

Deficits of the Will II: Dreaming and the Will

Part II Philosophy of Mind

Mental Faculties

Lent Term 2023

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Recap

Our question: What is the *scope* of the will in our conscious mental lives? What happens to our capacity to exercise agency when we fall asleep sleep and dream?

Last week we looked at a contemporary view of dreaming which suggested that dreams are subject to the will – the view that dreams are ‘agentive imaginings’.

The plan for today

Today we'll look at a different view of the ontological structure of dreaming which rejects the idea that the majority of our dreams are agential in nature.

1 Three objections to Ichikawa's Agential Imagination Model of Dreaming: phenomenological, empirical and the objection from aphantasia.

2 The Involuntary Imagination Model of Dreaming.

3 The Objection from Lucid Dreaming

RECAP: THE 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 hand on the fire does not involve my falsely believing that I am now stood in front of the fire doing so, but my *imagining that* I am doing so.



Recap: Dreams as Agentive 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”.

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



ICHIKAWA'S 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.

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

Imagination as subject to the will: The distinction between imagery and percepts is to be made on the basis that the former is necessarily “subject to the will”. That is to say, imagination is fundamentally an *agentive* phenomenon.



OBJECTIONS TO ICHIKAWA'S VIEW OF DREAMING



The phenomenological objection:

Dreams seem to us to be perceptual, not imaginative!

When I reflect on the *phenomenology* of my dreams, they seem to be more like perceptual experiences than imaginative episodes.





Do you agree?



Ichikawa's response I

Our gut reaction to the phenomenology of dreaming – that this supports hallucination style views of dreaming – is a result of the fact that we have simply failed to seriously consider the imagination model as an alternative to the orthodox hallucination model of dreaming.

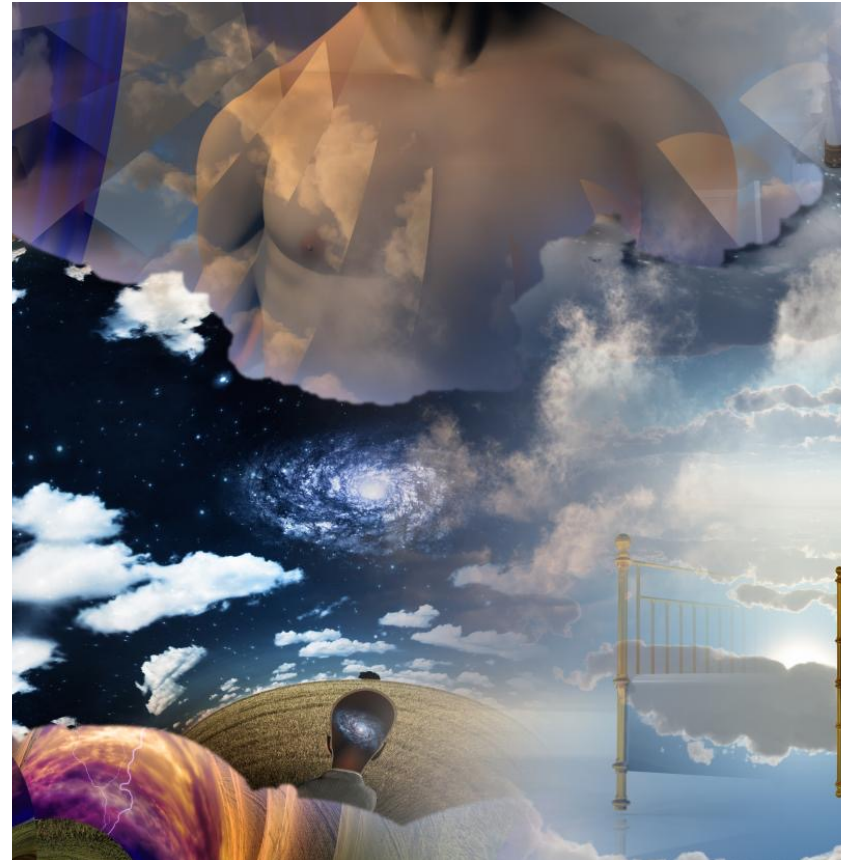


Ichikawa's response II

Second, we often fail to recognize the products of our imagination.

