

The Rise & Fall of Reason

REASON: to think or argue in a logical manner

by Rick Reed

Reason has long been central to Western thought. Rooted in the Latin *ratio* (“judgment”) and French *raison* (“to discuss or argue”), in English it has served both as *logical justification* and *moral cause* since the 13th century. For more than 2,500 years, reason has stood alongside *authority*—received knowledge; *observation*—knowledge gained by the senses; and *intuition*—knowledge that transcends logical reasoning as one of the four ways of knowing.

Thomas Aquinas elevated reason when he sought to reconcile it with faith. His *Summa Theologica* positioned reason as a divine gift—an instrument for discerning truth in a fallen world. The Scholastics (13th–15th-century Christian scholars and theologians) saw reason not as strict logic but as a moral compass, guiding humans toward clarity and virtue without succumbing to emotionalism. This legacy shaped Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions alike.

From Divine to Human

Yet, in the 17th century, its meaning began to shift away from its divine moorings toward something referring to a purely human construct. We can trace its decline through four eras.

Rationalism. Enlightenment-era thinkers magnified the scope of reason. Descartes, Locke, and others declared it the foundation

of all human knowledge. Indeed, Descartes’s famous dictum, *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think; therefore, I am”) positioned reason as the bedrock not just of knowing but of existence. Philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries made reason synonymous with objectivity and the rejection of superstition, casting it as the path to liberating humanity from ignorance and tyranny.

Among America’s Founding Fathers, Jefferson and Adams in particular understood that for the new nation to become a just and stable society, its foundation must be built on objective reason. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson invoked “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” a phrase rooted in rationalist natural law theory. Adams believed that laws and institutions should be grounded in reason and virtue. He even warned against the

dangers of unchecked emotion and factionalism.

Romanticism. By the 19th century, the Romantics rejected what they saw as the cold abstraction of reason for what they perceived as the liberating power of emotion and intuition. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley went so far as to declare, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” He, along with many other Romantic idealists, placed emotion and creativity above reason.

Existentialism. By the early 20th century, the existentialists argued that reason was incapable of resolving the absurdity of existence. Though they conceded that reason could describe the world and its physical operations, they insisted it could not justify living in that world. For them, each person must create his own meaning through choices he makes, rather than discovering through reason objective meaning that already exists.

Postmodernism. Following the existentialists, postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida regarded reason as contingent and complicit in systems of domination. The Frankfurt School critical theorists further critiqued Enlightenment reason as a tool for control rather than liberation. For the critical Marxist Herbert Marcuse, reason became a tool for overthrowing Western civilization. He radicalized reason in saying that, “Philosophy must break the spell of the prevailing rationality.”

The Perennial Invitation

Scripture affirms reason as part of God’s invitation to humanity. The Hebrew word *yakach*, translated “reason” in most English Bibles, means “to decide”—a call to moral discernment. This divine appeal frames reason not merely as logic, but as a relational bridge between God and man—a means of forgiveness, understanding, and truth. In Isaiah’s words, “Come, let us reason together.” ☺



FOMO

Beware the Other Attention Deficit Disorder

by Keith Hess

As you read this column, you may experience an urge to check your social media feed. Did anyone like your recent post? How come more people didn’t congratulate you on your life update? Did people find your meme funny?

You’re not alone. I just felt the urge to check my Facebook account. It is becoming common knowledge that social media use has led to harmful psychological consequences, including the amplification of a psychological phenomenon known as FOMO (“fear of missing out”).

While FOMO isn’t a logical fallacy in itself, it can lead to fallacious thinking, such as the *bandwagon fallacy* and the *false urgency fallacy*. On the former, a person decides to do something because others are doing it. On the latter, someone acts quickly on the false sense that they will miss out if they don’t. These psychological tendencies make thinking critically more difficult.

Many retailers rely on FOMO to boost sales. For example, they carry seasonal items earlier than expected and then pull them from

shelves earlier than expected. This creates a sense of urgency in customers, making them more likely to buy on impulse. Most shoppers don’t need the items being pushed. Yet they buy them anyway.

Be Discerning

I recently read *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (2019), by Cal Newport. It’s as relevant now as when it was first published. Newport urges us to be discerning in adopting new technologies. Rather than defaulting to acceptance, we should first ask how the new app or device will improve our lives and whether the cost of adopting it is worth the improvement it promises to deliver. In response, I deleted most apps from my phone and started taking daily walks just to think and pray. My mind

feels sharper, less fragmented, and more at peace. And the world didn’t end because I didn’t pick up my phone.

If the urge to pick up your phone feels irresistible, it’s not necessarily because you’re weak-willed. Social media companies capitalize on your data and attention, and they design their apps to draw you in and keep you scrolling. Since you are the product, they make more money by keeping you on your phones and apps longer. In so doing, they exploit the fact that we are social creatures who want to belong. They prey on our psychological vulnerability. The result is a generation that has lost the ability to focus and that lives more frenetic, fragmented lives.

Think a Second Time

How ought we then live? Instead of rushing to our phones to “stay connected,” we should try slowing down and having a genuine conversation with someone around us. To do this, we will likely need to put some restrictions on our phones, such as blocking certain apps or leaving the phone in a drawer after we get home from work. When the urge to pick up your phone hits you, stop, breathe, and ask yourself *why* you would be picking it up. Think about whether it’s a good use of your time to browse Instagram for an hour. Think about what you would miss right next to you if you were to spend your next moments on your phone.

Did you get through this article without the urge to check social media? If not, perhaps it’s time to rethink how you use your phone. The real risk of FOMO is not that something amazing could be happening online that we simply must know about. It’s that we may spend so much time on our devices, we miss out on the opportunities to engage in life as it is offered to us moment by moment, and we don’t truly live. ☺