

Deficits of the Will II: Dreaming

Part II Philosophy of Mind

Mental Faculties

Lent Term 2023

Dr Cecily Whiteley

Recap

Thus far we've been looking at the following questions:

- Do we have a **distinctive faculty of the will**?
- What are **intentions**? Are they reducible to other mental states like belief and desires?
- What is the nature of **addiction**?
- What is **weakness of the will**?



Our question for the next two weeks

- Are dreams agentive mental states?
- Put another way: when we dream are we able to exercise agency over our mental lives? How does this differ from the sort of agency we are capable of exercising when we are *awake*?

Are dreams agentive experiences?

- This is a question about the *scope* of the will in our mental lives: How pervasive is the faculty of the will? Are dreams deficits of the will?
- We're going to look at two contemporary accounts of dreaming which disagree on this question: voluntary imagination models of dreaming and involuntary imagination models of dreaming.

INTERLUDE: A METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM?

When doing philosophy of mind philosophers typically pose their central questions about specific mental phenomena on the assumption that subjects experiencing these phenomena are awake.

Consider these familiar questions:

- What is imagination?
- What is the nature of conscious experiences?
- How do we go about forming and acting on intentions?

INTERLUDE: A METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM?

You might think that reflection of this poses a methodological problem: if we are aiming at *complete* accounts of these phenomena, should we not also examine the exercise of these faculties when we are asleep?

An average person spends **26 years of their life sleeping! (roughly, 9,940 days)**. This suggests that a great deal of the conscious mental activity we experience as human beings occurs when we are not awake – i.e. when we dream.





Dreams as ‘Active Imaginings’

“Dreams are very much like vivid daydreams, entered into deliberately and voluntarily. Loose yourself enough in your daydreams and you will feel, in some sense, as if you are really there”.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF DREAMING?

- Ontological question in philosophy of mind
- Should be distinguished from other questions we can ask about dreaming: what is the biological function of dreams? Can dreams be genuine epistemic sources of knowledge and insight? Can we we morally responsible for our dreams?

Background question: How can I know that I am not dreaming right now?



Dreams as hallucinatory experiences

Descartes argument assumes that the experiences one has while dreaming are of the *same kind* that we have while we are awake.

That is, that when we dream we have perceptual experiences of *hallucinating*.

This view of the ontology of dreaming motivates the idea that dreams are epistemically *deceptive and ground false beliefs*.



A HALLUCINATION MODEL OF DREAMING

- 1. Percepts:** when I am dreaming of standing in front of the fire I am having a *perceptual experience* of the same sort, were I to be standing in front of it.
- 2. False beliefs:** when I dream that I am warming my hands on the fire, my experience involves my having the *false belief* that I am doing so.





A RECENT HALLUCINATION MODEL OF DREAMING

“What is the difference between my dreams and madness? What is the difference between my dream experience and the waking experience of someone who is psychotic, demented, or just plain crazy? In terms of the nature of the experience, there is none. In my New Orleans dream I hallucinated: I saw and heard things that weren’t in my bedroom. I was deluded: I believed the dream actions were real despite gross internal consistencies. I was disorientated. I believed that I was in an old hotel in New Orleans when I was actually in a house in Ogunquit”. (Hobson 1999 p.5).

IMAGINATION MODELS OF DREAMING

Key claims:

- The experiences we have whilst dreaming are not perceptual in nature, but *imaginative*.
- They are the same sorts of experience we have whilst imagining while awake.

AN IMAGINATION MODEL OF DREAMING

Imagery: dreams involve visual mental imagery. Visual imagery is the kind of experience one undergoes while imagining what something looks like.

- When I dream that I am stood in front of the fire, I am having an experience of the same kind as I have when *I visually imagine* I am stood in front of the fire while awake.

Propositional Imagination: the belief-like states I take toward the content of my dreams are not false beliefs but imaginings.

- My dreaming that I am warming my hands on the fire does not involve my falsely believing that I am now stood in front of the , but my *imagining that* I am doing so.