If you ask people to visually imagine objects while also visually projecting faint versions of the same image they will mistake those projections for images.

Perhaps non-lucid dreamers fail to recognize their own role in producing their experiences, which is why they don't *seem* to us like imaginative experiences.





Ichikawa's response II

This line of response relies on the idea that there is a deficit in our *ability to recognize* our own agency over our dreams.

But in this case, why not just give up on the idea that non-lucid dreams are genuinely agential?

An Empirical Objection

During lucid REM sleep, subject's eye movements, measured via the intentional slow tracking of visual motion while lucid, mirror the patterns of eye movements which occur during tracking of visual motion in waking perception, while strongly diverging from the eye movements accompanying tracking of visual motion during waking imagination (LaBerge et al. 2018).

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Smooth tracking of visual targets distinguishes lucid REM sleep dreaming and waking perception from imagination

[Stephen LaBerge](#), [Benjamin Baird](#)  & [Philip G. Zimbardo](#)

[Nature Communications](#) **9**, Article number: 3298 (2018) | [Cite this article](#)

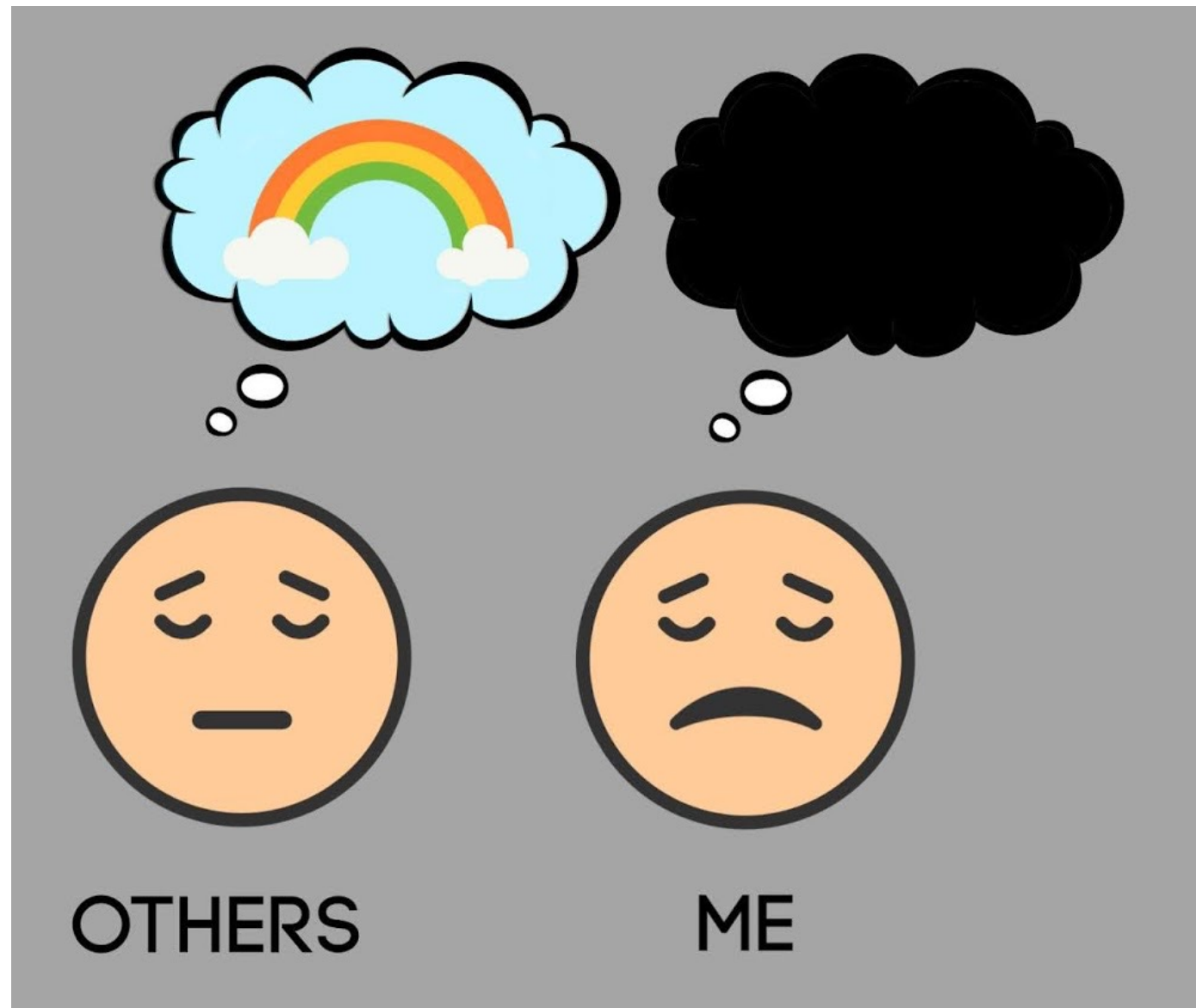
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An Empirical Objection

