: "You're rich. Give me a dime. It is your moral duty." That beggar would likely starve.



People are willing to lend a hand. People do not like it as well when they are asked to give a hand. Furthermore, people tolerate being asked to lend a hand when the asker is not asking for herself, but is asking for another person or another organization or cause.

As autonomous, self-responsible individuals, we feel that it is a vice to ask others for help. As parents, we spend 20 years trying to wean our children from their need for parental assistance. When we finally wean them, we achieve success as parents. When we come across adults whose parents failed them as children—these adults were never weaned—we successful parents are unimpressed, generally.

The name "community service" is a bad name. The label "community service" contains an implicit moral

claim upon me. The label "community service" is an example of what is called polemical definition. The word carries with it the moral claim that community service is morally good. "We *should* do community service." "We *should* 'give back' to the community." "We *should* be a part of something larger than ourselves." Personally, I reject these moral claims.

I do not reject the behaviors of the Donor of community service. I volunteered to be judge for the day for free. I do reject the moral claim implicit in the expression "community service."

Consider this: the Fellowship of Reason functions entirely based upon what might be called community service, the behaviors of the donors, not the moral claims of the beneficiaries.

Scott Carper is the webmaster. Dan Barber sets the room up for FORum, makes the coffee, and conducts InFORmation Hour. Sally Hull feeds us twice a month and hosts Philosophy Tapes in her home. David Ziebell is a lifetime charter member and the President. All of these people have done many other things for the Fellowship of Reason in the last ten years of our existence. Every activity of FOR is performed by volunteers.

Let me give another example. There is a ritual called Potlatch practiced by the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast. "At these gatherings a family or hereditary leader hosts guests in their family's house and hold a feast for their guests. The main purpose of the potlatch is the re-distribution and reciprocity of wealth." Wikipedia, the Online Encyclopedia.

To begin to understand the Potlatch, consider that Internet claim that the mythological etymology of the word "potluck" as in FOR's monthly potluck is potlatch.

Also remember the Festival of Dionysius in Ancient Greece during the Fifth Century B.C.E. In 484 B.C.E., Aeschylus was the winner. In 406 B.C.E., Euripides was the winner. These religious festivals were paid for by wealthy citizens.

The work of members of FOR to sustain our moral community is an example to consider. The wealthy Indian leaders conduct of a potlatch in the Northwest Pacific Coast. The wealthy Athenian who pays for the Festival of Dionysius. The host of the monthly FOR potluck.

In none of these examples does the Donor act because somebody in the community or some moral authority claimed that it was the Donor's duty to perform community service. The Donor acts: (1) because she can; (2) because she will enjoy her product; (3) because she will be honored as a donor; (4) because she will feel pride in being capable of achieving so much.

The perfect example of this for Objectivists is Cortlandt Homes. In Ayn Rand's novel *The*

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

Fellowship of Reason
P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107
678-641-9321

E-mail
info@fellowshipofreason.com

Subscription Information

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

Fellowship of Reason® is a service mark registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, Reg. No. 3,117,034. All rights reserved.

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

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

The Potlatch, or What is Community Service?

continued from page 2

Fountainhead, the hero Howard Roark secretly designs a housing project called Cortlandt Homes. He does it for free. He does it because he can. He does it because he will feel pride in being capable of achieving so much. He is denied his payment when the final plan is changed. He blows up the project, leading to the trial scene that is the climax of the novel.

Human beings want to be powerful. Human beings want to express their powers. A very common expression of power for individuals is voluntary production within their spheres of influence, also called community service.

Let us come up with a different word for "community service." "Voluntary production within their spheres of influence" is too bulky.

Consider human action. Human action means that which human beings do. Here is a simplified list.

1. Human beings work for a living. That is we exchange our labor for money.
2. Human beings fall in love and get married. When in a marriage, human beings cooperate toward common goals, such as buying the products necessary to live: food, shelter, and clothing. They build an environment in which to raise a family. They save for a rainy day. They save for retirement.
3. Human beings have children and perform all the services necessary to raise them.
4. Human beings form friendships and communities, large and small. In those relationships and communities, they perform actions for the good of the relationship and for the good of the community.

