

# RATIONALITY AND UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

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Among contemporary social scientists there are two central questions that have been frequently raised. First, is social inquiry scientific or philosophical? Second, is understanding others possible? In attempting to answer the first question, some may say that all kinds of social inquiry are scientific because they are empirical and can be measured by scientific methods or empirical approaches. Others may say that social inquiry is philosophical in kind because it deals with human beings and cannot escape from normative approaches. Still, others may say that it is both scientific and philosophical in the sense that it can be described in terms of both causal theories and intentionality. Still, others may say that social inquiry is neither scientific nor philosophical in the sense that it does not deal with “theoretical rationality.” They may argue that it is *phronetic* in the sense that it deals with “practical rationality.” However, this first question is not the main concern of this paper. In this paper I will inquire into the second question together with the concept of rationality.

## I. What Rationality Means

“Rationality” seems to be one of the most confusing philosophical concepts. It can mean different things to different people. In order not to get lost, we may study it through the long history of its usage, especially from great philosophers. We may date this back to Aristotle who first made a distinction between *theoria* (theoretical rationality) and *phronesis* (practical rationality). Kant followed this distinction and developed more in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, and other great philosophers considered reason as something “given” to human beings only, not to other kinds of animals. However, even though reason is believed “given” and considered central to the conception of human being, everybody must have resolution and courage to use it in order to reach maturity. Kant defines the meaning of