“Together these findings help address several broad questions within cognitive neuroscience and sleep research. First, the data provide *empirical evidence* for a difficult to test question that has been asked at least since Aristotle: “are dreams more like perception or imagination?”(Nir and Tononi 2010). **Based on the smooth tracking behaviour the findings suggest that, at least in this respect, the visual quality of REM sleep dream imagery is more similar to perception than imagination” (Baird et al. 2019).**



The
Objection
from
Aphantasia



NEWS

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Living With Aphantasia, the Inability to Make Mental Images

Living With Aphantasia, the Inability to Make Mental Images ... When the mind's eye cannot see, counting sheep or navigating streets with a "...



Aphantasia

'Phantasia' – Imagination

- A recently discovered mental imagery generation disorder
- 2-5% of people lack the ability to visually imagine at will



Are you Aphantasic? The Vividness of Mental Imagery Questionnaire

Consider carefully the vividness of your visual imagery experience. Does some type of image come to mind? Rate how vivid the image is using the 5-point scale. If you do not have a visual image, rate vividness as '1'. Only use '5' for images that are as lively and vivid as *real seeing*. The rating scale is as follows:

1. No image at all, I only “know” I am thinking of the object
 2. Dim and vague image
 3. Moderately realistic and vivid
 4. Realistic and reasonably vivid
 5. Perfectly realistic, as vivid as real seeing
- e Objection from Aphantasia