This simplified survey of human action suggests to me that only a small part of human action is trade of services for money, also called work. The large bulk of human action is action directed toward the interests of the individual that does not pay back money in exchange for services. Those interests are the spouse, the children, the friends, and the communities of the individual. All of this action is "community service." But that word is neither appropriate nor commonly used.

As I have suggested, community service is a polemical phrase that is designed to suggest that an individual "ought" to provide service to a particular community. "Community service" is used by a potential beneficiary of the unpaid labor of the individual. It is the beneficiary saying to the potential donor: "You ought to help me. It is your duty." I reject this claim. My human action is all about me: my chosen communities, my production, my honor, my pride.

Philanthropy is another word. Bill Gates, the Microsoft millionaire, is a philanthropist. His interest is medical health in Africa. Ted Turner, Atlanta media millionaire, is a philanthropist. His interest is the United Nations.



While Ron Menich is a great contributor to FOR, the word "philanthropy" does not capture his generosity. Philanthropy seems to mean throwing gobs of money. The delivery of personal services is what we are talking about in this context.

Stewardship is another word. One definition of stewardship is "taking responsibility for the survival and well-being of something that is valued, such as a natural resource" or, I add, such as one's moral community. That word works a little better for me.

Liberality is another word the works for me. In this context, liberality is defined as a trait of being generous in behavior and temperament. An antonym is miserliness.

Magnanimity is another word that works for me. A magnanimous person is a person with a large soul.

Beneficent is another word that works for me.

I like magnanimity. The character trait of having a great soul.

But even better is magnificence. Aristotle defined magnificence as "correctly dealing with great wealth or power." Another Aristotelian definition is "liberality of expenditure combined with good taste." The etymology of the word is *magnus*, meaning great, and *facere*, the verb "to make or do." So the meaning is great making or doing or making or doing or creating from greatness or power or wealth.

The Potlatch, or What is Community Service?

continued from page 3

Eureka! Magnificence.

Not community service, but magnificence.

This is exactly what I had in mind for myself when I volunteered to be judge for a day. I was being magnificent.

This is, I suggest, exactly what Ron is doing when he performs Celebration of Talent for us: He is being magnificent.

Only a person with great wealth or power has the capacity to be magnificent. I do not mean merely money. I do not mean being the President or the Dictator. Power has other forms. In my case, I have the unique power in my county to offer my services as judge for free. There is no one else who has that power.

In this place and time, Scott Carper has the wealth and power to offer web services to FOR. There is no one else for the job. Scott is unique. Scott is magnificent.

Dan is magnificent. Sally is magnificent. David is magnificent. *Et cetera.*

Dan said to me once: "Call me when you want to build a building", or something to this effect. I think what this means is: "Give me an opportunity for voluntary production within my sphere of influence." Dan wants an opportunity to be magnificent. He wants to build a building for the Fellowship of Reason.

So that is the question to which I would like to turn now. Since volunteer communities of all kinds, including moral communities, exist because of the generosity of their members, how can the Fellowship of Reason facilitate opportunities for generosity, how can the Fellowship of Reason facilitate opportunities for voluntary production within our members' sphere of influence, how can the Fellowship of Reason facilitate opportunities for magnificence?

Name some magnificent human achievements: The Taj Mahal, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Great Egyptian Pyramid of Giza, the Coliseum at Rome, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Empire State Building, the Cathedral at Chartres, France, the Great Wall of China, the Golden Gate Bridge, the subway system in New York City, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, the Parthenon atop the Acropolis at Athens.



Maybe Dan was right. Dan said, "Call me back when FOR is ready to build its building."

Think about a building for a minute. A building does provide many opportunities for magnificence. Of course, the most obvious opportunity is in the construction. As with all the examples I cited, the buildings were assembled precisely in order to be magnificent. But beyond that, since none of us has yet achieved the wealth of a Pharaoh, our building is likely to be more modest than the Taj Mahal. Our building will be like the Chalice Room at NWUUC.

The building itself, though, provides opportunities for magnificence. Members with free time will staff the office to welcome members and visitors and answer the telephones. Members with free time will contribute time to clean the building. Members will contribute money to make improvements. Members will use the facilities to conduct seminars, to give lectures, to attend a Toastmasters Club, to sing in choirs, to perform in plays, to host a weekend lock-in, to run at Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop, to do Philosophy Tapes, to do Fiction Book Clubs, to do Nonfiction Book Clubs, to do Invisible College, to do Movie Night.

