

Taking EP principles forward. Examples from the later work of Chris and Isabel Clarke

Chris. Quantum Theory and Consciousness.

Chris Clarke's work on what can and can not be said on the basis of quantum theory in the area of overlap between physics and consciousness is a model of EP tight rope walking (Clarke 1996, 2009, 2013). On the one hand, he delineates the current state of experimentally and mathematically based knowledge very clearly along with what can and cannot be concluded with confidence from this. On the other, he is always reaching out for a fuller version, a 'new story' that will encompass the human, spiritual and moral dimension. For instance in 'Quantum Mechanics, Consciousness and the Self' (Clarke 2004), he draws the connection between 'the mechanistic story started by Newton's successors (such as Laplace and Lemaitre) of a meaningless universe of isolated atoms' and a global capital inspired vision of 'the individual purely as a consumer and society as purely a vehicle for encouraging consumption through the desire to conform' – with disastrous consequences for the sustainability of the planet. (Clarke 2004, P.66)

He then examines the way in which quantum theory can offer a new story. He argues that it has successfully eroded the notion that Ultimate Reality is made up of small particles, replacing it with the variously and imperfectly realized notion of the Quantum State. According to this, reality arises out of something more fluid and context dependent

This opens the way for a pivotal role for consciousness in the determination of reality. Chris examines, critically, the various theories of how this might be achieved, content to sit with uncertainty where the jury is still out. He also sketches in how quantum theory might underpin a connected and coherent world view where constructing reality is a participative activity, concluding: 'The answer to 'what is the world really like?' is a story that is as much about our self as about the world.....we play a part, in coordination with all other conscious beings and with the influence of the context of the entire universe, in shaping what the world is.....we are not separated from each other and from the world as in the Newtonian system, but integrally connected with each other'.(ibid P. 90)

And later: It is possible for us to affirm our humanity and our connectivity with the world around us, while at the same time building on all we have learnt through the rigorous application of science.'(ibid. P.91)

I see these as centrally EP sentiments.

Ways of Knowing. Psychology. Isabel.

My own attempts to understand mysticism and anomalous experiencing within the framework of psychological science were at an embryonic stage during the late period of the EPs. They are included as a paper, Title: 'Prayer and the Growth of Self' in the unpublished 'Probing Prayer'. I was interested in the threshold between ordinary, everyday, experience and the boundless state encountered by the mystic and seeking a framework grounded in psychological science to contain it.

In the early 1990s, I was working as a therapist with individuals given a diagnosis of psychosis. This opened a whole new field of data. I recognised strong parallels between the experiences they told me about, as their therapist, and the mystical literature with which I was familiar – no matter that

things then went horribly wrong for them and they ended up diagnosed and stuck in the psychiatric system. The mystical writers warned of the dangers of this 'across the threshold' or 'transliminal' state and here I was seeing them writ large. I use the term 'transliminal' which Claridge (1997) adopts from Thalbourne in order to explore precisely this territory.

Mystical and new age writers had a tendency to talk about 'real reality', 'beyond the veil' etc. whereas psychiatric 'wisdom' saw the people in the hospital as divorced from 'reality'. The idea that there are in fact two ways of encountering 'reality', two ways of knowing, offered a way into this paradox and much else besides. Using the soundly research based, Interacting Cognitive Subsystems (ICS. Teasdale & Barnard 1993) model of cognitive architecture as a foundation, it is possible to understand this in terms of the limitations of human cognitive processing. (See Clarke 2008 pp 95-101 for a full exposition of this).

A brief explanation of the Ways of Knowing hypothesis runs as follows. As human beings, we have two stabs at reality. One is filtered and incomplete, but truly manageable. The other (the transliminal) gives us a glimpse of the whole, but is not a place from which it is wise to try and conduct one's life. Science has tended to concentrate on just one of these ways of knowing – the filtered, precise one, and ignores the other one (to the detriment of science). To give these two ways of knowing equal weight, at the same time as being fully aware of the limitations of each, opens to science the wealth of knowledge gained through feeling and experience. An example of such knowledge is relationship. This is central to human life, but we can only discern relationship through feeling. Propositional knowledge is no help here.