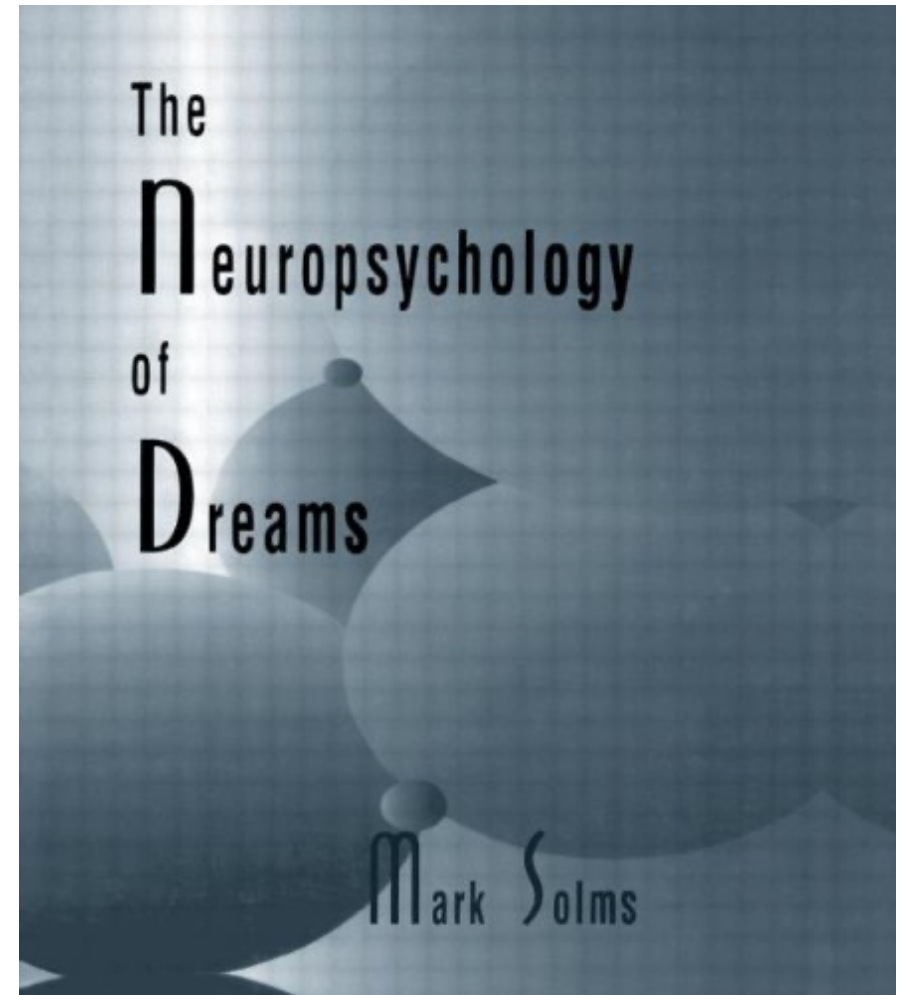


Implications for Ichikawa's View of Dreaming

- What would Ichikawa's model of dreaming predict about the dreams of aphantasics?

Recall from last week

- 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.





Implications for Ichikawa's View of Dreaming

- This suggests that the agentic imagination model would predict that aphantasic's *lack visual dream imagery*.
- *The problem:* findings of current aphantasia studies go against this, providing evidence of multiple cases in which subjects report a sustained, lifelong *loss* of waking imagery whilst the capacity for rich visual dreaming is retained



The Argument

P1: Subjects with aphantasia lack the agential capacity to generate and consciously experience sensory mental imagery.

