



## Reflections on Human Inquiry: Science, Philosophy, and Common Life

Mukherji, Nirmalangshu, Singapore: Springer, 2017, pp. xiii + 202, 99.99 € (hardback).

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## BOOK REVIEW

Mukherji, Nirmalangshu, *Reflections on Human Inquiry: Science, Philosophy, and Common Life*, Singapore: Springer, 2017, pp. xiii + 202, 99.99 € (hardback).

The book is composed as a collection of essays written by a philosopher of mind over three decades while engaged in a scientific study of the human mind through a study of Chomskyan linguistics. Although immersed in this scientific inquiry, Mukherji is acutely aware of, and uncomfortable with, any such inquiry's limitations. This leads him to some penetrating questions. Can the scientific theory of language explain the richness of human expression? Or, more generally, can a science of the mind account for human experience? These questions are not entirely new; similar concerns have been raised by critical theorists, sociologists, philosophers of science, etc. What is refreshingly new is that these questions are investigated by Mukherji as an insider, a scientist of the mind. Reflection on the limits of scientific enquiry lead him to 'reflective pluralism' [5]. This does not recommend wholesale scepticism about science, as made popular by post-structuralists; rather, it is a guarded scepticism that creates the need for alternative forms of inquiry by showing the limits of scientific inquiry. Mukherji as a scientist grapples with specific internal problems that give him unique insight into science's virtues and limits—insights beautifully revealed in chapters 2–5. In the remaining chapters (6–12), Mukherji undertakes two tasks—creating the space for alternative, albeit rational, forms of inquiry, and showing, by example, what these alternative forms might look like. The first task is formidable because the space is already taken by the recent proliferation of philosophical theories of mind in a quasi-scientific mode. Mukherji's thorough grasp of this literature is revealed in the artful argument against these attempts to show why they are doomed to failure. The problem is that these theories are not conceived of as alternative modes of inquiry. The second task is even more daunting, because the alternative form of inquiry that he recommends is in its infancy. Focusing on fundamental concepts in philosophy of mind, consciousness, belief, knowledge, and interpretation, Mukherji provides examples of what such an inquiry might look like, by addressing such fundamental questions as that of how to understand human cognitive agency as a whole. The book's most important contribution is to show that philosophical inquiry into the mind needs an alternative *form* of inquiry beyond the popular scientific and quasi-scientific modes. The book is rich in thought-provoking material, and is a must-read for anyone concerned about the nature of philosophical inquiry.

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