

Essay on modern reason

[Religion](#), [God](#)



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Lee Harris is aware of the fact that Pope Benedict XVI's speech entitled "Faith, Reason, and the University," has received a lot of attention and discussions from the public. Amid the discussions and responses, Harris is of the view that the speech has been widely misunderstood and inaccurately conveyed to the public. He is in support of this view because of the various opinions that the speech elicits from the public, particularly the part that talks about Jihad and how the media reported it to the public. For example, he mentions the New York Times, which had a headline that gave a literal impression the Pope attacked secularism (belief in one's freedom from religious influence) and dropped a note to the Jihads (Harris, 2006).

According to Harris, this is a wrong interpretation of the pope's message. He is of the opinion that the speech was a critique to the "modern reason from within". We will examine the evidences he gives to support his view, and why he thinks the critique is essential. Finally, a critical analysis of his views with concluding remarks.

Harris argues that the Pope employs paradox in his speech to elicit a critical thinking and re-evaluation of the "modern reason from within" that westerners claim to subscribe. According to Harris, an embodiment of the traditional church calls for the ancient Socratic critical thinking that is paradoxical. Harris believes that the pope invokes reason because of his acknowledgment that he is not attempting to rewind the clock and reject the modern age insights. Instead, he calls for recognition of the positive, modern age insights. However, people should bear in mind the role of critical thinking in creating and sustaining the various faiths that they believe in. They have to be sure of knowing what they talk about when they talk of faith, reason

and the community. Harris thinks that the Pope's speech is significant in awakening critical views because reason is under attack by those who do not trust in Islamic religion and the western intellectuals who do not fully comprehend its meaning.

Harris begins his arguments from the known facts about modern "reason from within" by giving an insightful difference between the Greek notion of reason and the modern notion of reason. He states that the modern reason from within after Kant seeks to identify itself with scientific truths from empirical data, which gives certain results. It excludes reason about God, religion and ethics unlike the Greek reasoning, which can reason about anything. From the Pope's speech, Harris finds fault with this "reason" because of the following arguments. Firstly, he rejects the notion that modern reason from within can reason entirely without inclusion of God. The westerners who believe in the modern reason from within will have an uphill task in responding to Muslims who do not subscribe to reason. Instead, they believe in force and imposition of their teachings on unbelievers. Secondly, modern reason cannot exist without reason because it requires reasonable men who can acknowledge the beliefs by modern reason. In addition, the rational foundation of the modern science that the world is governed by rules and order derives its origin from the Christian reason that God created the world in order.

Harris views are in line with other philosophers such as Socrates about the role of reason and critical thinking in life. Socrates acknowledges that unexamined life is not worth living. Conversely, people have to re-examine

the modern reason from within and put across his arguments convincingly. I find all of his arguments valid, even though some like not leaving the reason about God religion and ethics to subjective mind requires more convincing. One may argue that, if “ reason” cannot afford to leave decisions of right or wrong to subjective mind, then how different is it from Islam that imposes such decisions on individuals by force and without reason. However, it does not hold since Harris addresses it by showing that it would be impossible to create a world where reason will exist without restriction on freedom. The few who choose force over reason will destroy the community. In conclusion, Harris successfully delivers his view that the Pope was calling for a re-examination of the modern reason and not just attacking secularism and Muslims.

Reference:

HARRIS, L. (2006, October 2). Joseph Ratzinger on the destiny of reason.

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