

# Rationality from the Pre-Modern to the Modern society

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**Abstract:** The present paper is an attempt to understand the concept of rationality and how it is placed as the core element, executing both the idea of harmony and disharmony in the society. In a conceivable manner, rationality can be interpreted as a “belief formation and belief-regulating process”. Rationality is the guiding principle that builds system and regulates it. Accordingly, it can also be said that the system of belief or the rationality is something that is inevitably tied with the human existence. Further, it also conditioned by the socio-political situations of society and also from the way of participation of individuals in the society. In the history of philosophy, the analysis of the concept of society prior to the modernity pertains to the understanding and interpretation of the theological rationality. Theological rationality lays its emphasis on the social principle as insinuated from the teachings of the scripture that is the progression of society is believed to be unconditionally associated with the norms and obligations generated from the scripture. For example in the theological tradition, St. Augustine “stressed the priority of faith and the acceptance of the biblical revelation” in understanding the authentic nature of the self and its way of belongingness in the society. Again, in modernity, the concept of society as such is attempted to be interpreted and explicate from the perspective of science. Correspondingly, the rationality of modernity in turn, aims to redefine the fundamental characteristics of the social dimension with respect to the idea of innovation, scientific enhancement, technological advancement, etc. Having said this, the nature and the characteristics of society on a different level possibly transcends form the grasp of both the understanding and interpretation of theology and science. Accordingly, society can also be said to be disclosing certain important aspects that has its ground on the unmediated everydayness situation regarding individual’s decision, actions, opinions, etc and other events of communication. Here, the paper aims to analyze the concept of rationality with regard to the question such as—  
Is rationality an important element of society, if so what are the levels of social inducement that can be generally appreciated? Do the theological rationality and the scientific rationality as a historical importance in understanding the concept of society intervene in developing a harmonious human relation in the society? Are there possible alternatives of developing rationality in the society unhitched from the idea of foundationalism? Further, in the process of articulation, the paper aims to incorporate a historical, ethical and hermeneutical method.

**Keywords:** Rationality, Foundationalism, Hermeneutics.

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## Introduction

Rationality is a matter of deliberately doing the best one can with the means at one's disposal—of striving for the best results that one can expect to achieve within the range of one's resources—specifically including one's intellectual resources. Optimization in what one thinks, does, and values is the crux of rationality. It is rationality that provides a distinctive feature to man and its execution of actions, decisions, opinions, etc. Rationality serves as the component that enables to guide human through the proper assimilation of reason and also through its utilization of the developed principle. On different occasion, individuals in the society tend to rely on certain principles when they seek for support to their understanding and also to convince other as to why something is true. In such cases, we provide a reasonable argument that conforms to the principle that is of the general consideration. Therefore, to justify and to uphold

our beliefs, it is indeed a requirement of a principle of rationality.

## Section 1

In the pre-modern society, especially in the context of Europe, the church became the most powerful organization displaying certain act of governance that shapes the structure of society, culture, political situations, human’s perception of the world, etc. The developed rationale in turn disseminates the fundamental idea that individuals in the society should cultivate its beingness in harmony to the established principle of the church and its interpretation of the scripture. It is construable that the church in general views that the teachings of the God as embedded in the scripture and hence the developed doctrines, ideas and principles are regarded as something infallible. Accordingly, the task of theological rationality is to furnish the ‘understanding’ of the nature and attributes of God with its relation to the

world. Individuals in the society are then made to propagate the belief that truth, knowledge, morality, etc are revealed within the bounds of the church through the intervention of God. The theological rationality as mediated by the interpretation scripture presupposes the general characteristic of God such as, God as the creator, the sustainer and the judge. In relation to this view, the scriptural idea or the notion of God is regarded as pervading all forms of life and integrates it under the direction and control of the church. Here, the church is structured as the sole entity that is positioned over and above human being. The theological rationality establishes the outlook that the church alone has the authority and is equipped with the ability to guide individuals in the society and subsequently entails the 'way of the divine' as the principle idea that could at fathom remodel the structure of the social reality, the individuals' perception of it and also its participation or the beingness in the society.