Most people choose for their acts of magnificence their communities, such as their marriage, their family, their children's school, and their moral community. All of these communities have a physical place: the home, the school house, the church, synagogue, temple, or FORum. Support of our places is an important and perhaps primary object of magnificence.

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

The Potlatch, or What is Community Service?

continued from page 4

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

So, as usual Dan is right. Our moral community needs a building in order to practice magnificence—great doing, great making, great creating, or creation, making or doing from greatness.

The Cathedral at Chartres is the visible symbol of the people of Chartres that “we are a magnificent people.” Ditto the Incas and Machu Picchu. The Egyptians and the Great Pyramid. The Babylonians and the Hanging Gardens. The Athenians and the Parthenon. *Et cetera.*



In the meantime before the building is begun, there are many opportunities for magnificent in the Fellowship of Reason, here are some examples from the past. Sally arranged two canoe trips to the Okefenokee Swamp in South Georgia. Teresa Barber arranged three weekend white water river adventures for Fellowship of Reason members in the North Georgia Mountains. John, Beth, and Scott have hosted trips to Grandfather Mountain near Linville, North Carolina. The hosting of all of our existing functions are instances of magnificence: Movie Night, Classic Film Course, Fiction Book Club, FOR Pub Nights, Dan’s Sailing Club, Invisible College, Philosophy Tapes, and, let us not forget the Potlatch, or our version of the same, Potluck.

We, the members of the Fellowship of Reason, are great people and we are capable of doing great things. Let us do them. We are magnificent.



Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

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

You Are Invited to a Special Evening with

Sunsara Taylor

Saturday, March 14th, 7pm

At the home of Dr. Jim Ainsworth

931 Mercer Street SE, Atlanta, GA 30316

Refreshments

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=Atlanta&state=GA&address=931+Mercer+St.+&zipcode=30316>

Join us for a house party fundraiser for Sunsara Taylor's travel expenses, who will be traveling from New York City to be a featured speaker on a panel at Georgia State University the following Monday, March 16, called *Morality Without Gods – Possibility or Fantasy?* hosted by GSU's Revolution Club (full panel and details below). Come meet Sunsara and be a part of an informal and unforgettable evening of stimulating conversation about morality, god, and the role of religion in society.

RSVP: ainsworth@gsu.edu (preferred) or 404-694-9491

Since last fall and into this spring, Sunsara has been on a national campus speaking tour in which she draws from *Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*, the recent book by Bob Avakian (Insight Press 2008). Her tour has brought her to campus groups, urban high schools and academic departments including the Center for the Study of Religion at UCLA and the Black Studies Program at Cleveland State University.

She is a writer for *Revolution* newspaper and an uncompromising atheist. Her coverage of the rise of Christian fascism has taken her to the gates of abortion clinics across the country, to Terri Schiavo's hospice, to inside the stadiums of the BattleCry movement to train Christian youth shock troops and led to numerous impressive verbal battles with Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and countless thoughtful interviews with reality-based radio hosts.

Join us for the fundraiser house party and then at the Georgia State event:

Morality Without Gods – Fantasy or Possibility?

Monday, March 16th, 7PM

Georgia State University, Speakers Auditorium

(Student University Center, Corner of Gilmer and Courtland St.)

At a time of broad controversy and debate over religion – on a scale unprecedented in recent times- Sunsara Taylor, Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel, and Martin Cowen will have an exchange on the question of God, morality, and the role of religion in society. Can you be good without God? Are beliefs in Gods obstacles or pathways to understanding and changing the world and to the emancipation of humanity?

Panel:

Sunsara Taylor- Writer for *Revolution* newspaper and an uncompromising atheist. Sunsara has recently been on a national campus speaking tour on the book, *AWAY WITH ALL GODS – Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World* by Bob Avakian. (www.awaywithallgods.com)

Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel - Pastor of Victory for the World Church in Stone Mountain, Vice-Chair of the African American Leadership Council of the People for the American Way.

Martin Cowen – Founder of the Fellowship of Reason, founded in 1998, the Fellowship of Reason is the world's first and only reason-based moral community.

Moderated by: Dr. James Ainsworth, Associate Professor of Sociology, Georgia State University

Discussion with panel to follow.