Taking into account the different character of the two ways of knowing is, I would argue, very relevant to most EP concerns. Transliminal experience has a supernatural, a numinous charge – the origins of 'wowsk', and this is both very seductive and accompanied by unswerving certainty. It is easy to dismiss this certainty as 'delusional', and indeed some would bin the whole of religion on these grounds. This is where the different logics governing the two different ways of knowing become crucial. Ordinary, scientific knowing is governed by the logic of either/or which is familiar. The transliminal is governed by the paradoxical logic of 'both/and'. (Clarke 2010, 2008). Its conclusions should not be lightly dismissed, but they also need to be treated with caution as inclined to be tricksterish. This is territory in which we humans are not really equipped to operate, which ties in with the EP respect for the limits of the precisely knowable.

I also argue that this way of knowing has an important contribution in creating a scientific conceptual framework for psi phenomena. The transliminal way of operating is a place of relationship. When everyday knowing is in charge, we are grounded in our individual self consciousness. I would argue that, when we start to enter the transliminal (and this can be partial), we start to step outside of this individual boundedness into a place of relationship. Here we are open to influence, whether from not normally accessed parts of the self (e.g. hearing the voice of the abuser) or equally from beyond – possession etc. It seems that in such states, which become accessible through high (stress, trauma) or low arousal (relaxed, dreamy, hypnagogic), interchangeability of psychic contents becomes possible. This gives us a single way into understanding well documented phenomena such as telepathy, past life regression and reincarnation experiences (Clarke 2012)

I would be fascinated to know whether these ideas would have got past the scrutiny of Margaret, Richard and Dorothy – but will never know. I myself see this framework as honouring the EP tradition of taking both phenomenological and experimentally based scientific data equally seriously.

Chris. Ways of Knowing.

In his writing on quantum theory, Chris was critical of the conventional physics position. This welcomed the useful experimental results that flowed from the theory at the micro level while ignoring the gaps that opened up when attempts were made to apply at a macro level the physics that had been proved correct when examining very small things. Chris writes: 'quantum theory depends essentially on "the observer" that switches quantum physics to classical theory. When cosmology was taken back to the earliest times, microseconds after a speculative time zero when the use of quantum theory was essential, valuable insights in the structure of the universe were obtained, but only by fudging the need for a primal observer (God?)'.

This was one of those points at which the scientific picture starts to show cracks. Conventional physicists attempted to paper over these cracks, which, according to EP lore, point the way forward and if pursued, can lead the way to a wider vision. However, Chris was equally critical of new age use of quantum theory ideas to back up notions of 'anything goes'. He utilized the Ways of Knowing ideas that Isabel had expounded, based on ICS, to make the incompatibilities central to understanding the way things are, instead of an embarrassment to be explained away.

In 2005, he instituted a Ways of Knowing project. Imprint Academic brought out a book edited by Chris, with that title, with cross discipline contributions from an array of writers, covering logic (Bomford on bi-logic) mysticism (including Neil Douglas-Klotz), the social context (June Boyce-Tilman), transpersonal theory (Jorge Ferrer) among others, along with a major conference at the University of Winchester and a linked colloquium. The colloquium was funded by the Theoria fund.

In his chapter in the edited book (Clarke 2005), Chris argued that, while factoring in the paradoxical nature of human logic does not make quantum theory universally compatible with observed reality, it does provide a parallel way of making sense of and handling that incompatibility. The fact that human knowing is characterised by two different logics and draws on different aspects of experience, with a gap that can open up at any time between them, echoes the gulf between quantum theory and macro reality. This leads us to recognize the fundamental limitations of human knowing. Mapping the extent and implications of those limitations is more significant for gaining true knowledge than trying to paper over them or pretend that they do not exist. Moreover, this is the path that is true to the EP tradition.

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