Verstehen and Humane Understanding

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Preface

The essays which follow are an attempt to explore the questions as to whether reason might take different forms depending on subject matter. More specifically, the contributors to the series—which formed the Royal Institute of Philosophy’s annual lecture series for 1995–6—were interested in examining whether in the human world forms of thought and knowledge exist which, while not conforming to the patterns of the natural sciences, can nevertheless be thought of as expressing and adumbrating canons of rationality.

The first two essays, in contrasting ways, map out the territory. There then follow six essays, mainly devoted to examining the thought of various thinkers who since the eighteenth century have maintained that history and human action require forms of discourse and analysis not assimilable to the scientific. The remaining seven essays explore in more depth the requirements of realms such as the psychological, the theological, and the aesthetic, and the collection concludes with the latest of the recently unearthed Xanthippic dialogues.