

Recovering Mary Evelyn Clarke*

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N. G. Laskowski's [post](#) on Bluesky sent me on a bit of a detective mission to learn more about the philosopher Mary Evelyn Clarke. This PDF collects everything that I have been able to uncover so far. If you know more about her—or if you spot any errors—I would be very glad to hear from you: louis.doulas@mcgill.ca

1 Reconstructing Clarke's Academic Background

MARY EVELYN CLARKE earned her BA in Philosophy (First Class) from King's College London in 1918, and her MA in June 1920 from King's College for Women, where she was also a lecturer.¹ She began teaching at Smith College in 1923, where she would remain for thirty-five years. She also taught in Wales before that,² likely between 1920 and 1923.



Figure 1: *Smith College Philosophy Department (1951). Clarke is second from the left in the front row; Morris Lazerowitz and Alice Ambrose appear in the back row (leftwards). Source: Smith College Archives via Five College Compass (object ID 1373134), accessed August 2025.*

* Last updated on August 7, 2025.

¹ *Calendar, 1974–1975*, item reference KCLCAL-1974-1975-240, King's College London Archives, London, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://kingscollections.org/calendars/collection/1974-1975/page-240#page-header>.

² *Smith College Bulletin*, January 1959, p. 18, https://compass.fivecolleges.edu/system/files/2024-08/presidents_reports_1958.pdf.

It appears, however, that Clarke completed her PhD a few years later, in 1926, after already starting at Smith. The University of London Historical Record lists this:³

1926. Doctor of Philosophy (external): Clarke, Mary Evelyn, M.A.: Private st.

This tells us that Clarke received her PhD from the University of London as a private (i.e., external) student, rather than through any constituent college.⁴ Moreover, her 1929 book, *A Study in the Logic of Value*, acknowledges the Publication Fund of the University of London for a grant in aid of the book's publication, the substance of which, she notes, was originally presented to the University for degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Clarke, then, was most likely working independently or remotely—probably from Smith—while preparing her dissertation, which she then submitted directly to the University, not via any constituent college.

<p>Clarke, Marguerite D. : B.A.* 16, E. Lond. ; Ped. 17, Lond. Day Tr. C. Clarke, Marian E. : B.A.* 29, Univ. C. Clarke, Mary A. D. : B.A.* 21, King's ; Ped. 22, Lond. Day Tr. C. Clarke, Mary E. : B.A.* 18, & M.A.* 20, King's ; Ph.D. 26. c Clarke, Nelson : B.Sc.* 22.</p>

Figure 2: A bolded “c” indicates a Life Member of the Convocation of the University of London. Source: University of London, *Graduates List*, 1931, p. 611, University of London Archives.

2 Who Was Clarke's PhD Supervisor?

Clarke's external status does not necessarily rule out having a supervisor.⁵ However, determining who that supervisor was is far from straightforward. The published version of her dissertation, *A Study in the Logic of Value* (1929), offers little direct

³ 'Doctor of Philosophy – external,' in *University of London: the Historical Record (1836–1926)* (London, 1926), *British History Online*, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-university-graduates/158>.

⁴ A separate entry in the University of London Graduates List includes a bolded “c,” indicating that Clarke was a Life Member of the Convocation of the University of London (see Figure 2 above)—a status granted to degree holders of the University. While not directly relevant to the submission of her dissertation, this confirms her formal affiliation with the University beyond the PhD award itself. See *University of London Graduates List*, 1931, p. 611, University of London Archives. <http://archives.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/resources/1931gradlist.pdf>.

⁵ Clarke's “private student” status seems crucial here. It suggests she was not formally enrolled at King's—or any college—for her PhD. Her dissertation was submitted directly to the University, under a centrally approved supervisor.

insight: its preface includes no explicit acknowledgement of a supervisor, only a general statement of indebtedness to the writings of G. E. Moore, John Laird, and E. G. Spaulding of Princeton University—figures who influenced her thinking but were not, alas, affiliated with the University of London and thus unlikely to have played any formal supervisory role.⁶ In the absence of explicit documentation, two possible candidates seem plausible to me (though see §3).