### **Section 2**

From a philosophic point of view that intellectual movement in history that was highly fashioned by science and its method of understanding and interpretation of the various human phenomena is of the 'modernity'. Modernity in general is the quality or the state of being modern. Here, the idea of behind the term 'modern' is to segregate from elements which can be regarded as traditional or that which are non-scientific in character and quality. Modernity and its prospect of understanding the nature of society aim at elevating the aspects of rationality, scientific knowledge, individuality, human subjectivity, freedom, liberty, autonomy, etc. The fundamental quest for modernity is to celebrate the many achievable possibilities of science especially the methodological component which is grounded on evidences, facts and rational enumeration. Correspondingly, the rationality of modernity entails the view that certain approaches, theories, understanding or interpretation can be characterized as 'rational' when it is scientifically analyzed and evaluated within the spectrum of science. Modernity's scientific rationality also possibly constructs the outlook that truth and knowledge of various intellectual approaches can be safeguarded from the association of dogmatism through the procedure of science.

The basic line of demarcation of scientific rationality from theological rationality can also be roughly outlined with the configuration of the usage of human reason. The faculty of reason in both the systems

is endorsed with a different motive or consideration. Noticeably, in the theological rationality, 'reason' can be said to providing the accessibility of conferring the hermeneutical keys for the exposition of the scripture. As suggested by St. Augustine, the authority of the scripture is sustained through the arguments and supports deduced from the rationalistic terms as induced by reason. Also, reason is regarded as providing the avenue for conceiving scriptural teachings as the structural conditions or the enactor of laws under which individuals in the society regulates their everydayness act of participation. On the other hand, the skeptical problem of theological rationality as put forth by the modern philosophers pertains to the idea of man's inability to learn about the ways of God through philosophical reasoning or scientific exploration. In modernity, man becomes the center for every world explanation in the sense that human reason is regarded as suited with the ability to know the reality in terms of the subject. It also cultivates reason as the objective element that could possibly uphold the foundation for any act of socialization.

### **Section 3**

It can be stated that for the possible social progression or the attainment of an appreciable social dimension the ineluctable element is the development of a regulating principle or rationality that invokes or render the idea of 'harmony' among participating members and also to the society. Rationality is the important condition in the society that consists "in the appropriate use of reason to resolve choices in the best possible way". Here, the idea of making rational choices in the society necessarily assimilates the principle of human solidarity, the important interpersonal human relation, the development of moral system, etc. Hence, in this regard, it is noteworthy that rational decisions in the society should essentially be directed towards the idea of furnishing the many social components that may possibly entertain in the establishment of a harmonious society. Having said this, on the contrary, the distinguished rationality of theology and science though proposes the 'ideal' of shaping the society to its admissibility the project itself was offering certain impediments that might dismay the achievable possibilities regarding individuals' participation and the development of society. Here, from a philosophical perspective the issues related with both the rationality could possibly be accounted as a hermeneutical problem or the problem of interpretation in the sense that the matter itself is constitutive of the very act of interpreting 'what rationality is'.

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According to Palmer hermeneutics or the act of translation can be regarded as the theory and methodology that pertains to the “interpretation and explanations” of various ideas, texts, concepts, principles, etc. Consequently, the fundamental tenet of ‘hermeneutics’ is to acquire meanings and understanding that are coherent, comprehensive and impartial so that the act of encoding or deciphering opens up the horizon of many possibilities. The concept of rationality belonging to that of theology, advocates certain constraints to the practice of free, rational and independent way of expressing opinions, decisions or actions of individuals within the bound of society. Participants in the society and its way of being are therefore put under the control of whichever social principles generated from the scripture and the church without regard to the question of its legitimacy or illegitimacy. Based on this outlook, here, it is conceivable that the developed rationality itself serves ‘contrariwise’ to the elemental attribution of the ‘rational choice’ equated with the concept of rationality. Further, theological rationality also undermines the social character of rationality that amplifies that idea of the general good through its act of fostering the passive engagement of individuals with the society.