For more info: GSU Revolution Club, revclubgsu@gmail.com

Calendar

[calendar view](#)
[upcoming list view](#)
[past list view](#)

◀ March 2009 ▶

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 12:00 PM Fellowship of Reason Monthly FORum and Children's Education Program	2	3 7:30 PM Philosophy Club	4 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring	5 📅	6	7 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course
8 Today 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes 10:30 AM Dan Barber's FOR Sailing Club RSVP Now	9	10 7:30 PM Fiction Book Club RSVP Now	11 7:00 PM Sandy Springs Pub Night RSVP Now 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	12	13	14 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course RSVP Now
15 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes 10:30 AM Dan Barber's FOR Sailing Club RSVP Now	16	17 7:30 PM Philosophy Club Your RSVP: Yes	18 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	19	20	21 7:30 PM Potluck Supper Your RSVP: Yes
22 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes	23	24	25 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	26 8:00 PM Midtown Pub Night RSVP Now	27	28
29 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes	30	31				

◀ April 2009 ▶

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	2	3	4 7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course RSVP Now
5		7	8			11

12:00 PM Fellowship of Reason Monthly FORum and Children's Education Program Your RSVP: Yes	6	7:30 PM Philosophy Club Your RSVP: Yes	7:00 PM Sandy Springs Pub Night RSVP Now 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	9	10	7:00 PM Classic Film Appreciation Course RSVP Now
12 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes	13	14 7:30 PM Fiction Book Club RSVP Now	15 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	16	17	18 7:30 PM Potluck Supper RSVP Now
19 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes	20	21 7:30 PM Philosophy Club Your RSVP: Yes	22 7:30 PM Invisible College: Wagner's Ring Your RSVP: Yes	23	24	25
26 8:00 AM FOR Runners Your RSVP: Yes	27	28	29	30 8:00 PM Midtown Pub Night RSVP Now		

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. Meet and greet at 12:30 p.m. The program starts at 1 p.m. Presided over by FOR's President or Vice President, members give presentations such as Celebration of Freedom and Celebration of Talent. A 15 to 20 minute Oratory on an ethical subject highlights the program. A short conversation called FORum during which audience members share their thoughts concludes the program. We enjoy post-program conversation until 3 p.m. when those interested adjourn to a local restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program from noon to 3 p.m.

Martin Cowen director: 678-641-9321.

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: 678-641-9321

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

Invisible College: Wednesdays 7:30 p.m.

Doctor of Philosophy reveals the secrets of philosophy in a live two-hour lecture. There is an enormous fee and limited seating. Adepts and initiates only.

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

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at Tele's house across the street from Sally's house. For book selections and more information, go to:

www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm

Tele Holt coordinator: 404-843-1886
telehold@gmail.com

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

Our next Potluck is Saturday, March 21, 2009, at 7:30 p.m. Remember it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share. Host: Kate Miller

Two Pub Nights: 2nd Wednesday (Five Season's Brewing) and 4th Thursday (Manuel's Tavern)

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Wednesday at Five Seasons Brewing at 7 p.m. and on the 4th Thursday at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and conversation.

Scott Carper coordinator Manuel's:
 404-964-6697

Marianna coordinator Five Seasons Brewing:
mashoonya@yahoo.com

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, March 28, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

John Grover coordinator: 404-872-4555

*Join us for our
 next monthly
 FORum:*

April 5, 2009
Sunday at 1 p.m.
 (Meet, Greet at 12:30)

FOR Children's Program
 from noon to 3 p.m.
 Educational Program from
 12:30 p.m. to 12:50 p.m.

Birthdays

- March 4 Scott Carper
- March 17 Terry Carter
- March 22 Toni Brookner
- March 24 John Brooks
- March 31 Clint Harper

- April 3 Theresa Barber
- April 7 Beth Anne Grella
- April 9 Kathleen Allen
- April 9 Kate Miller
- April 9 Erik Bauer
- April 24 Peter Brookner
- April 24 Susan Menich

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

P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107

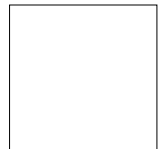
E-mail

info@fellowshipofreason.com

A Reason-Based Moral
Community for the 21st
Century

FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.

P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107



We're on the Web!

See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com