How do we get from this to a view about the role of agency in dreams?

“Dreams are very much like vivid daydreams, entered into deliberately and voluntarily. Loose yourself enough in your daydreams and you will feel, in some sense, as if you are really there”.

“To imagine is to act – our imagery is in some important sense under our control; this is not so with percepts”.

Imagination as Subject to the Will

“The concept of imagining is rather like one of doing than receiving. Imagining might be called a creative act”
(Wittgenstein).



Does this not
imply that we
cannot have
involuntary
imaginings?

- We often classify things which appear involuntary as imaginations e.g. earworms, unbidden images. Do these not count as imagination on this agential view of imaginings?
- Ichikawa says that we can still view these as imaginings. On his view, these involuntary imaginings are still subject to the will – we can attempt to banish visual imagination, while ‘it does not make sense’ to attempt to banish perceptual experiences.
- This suggests that the former but not the latter are subject to the will – they are agential states.

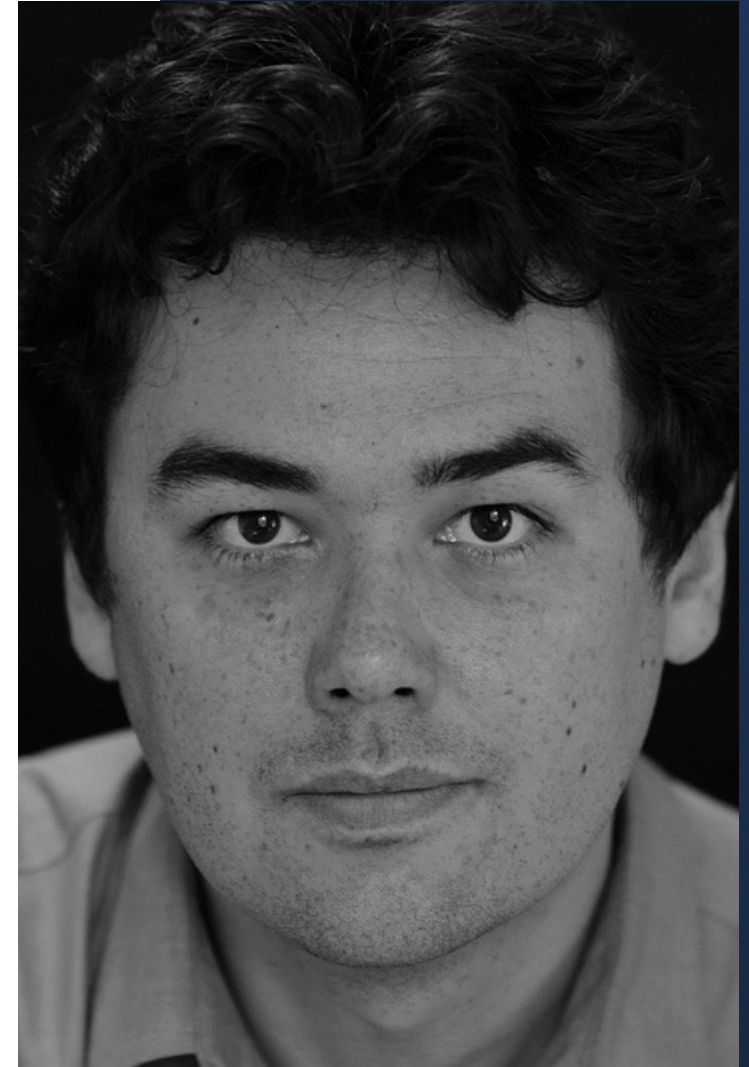
Can we attempt to banish
the products of visual
imagination?

“ We do not ‘banish’ visual impressions as
we do images. And we don’t say of the
former either, that we might not banish
them’ (Wittgenstein 1967)”



Can we attempt to banish the products of visual imagination?

