

Broadening Reason: Benedict XVI on the Realism of Faith

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On September 12th 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered an address titled “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,” to the University of Regensburg. In the address, Benedict suggested that the modern “concept of reason needs...to be ‘broadened’...to embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical”.

Crucial to this project of *broadening reason* is Benedict’s defence of the thesis that a “critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith”. But Benedict is not simply concerned with shoring up the Greek heritage of metaphysics as a means to overcome the instrumental rationality which he takes to be characteristic of modernity, nor does he set out merely to defend that heritage in the face of ongoing philosophical and theological efforts to dehellenize Christianity; rather, he makes the claim that “the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason *are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.*” [emphasis mine]

Thus, it turns out that the call to “broaden reason” is a call to broaden our understanding of *faith*, and what begins as a “critique of modern reason from within” is, more importantly, a vigorous self-critique of modern Christianity.

In the encyclical *Spe Salvi*’s exegesis of *The Letter to the Hebrews* in particular, Benedict proposes faith as a method of knowing existence. In fact, there faith is presented as the highest expression of human reason, and as an eminently reasonable knowledge of reality. Benedict’s undertaking is, therefore, nothing short of a modern theological revolution, akin to Walsh’s “modern philosophical revolution”, regarding the “primacy of the existing real, of being itself”.