

A note on general philosophy

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Our philosophical quest is so large and intricate that it is difficult to know where to begin. Indeed there may be no self-evident place to start and the various topics of philosophical investigation are intermingled in a vast continuous web. It is often said that philosophy in its purest form has no subject matter and is more correctly construed as a skill. Yet there is an underlying realisation that underpins the philosophical investigation. It is as much a matter of form as it is an observed predicament of the human condition. Philosophical investigation, it seems, begins in the individual. The philosophical mind belongs exclusively to an individual and the factors that form the mind of the philosopher, such as experiences, are specific to the individual. The philosophical framework is ultimately dependant on the individual mind. This simple realisation impacts on form when we understand that a single individual may not necessarily be privy to the experiences of another mind. In absence of the entire repertoire of the philosophical experience that has ever occurred in history, a single individual is limited in resources to have the entire picture of the human experience as it has transpired throughout the universe. Humbleness and respect for the experience of other minds is therefore in order as we come into contact with them, such as when we share our philosophical thoughts and investigations. “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main,” says Donne [1]. However, in absence of clear evidence suggesting otherwise, it would seem that we may indeed be little islands of philosophical thinkers in the sense that we do not directly experience the minds of others. However, where language fails, other forms of art like music and painting are an amazingly powerful tool to convey the human spirit and emotions of other minds. Arguably it is indeed a capacity for philosophising, along with the ability to create art, that defines and proves our humanity and sets us apart from the beast. “He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest; In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;” says Pope [2], realising that while we are not beasts we have streaks of “divinity”. This capacity for philosophy and art could be indeed our “divine” component, although the usage of the word “divine” is arguable here. There is a strong case to show that language and art can create strong connections between the islands that we form. Most of the time, we seem to understand each other’s experiences or we are enriched by learning from them. With the exception of extremist solipsists, we acknowledge the existence of other minds, and we can often share experience in very powerful and meaningful ways that are often mutually enriching. Many maintain that exposure to discourse can only enrich an individual’s position, and an already open mind cannot be closed by listening to others.

We must therefore conduct philosophical discourse with some sense of humility and respect for the experiences others may have and that we may be missing. But philosophical inquiry is open to all minds, and often, we know we have converged upon the meaningful questions when we collectively fail to answer them, or when they have far-reaching repercussions on many.

I here add a quick note of form: I have chosen to make the binding text of these documents in English to reach a maximum audience and because English is fast inheriting the important niche of the common global language. It is not meant to undermine any linguistic group.

1. Donne, J., *Meditation #17 From Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. 1623.

2. Pope, A., *An Essay on Man*. 1734.