Scientific rationality on the other hand, constructs a logical system in which through its reference man could reasonably perceive the reality free from indoctrinated ideas or principle. The primary objective of scientific rationality aims at vindicating the society from the association or intervention of what it termed as tradition. Here, following Gadamer’s view of tradition which comes under his notion of prejudices is what sustains the society and possibly generates the form of ‘understanding’ that can be accessed by every members despite their calculable differences. According to modernity and its rationality, prejudices exhibit the undesired authority in the society and hence impedes in the construction of the modern self or the self-regulating individuals in the society. It is permissible on various ground of scientific rationality promoting its level of antagonism towards certain prejudices on the ground of being authoritative and simultaneously as delimiting the individuals’ performances in the society but on the other hand the denial of authority in turn embraces the concept of individualism in the sense that the ‘unbound self’ or the self which is undetermined by preordained social principles paves the way for the self to be socially isolated from the other.

The principle idea behind both theological rationality and scientific rationality can be conceived as the approach to

delineate and cultivate a concrete structure of the social reality and also to acquire control or to determine the way of participation of individuals in the society with certain teleological motives. Regarding individuals’ decision, action and conduct that are executed within the bound of society are at all times made in consonance with the established ideas, concepts and principle of the constructed rationality. The theological rationality as supported by ‘faith’ and the scientific rationality as substantiated by scientifically obtained analysis, examination and evidences though diametrically opposed to one another exhibits certain authoritative claim in connection with knowledge, understanding, belief, perception, etc and most importantly about the actual structure of the social reality. Here, the idea of authoritativeness is construed on the basis that both the rationality and its claim or contention of the certain ideas and principle that is considered prerequisite for the social progression is made on the ground of absoluteness and offers ‘overlook’ for the other methods and approaches of understanding and interpreting the structure of the society. The rationality of theology and modernity can also possibly be equated with the concept of ‘foundationalism’ in the sense that both the rationality claims the coherent understanding and interpretation of society and the way of beingness of individuals can be explicated exhaustively either through the ‘faith’ of theology or the ‘science’ of modernity. The concept of foundationalism in philosophy is largely associated with the branch of epistemology but the essence of it entails the absolute referring point where explanation of various elements can be made with certainty. The concept of foundationalism can also be understood in terms of a position which induces the idea that understanding, beliefs, opinions, etc should be deduced from an established principle, concept or rationality.

Following Gadamer’s view, interpretation and understanding has an isomorphic relation and hence the problem related with the act of interpretation can be rectified or resolved through the construction of a coherent form of understanding. As suggested by Gadamer, understanding is the understanding with the other or the act of coming to an agreement with the other. It can also be conceived as the act of consent that generates transparency to the self-other relation in the society. Accordingly, the interpretation and understanding associated with the rationality of theology and science possibly causes certain imbalances in the social environment by overlooking to the social goals that can be achieved through the legitimate participation of

individuals in the society that may enhance the self-other relation, mutual cooperation, social cohesion, etc.

### Conclusion

In general, the essence of society is said to be represented by the harmonious human relation. It is also through the act of mutuality of individuals that intervenes in the reconciliation of certain internal incoherency of society. The rationality of theology and science though aims for the better social progression, it on a various accounts executes shortcomings associated with its way of interpretation and the construction of what understanding is. The form of understanding deduced from both the rationality undermines the actual way of how individual participates in the society and therefore executes their rationale as the mirroring point where members of the society should refer to. Hence, in the process of developing certain rationality for the society, the principle should also have its focus on rational choices that lays emphasis on the importance of the everydayness act of individuals regarding choices, engagement, decisions, actions, opinions, etc. It is only through the assessment of such elements that renders the possibilities of the attainment of social goals and also in furnishing the self-other relation in the society.

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