

Q: Dear Robert! I have read what you posted about not-knowing, and about no objective truth. I agree with it, but I have a question. By understanding our own limitations, and by that recognition, understanding our own minds, doesn't that mean that we will understand quite clearly how other minds work? Only the mechanism, not the details. Also, may I ask you, is your peace total?

A: Hi.

When I refer to recognizing our own limitations, that includes the inability to understand one's own mind. All we know is mind, and since we have no way of observing that from "outside," any understanding will be partial at best and certainly inaccurate.

Understanding another's mind presents an additional problem. I can know directly what I think and feel, but all I know about your experience is what you tell me in words or show me by nonverbal methods such as mime and gesture, works of art, etc. I can assume that your thoughts and feelings are similar to mine, but that is a huge assumption, probably unwarranted, and further, any such "knowing" must rely on analogy with what I already know.

For example, you say, "I was exposed to Covid yesterday and now I am afraid that I might be infected," and I reply, "Yeah. The same thing happened to me last week." I call it the same thing, but is it? On the factual level, yes; we were both exposed. But on the thinking/feeling level, it might not be the same thing at all. I may attempt to understand your fearfulness by analogy to my feelings about illness and death, but those might be radically different from yours. Perhaps you are terrified of not being at all, and I see death quite differently.

That is why I say that each of us is essentially alone. We may try to bridge the gap between one mind and another, and perhaps we can get a sense of what someone else experiences, but we will never see the whole picture. Generally, we assume that we know more about others than we really do know.

You ask if my peace is total. If you mean never feeling anxious or upset, the answer is no. If you mean being open entirely to whatever arises next, then yes, and that is not a choice.

Be well.