

The advice to become a narrow specialist: two personal worries

Author: Terence Rajivan Edward

Abstract. There are philosophers and literary figures who write on a variety of topics. I suppose I do as well. Here I present two personal worries about the advice to become a narrow specialist.

Draft version: Version 1 (7th December 2022)

There are philosophers and literary figures who write essays on a variety of topics. I suppose I do as well. I imagine joining a queue with figures past and present. Then I get to the door for entering the club. But the person guarding the door looks at me skeptically and asks, “Do you qualify as a general practitioner?” That’s the term!

“There are questions over whether I qualify? What do you mean? I write on a much wider variety of topics than others I know.”

I have been thinking about objections to the advice to become a narrow specialist, advice famous from the Enlightenment (Smith Bk. 1, Ch. 1). And I detect two problems here. The advice risks discouraging some suitable candidates from entering this league, to change metaphors, because they are too narrow. (If you don’t think I’m suitable, the lesson may apply to someone else!) And when others follow the advice, it can give a candidate an illusion of not being too narrow.

Reference

Smith, A. 1904 (originally 1776). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. London: Methuen. Available at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN.html>