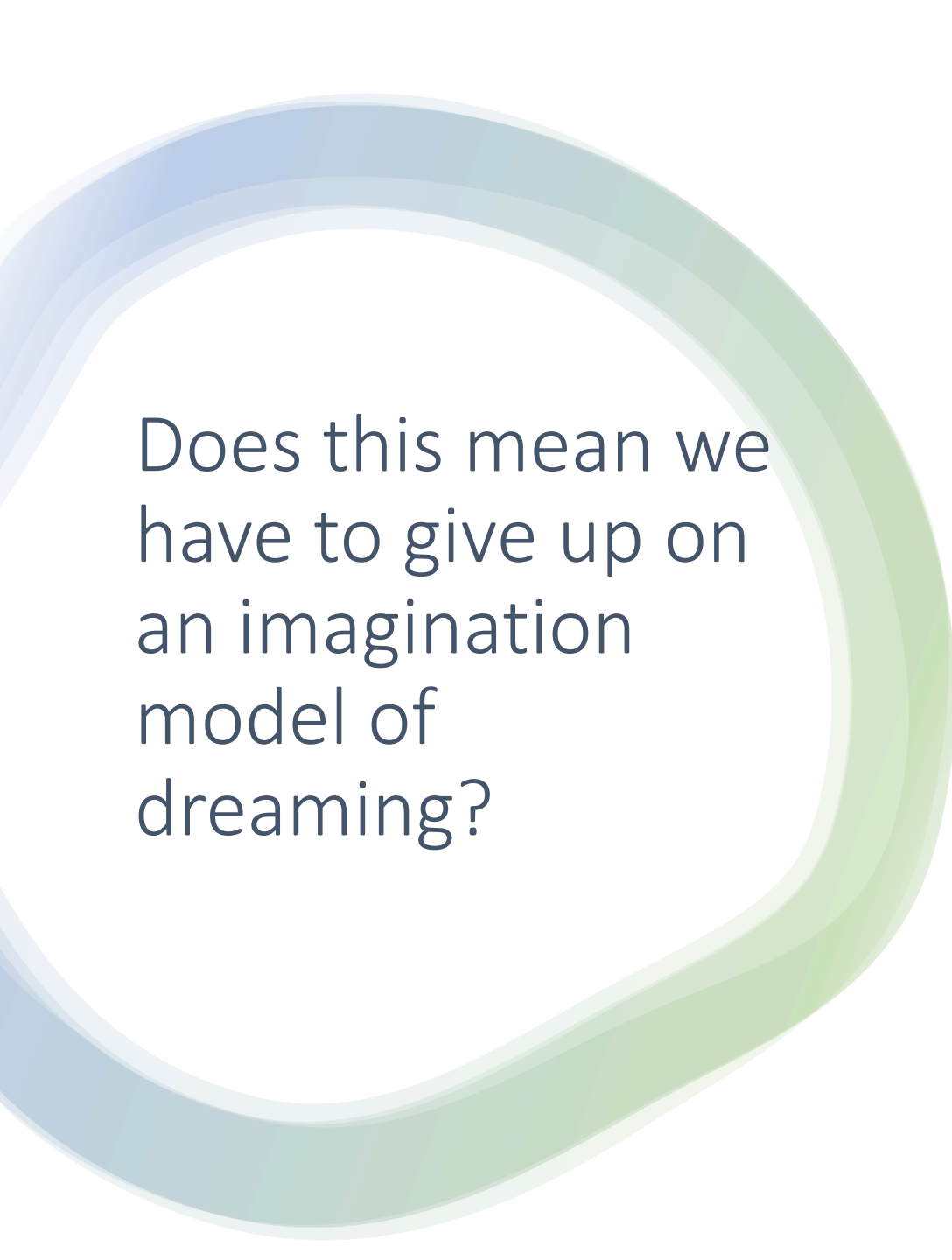
P2: Visual imagery in dreams is to be understood and accounted for solely in terms of imagery of this kind.

P3: Dream reports accurately reflect dream experience such that aphantasic dreams are correctly described as having visual content.

P4: An adequate ontology of dreams must have the resources to account for empirical considerations similar to those raised by the dream reports of aphantasics.

AN INVOLUNTARY IMAGINATION MODEL OF DREAMING






Does this mean we
have to give up on
an imagination
model of
dreaming?

P1: Subjects with aphantasia lack the agential capacity to generate and consciously experience sensory mental imagery.

P2: Visual imagery in dreams is to be understood and accounted for solely in terms of imagery of this kind.


P3: Dream reports accurately reflect dream experience such that aphantasic dreams are correctly described as having visual content.

P4: An adequate ontology of dreams must have the resources to account for empirical considerations similar to those raised by the dream reports of aphantasics.



An Involuntary Imagination Model of Dreaming

P2: Visual imagery in dreams is to be understood and accounted for solely in terms of imagery of this kind.

