

Notes on In Praise of The Gods by Simon Sarris

What should the reader/listener takeaway from this essay?

First, we need to ask the question: “what question is Simon answering or what issue is he speaking to?”

Although essays are not meant to be tightly constrained by subjects, they are not always without themes. So I think the theme is clear in this essay that RATIONALITY IS NOT THE ALL BE ALL we make it to be. Perhaps the thesis of the essay lies in the statement:

“To lack reason is to be inhuman. To rely on it solely is to be disembodied. This disembodied nature is the vice of the modern intellectual.”

An extended summary will include a statement early in the essay that

“Since Descartes’ time, rationalist thinking has ascended beyond primacy, to become an attempt at vacating not only other faculties, but also other motivations and desires.”

And

“Almost no new cities match the beauty of the few remaining medieval city centers, which themselves are so cherished that people will spend thousands to fly there, just to see them in person for a few days. But tourists fly home, and never think of creating a new place, of creating something that constitutes an artistic endeavor beyond themselves. Rather they will leave building to builders and zoning codes, who will plan the next warehouses for humans, for rarely today can people verbalize their values in any other terms than the economic.”

This (above) is actually concerning. It seems to be as if people are abandoning their creative impulses. They are content with dwarfed inspiration: that is, they see something inspiring and they simply feel it and abandon it. There is no desire to draw on that inspiration to recreate or build something for themselves that may in turn inspire others. They treat creative sites like pilgrimage journeys where you glance at a relic, feel a sense of devotion, practise devotion there, and forget about it as soon as you leave the site. That definitely, is one of the consequences of idolizing reason to the abandonment of other faculties, motivations, and desires.

With the quote:

Atrocities at scale are most possible when intuition is beaten out of people, and replaced with wholly authoritarian epistemic conditioning.

One can see why propagandists want you to disbelieve your gut senses at all costs. They understand although morality is objective, virtue is still a moving target. But they take you in whatever direction so that you are too exhausted to shrug off their sinistrality. Evil.

A more filling part is on *Stories: building intuitions*. Ethics and aesthetics rely very well on intuitions. No amount of text and jargon in your head will help you hit the moving target of ethics and have a taste in good things. I mean, this explains why some people are very brilliant but hopelessly philistine and boring. One way to help build and not short-circuit intuition building is to read an entire thing instead of angling for a summary. That long-winded part of the reading where it seems as if you are not getting the gist of the matter is actually acting on you in ways that are not obvious. When the advantages begin kicking in, you don't even know where you picked up the skill from. An instance is that reading an author like Nassim Taleb may help you appreciate good writing while picking up the gist of the *Incerto*. This is why reading itself has to be enjoyed: if you thought reading was just for information transfer, you will miss the subtle elements of good writing that fortifies your taste. Like it is with the hyperrational, they quickly boil down the benefit of a thing to its most obvious benefit. Hyperrationalism leads to reductionism.

On rituals before rationality, very cogent point. Rituals, according to Lewis Mumford, was potent for the caveman in controlling the surging power of dreams and creativity he was experiencing before he developed language. Where language is tightly knit with rationality, rituals precede that. That means that there are things we can experience and perform without necessarily explaining. In that sense then, rationality comes second and it is only naive to think that language which came second can explain all that is encoded in rituals.

I personally will like the reader to leave here with the desire to use their complete faculties and look toward rituals, stories, mythology, and sharpen their aesthetic senses.