The first is HILDA DIANA OAKELEY (1867–1950), who taught at King’s College for Women during Clarke’s MA in 1920. When the women’s college was absorbed into King’s in 1915, Oakeley moved into the main college. She played a central role in launching King’s postgraduate philosophy program in 1923. So, she may have mentored Clarke during the MA and possibly beyond.

The second is GEORGES DAWES HICKS (1862–1941), who was Professor of Moral Philosophy at UCL from 1904–1928. Hicks was one of the longest-serving and most senior moral philosophers in the University of London system in the early twentieth century. Hicks may have been more likely to fill that role than Oakeley, who, while influential, was college-based and may not yet have been eligible to supervise external candidates.

3 A Third Possibility: Susan Stebbing

SUSAN STEBBING (1885–1943) is another serious candidate worth considering.

There is no question that the two were personally acquainted. Clarke’s name appears several times in Stebbing’s correspondence, suggesting sustained communication even after Clarke had been long based in the United States. In a letter to Dorothy and G. E. Moore dated 19 November 1940, Stebbing refers to Clarke in connection with the Moores’ visit to Smith College:

You will, of course, have seen Miss Evelyn Clarke. I wrote to her a few days ago—an important letter. Will you tell her so?⁷

Clarke also served as Treasurer of the Susan Stebbing Memorial Scholarship Fund, established following Stebbing’s untimely death in 1943,⁸ further suggesting a close professional relationship.

Stebbing had graduated from King’s College in 1912 and remained briefly as a Visiting Lecturer in 1913. This was obviously well before Clarke’s appointment

⁶ Of the three, Clarke specifically thanks Spaulding for his verbal suggestions.

⁷ L. Susan Stebbing, “Dear Dorothy and Professor Moore,” 19 November 1940, GBR/0012/MS Add. 8330 8S/29/14, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, U.K.

⁸ Wm. Pepperell Montague, “Note,” *Ethics* 54, no. 3 (April 1944), p. 234, <https://doi.org/10.1086/290407/>.

at King's in 1920 (see Figure 3); however, by that time, Stebbing had become an Assistant Lecturer at Bedford College, a constituent of the University of London, where she would remain for the rest of her career. She was promoted to Lecturer the following year with a five-year appointment and was then offered a full-time lectureship by 1923–24—around the time Clarke was likely completing or revising her dissertation. Moreover, Stebbing's interests in logic and social and moral philosophy aligns closely with the subject matter of Clarke's dissertation.

Now, given Clarke's designation as a "private student" (see note 5), her PhD would have been submitted directly to the University of London, rather than through a constituent college. This arrangement, however, would have required oversight by a University-approved supervisor.

Why is this relevant? Because while Stebbing may have been intellectually well-suited to supervise Clarke's dissertation, it is unclear whether she held the formal status necessary to supervise *external* doctorates at that time.

So, could Stebbing have been Clarke's supervisor? Maybe; maybe not. What is needed now is access to the University of London's central list of approved PhD supervisors or examiners from the mid-1920s. Such a document could clarify who was eligible to oversee theses submitted by private students like Clarke.

Names of the Past and Present Staff

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LOGIC

Lecturers

1905 Kenneth Jay Spalding, M.A.

1910 Clifford Sully, B.A.

1913 L. Susan Stebbing, M.A.

1914 Walter Robert Matthews, M.A., B.D.

1920 Mary Evelyn Clarke, M.A.

Figure 3: Excerpt from the Calendar, 1974–1975, item reference KCLCAL-1974-1975-240, King's College London Archies, London (accessed August 6, 2025).

4 Clarke's Publications

Books

Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1929). *A Study in the Logic of Value*. University of London Press.

Articles

Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1925). "Valuing and the Quality of Value." *The Journal of Philosophy* 22: 57–75.

Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1932a). "A Philosophy of Reality. E. L. Young." *International Journal of Ethics* 42: 381–383.

- Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1932b). "A Phenomenological System of Ethics (I)." *Philosophy* 7: 414–430.
- Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1933). "A Phenomenological System of Ethics (II)." *Philosophy* 8: 52–65.
- Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1934). "The Contribution of Max Scheler to the Philosophy of Religion" *Philosophical Review* 43: 577–597.
- Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1945). "The Shape of Modern Culture." *Hibbert Journal* 44.

Reviews

- Clarke, Mary Evelyn (1933). "Ethics." *Journal of Philosophy* 30: 404–417.