- The involuntary imagination model of dreaming rejects this claim.
 - It denies that imaginative experiences are fundamentally agential in nature.
 - It avoids the objection from aphantasia – **only agential** imagery is lacking in such cases.
- 

Wakeful Consciousness

- A recent involuntary imagination model of dreaming falls out a positive view of wakeful consciousness
- What does it mean to be conscious? Many popular answers to this question focus on phenomenal consciousness – the ‘what its like to be’ have experiences
- Another answer to this question invokes the idea of being *awake*.
- Arguably, this is what many of our ordinary attributions of consciousness track





Wakeful Consciousness as a State of Capacitation

‘Consciousness [wakeful consciousness] necessitates an overall *mental activeness*, for the reason that the conscious [i.e. the awake] are in control of the overall movement of their own minds, and the dream is an essentially inactive phenomenon’

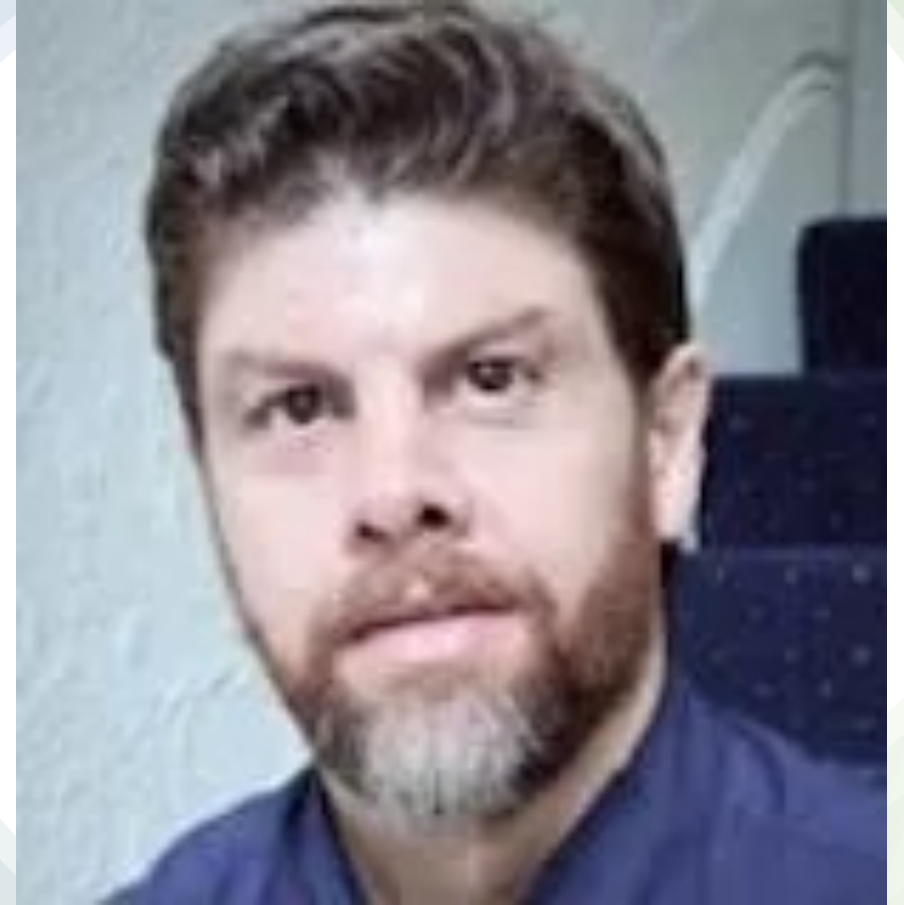


Wakeful Consciousness as a State of Capacitation

- To be awake – to be in a state of wakeful consciousness – **is to be able to exercise mental agency** .
- *When we dream we imagine that we are awake,* we imagine that we are mentally active, whilst lacking a capacity for agency.

Wakeful Consciousness as a State of Capacitation

“In short, [in the dream state] one suffers from a sort of mental paralysis—a form of mental paralysis that doesn’t even allow for the possibility of failed attempts to exercise agency over one’s thinking. But it is a form of mental paralysis that is accompanied by the *illusion of agency*—the illusion of seeming to affirm, seeming to judge seeming to decide, seeming to be mentally active (13).