“The fact that sometimes we imagine things we’d rather not be imagining does not show that imagining is not an action and subject to the will. Unwelcome imagery is more like an unwelcome habit or addiction than an unwelcome set of chains... even when our imagery is unwelcome and we cannot banish it, we can try to banish it; we know what it is to banish it. We are failing to perform an act. Not so with percepts”. (2009).



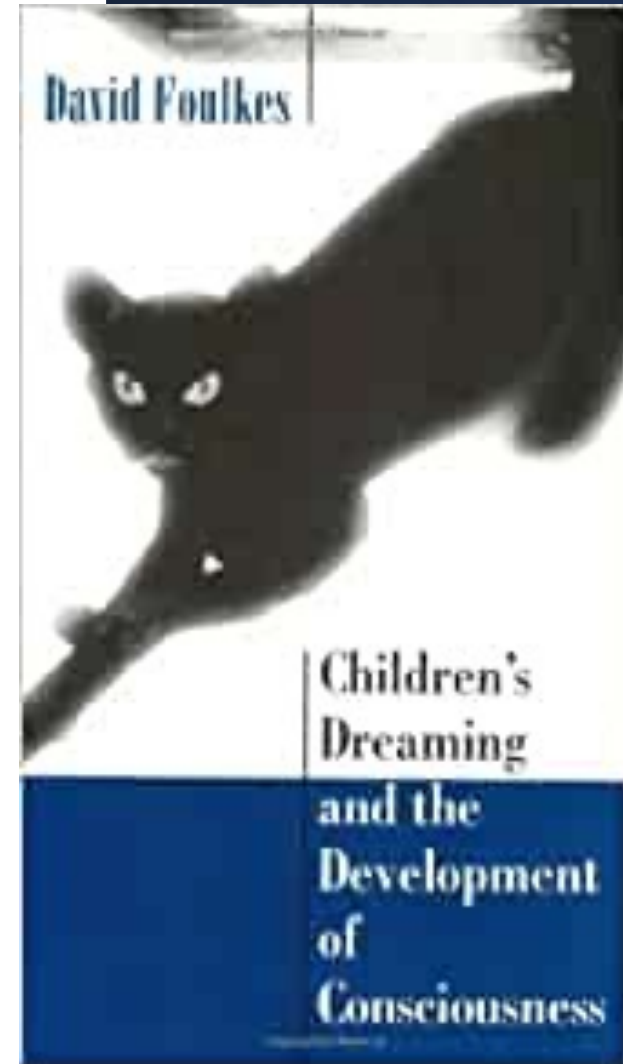
Arguments for the Imagination Model of Dreaming: Dreaming in Colour

- Do you dream in colour?
- In the 1940s and 1950s, most people believed that visual experience in dreams was black and white.
- What accounts for this discrepancy?
- The hallucinatory view seems to struggle to account for this
- The imagination view can accommodate this by appealing to the idea that visual imagery is often *indeterminate in colour*.



Arguments for the Imagination Model of Dreaming: Dream Development in Children

- Psychologist David Foulkes conducted a longterm study of dream development in children
- Found that dreams are not (contra common belief) ubiquitous in young infants, but develop gradually around four years old, beginning with simple images and slowly increasing in complexity
- The study suggested that dreams develop in correlation with the development of waking imagery ability.



