

## ***The Many Bubble Interpretation, externalism, the extended mind of David Chalmers and Andy Clark, and the work of Alva Noe in connection with Experimental Philosophy and Dreamwork***

### *Abstract*

*The idea of dreams being mere internal artifacts of the mind does not seem to be essential to externalism and extended mind theories, which seem as if they would function as well without this additional assumption. The Many Bubble Interpretation could allow a simpler rationale to externalist theories, which may be even simpler if the assumption that dreams have no worthwhile content outside the mind is omitted.*

Almost everybody agrees that mind and world are causally coupled (Prinz, 2009).

In normal perception we don't have the problem of stabilising detail. Noe (2009) points out - and in that follows the point made by LaBerge and many others - that if a dreamer looks more than once at, say, a printed sign in a dream the sign is likely to say something different on second viewing (apparently always in LaBerge's experience). The sign's content may even change whilst it is being watched. It often does in my experience of dreamwork. In general terms I have found that recorded results of dream experiments are more consistent over a series of experiments involving many different dreamers, than some experiments in the waking world which could be expected to be much more easily quantifiable and even more easily measurable (Yates, 2008). Synaesthesia is one example. That is to say with dreamwork we are left with a pile of reasonably consistent data to consider, even though the data itself may be construed as irrationally produced or even arising from a random source. Others such as Domhoff seem to confirm this.

But, even though dream results are in some way scientifically collatable, there is still the problem with instability of detail within individual dreams. For example, it is not like measuring UV spectra, when the same pure substance should give the same results each time. Now variability is not too unusual in psychology experiments, but clearly this level of variability is well beyond the norm.

Noe interprets this as meaning that dreams are not real, in the sense that waking experience is real, though he admits that the perceptual experience of dreaming is real. He then reasonably says that this implies that waking experience is different to dreaming experience, and that dreams cannot be construed as evidence in effect that reality is just another dream.

Yes, we can go this far. Andy Clark and Chalmers also seem largely to admit this view. In principle for day to day working purposes we can accept such an idea but we would use Ockham's razor yet again to say that it does not mean, either, that dreams necessarily consist ONLY of results from within the brain. In a way Noe would betray the thread of his own argument if he took the view that dreams necessarily consist only of results from within the brain, as he is very much into Merleau-Ponty type externalism.

In other words, if we accept Noe's variety of externalism in principle, we should leave it as open ground that dreams may come not just from a simple B-series 3+1 dimensional lump of white and grey neural matter. In fact our own position involves the A-series as well, where

externalism, we trust, provides less of a problem. (Yates, 2008, 2008a, 2008b).

So such a position should be arguable and indeed essential at least in principle with Noe.

And in fact the mental status of dreams is still not clearly known, and there is no need for dreams to be purely internal in origin to allow most of Clark's argumentation.

Of course anyone who seems to claim entirely the unfortunate implied position that we only need consider what goes on in the brain to understand how the brain operates in the world, probably can be dealt with using a slightly different paradigm, not the topic of the present note.

The position of both Andy Clark and of David Chalmers seems to differ quite substantially from that of Noe. Although they both seem to favor augmented extensions of the simple B-series 3+1 dimensional lump of white and grey neural matter, it is sometimes difficult to visualise a satisfactory precise detailed formulation of that idea. Without a clear A series somewhere, instinct tends to make one fall back to Fodor's position.

With the A series on board, things differ dramatically. Purely to illustrate this point in another quite different case, if we consider Butterfield's (2001) critique of Barbour's work (Part 3.1), we realise that the moment McTaggart's paradox is invoked, the situation changes drastically.

It looks to me that Andy Clark is apparently activating the Foundation Argument against dreams, according to his correspondence with Noe (2009) at least. This seems to be a needlessly blunt edged sword to establish his views. The idea that consciousness depends only (or mainly) on what is happening in the brain the brain would take him away from the more extreme stance of Noe. And the Foundation Argument idea seems quite unproven anyway. It is essentially close to the idea of Crick. Noe gives quite cogent reasons against that, which may not concern the present argument. It really hardly matters to Clark's main argument that he should also apply it against dreams if he applies it to a lot of other things too. In other words, Clark's occasional comments that "dreams" seem to constitute almost purely cranial/neural matters do not really seem to be a clincher to his argument, but incidental ideas.

And as I just pointed out, we can look at even more unfortunate paradigms elsewhere. To put it largely, arguments against solipsism and generally accepted brute fact can come into such a discussion, except in specialised areas of mind science. There we are talking of Churchland as well as Crick and Searle, and our own working argumentation would be presented differently in such a case.

So it is perhaps simplest to look at the views of Fodor (2009) and Chalmers (2009). Fodor is claiming that Clark is effectively using the slippery slope argument between Otto and Inga, and also that notebooks are not the same as minds. Now that, apart from intentionality factors, does seem to be the case.

I'm not sure of the dispositional claims of Chalmers. Obviously Chalmers seems maybe to eventually want to solve a problem which Noe refers to on the first page of his preface "Only one proposition about how the brain makes us conscious . . . has emerged unchallenged: we don't have a clue." The Chalmers solution could presumably involve yet more machines, and Fodor presumably would not quite take that line.

I think here we are left with different levels of implied logic. Noe's approach could be construed as a sophisticated "ad hominem" level argument, briefly to the effect that everyone knows that

the world exists in the way most people think it does (for example, in no sense is it anything resembling the Matrix). That is somewhat in the sort of way that some have said Dr. Johnson tried to refute Bishop Berkeley, by kicking a stone and saying "I refute it thus". The problem is of course not just time constraints but more importantly constraints as to apparently available accurate scientific knowledge about situation and circumstances. In the context of neurophysiology and consciousness research generally we frequently seem to be deep into the area of informal logic (Groarke, 2008, 1999). Of course Noe has written a lot to expand and rephrase his arguments and to include a great detail of neurophysiological detail, and that is indeed of great value to his comments, and that fact must be remembered.

But in the case of Clark and Chalmers I am left feeling that they are looking for more of a logical commitment (Groarke (1999), Walton, (2002)). The most recent post of Chalmers (2009) suggests that it has not got there yet, but my thinking is that the sort of overall approach that Mandik (2009) has used, where he actually goes so far as to question the current idea of representation, is perhaps more relevant. Details in Mandik's case are sketched out by others in Mandik (2009a).

Whether there is an appropriate formalism is not the point here, as dreams is our current topic in this note. But it is possible to point out that it is only if the brain is considered as a simple B-series 3+1 dimensional lump of white and grey neural matter that worries about externalism overawe us so much. In the Many Bubble Interpretation (Yates, 2008, 2008a, 2008b) the relationship comes out naturally. Simple mathematics is not there in detail yet but so far all seems straightforward.

To look briefly forward, purely for a simple modus operandi in experimental philosophy, I consider that Knobe's (2009) style of approach may be better than a lot of mathematics before we can contrive more parameter values.

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### *Conclusion*

It cannot be assumed that dreams are of necessity simply part of a simple internal mental continuum.

The Many Bubble Interpretation could allow a simpler rationale to externalist theories, which may be even simpler if the assumption that dreams have no worthwhile content outside the mind is omitted.

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