A DIFFERENT 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.

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

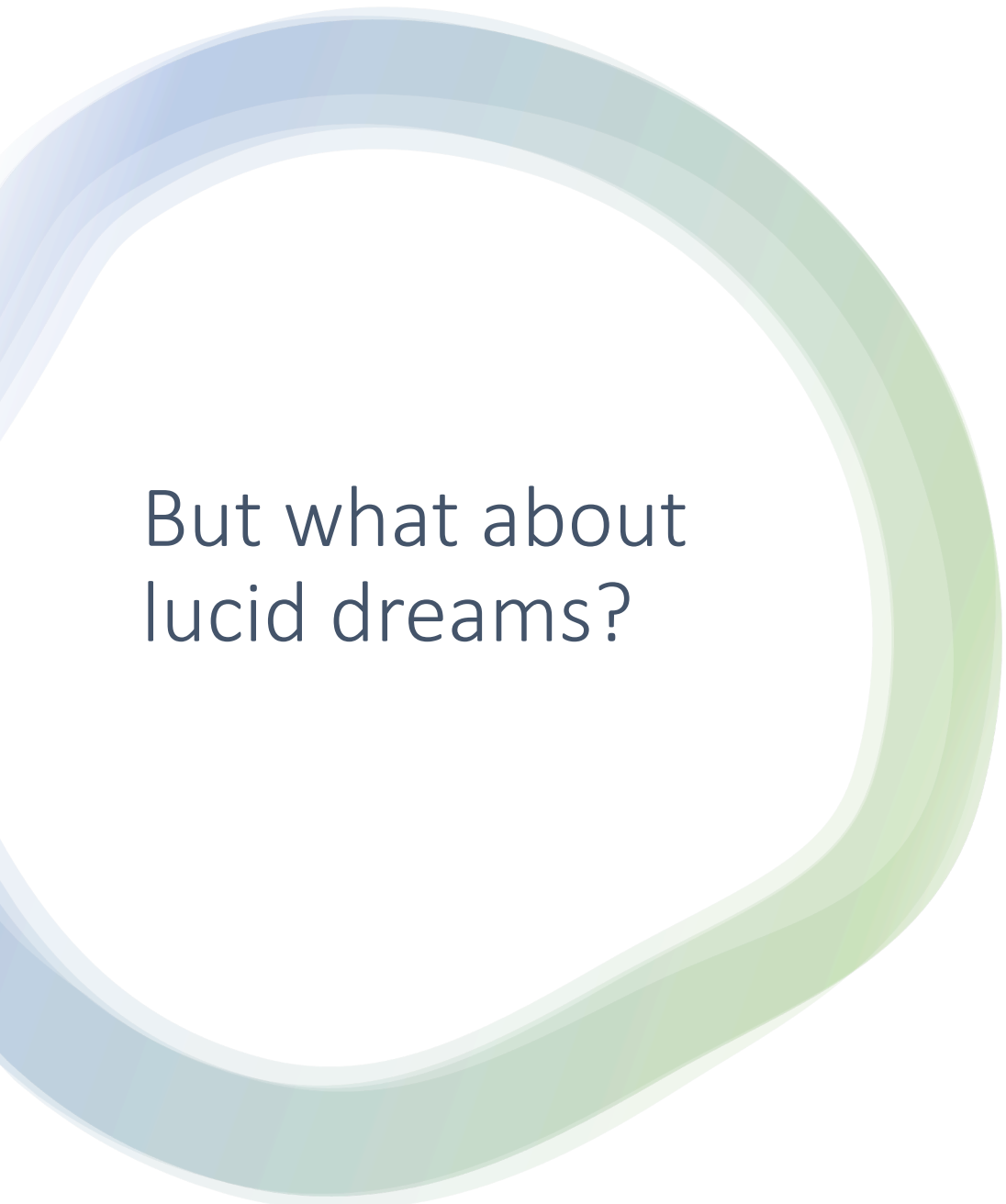
Imagination is not subject to the will. So, what is it?