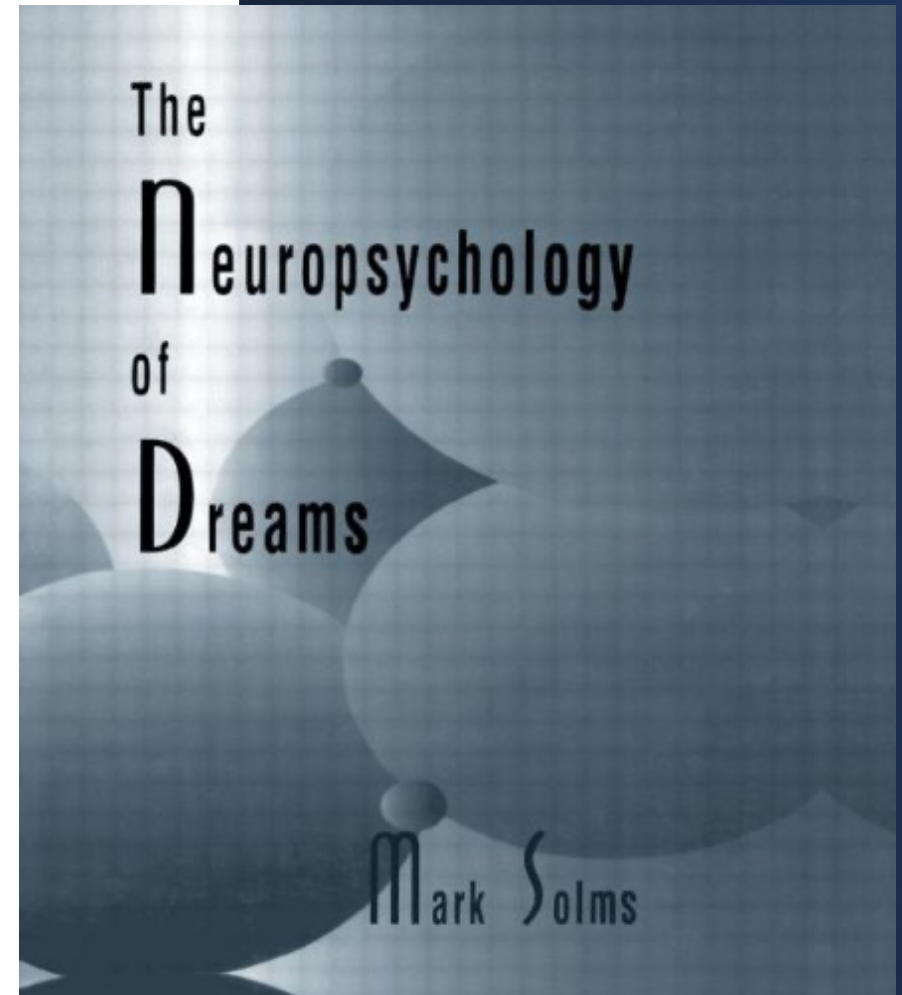
Arguments for the Imagination Model of Dreaming: Dream Development in Children

“From all my data, the suggestion is that dreaming best reflects the development of a specific cognitive competence, indexed by certain kinds of tests of visual-spatial imagination, leading to the conclusion that such imagination must be a critical skill in dream-making”.
(Foulkes 1999).



Arguments for the Imagination Model of Dreaming: The Neuropsychology of Dreaming

- Mark Solms surveys historical case studies in which brain trauma resulted in both imagery deficits and cessation of dreaming
- Solms found that the most robust finding was the observation that cessation or restriction of visual dream-imagery is invariably associated with a precisely analogous in waking imagery
- In short: if you remove the ability to visually dream, you remove the ability to visually imagine while awake.



Arguments for the Imagination Model of Dreaming: Lucid Dreams

“The second reason in favor of the suggestion that dream experiences are subject to the will is that sometimes, some people have lucid dreams – dreams in which the dreamer, aware that she is dreaming, takes active and conscious control over the content of her dream. Percepts and beliefs are never under our active control, so the orthodox [hallucination] model can certainly not describe lucid dreaming”.



The scope of the will?

- If this view of dreaming is correct, where does it leave us with regard to the question we started with. How pervasive is the will in our mental lives?
- This imagination model of dreaming suggests that the will is more pervasive than we might have thought!
- Recall, an average person spends **26** years of their lives asleep. If we have conscious experiences the majority of this time (open question in dream research), that's a lot of time for our will to be operative!

Next time...

- Objections to the imagination model of dreaming
- An *involuntary* imagination model of dreaming
- A new question: can we form intentions in lucid dreams?