Imagination is not subject to the will. So, what is it?

- This model requires supplementation with an alternative positive theory of imagination.





But what about
lucid dreams?

- This view faces an obvious objection: what about lucid dreams? Do these not pose a counter example to this model?

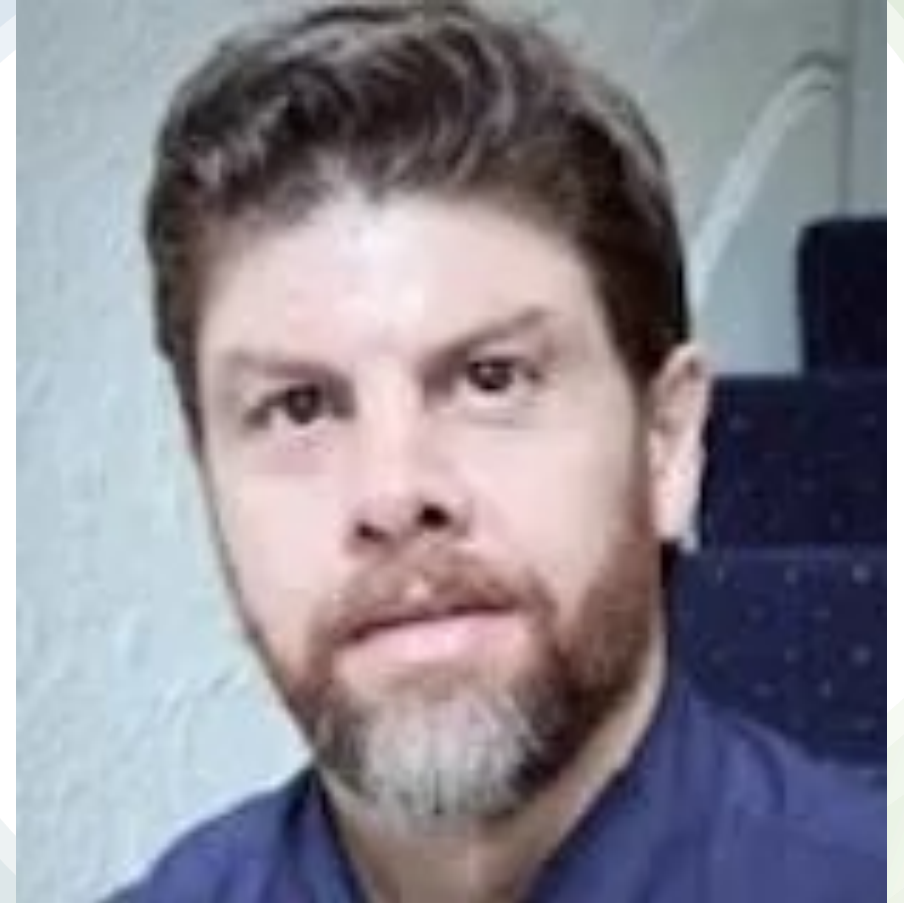
Recall the Empirical Objection

“Together these findings help address several broad questions within cognitive neuroscience and sleep research. First, the data provide *empirical evidence* for a difficult to test question that has been asked at least since Aristotle: “are dreams more like perception or imagination?”(Nir and Tononi 2010). Based on the smooth tracking behaviour the findings suggest that, at least in this respect, the visual quality of REM sleep dream imagery is more similar to perception than imagination” (Baird et al. 2019, emphasis added).



Are lucid dreams the same as non-lucid dreams?

“during lucid dreams, the dreaming subject becomes aware that the events she is imagining are not real, and this is *precisely because* at that point during sleep the subject’s ability to exercise agency over her mental life is reinstated, albeit in a limited, degraded form” (Soteriou [2017](#), p. 12).”



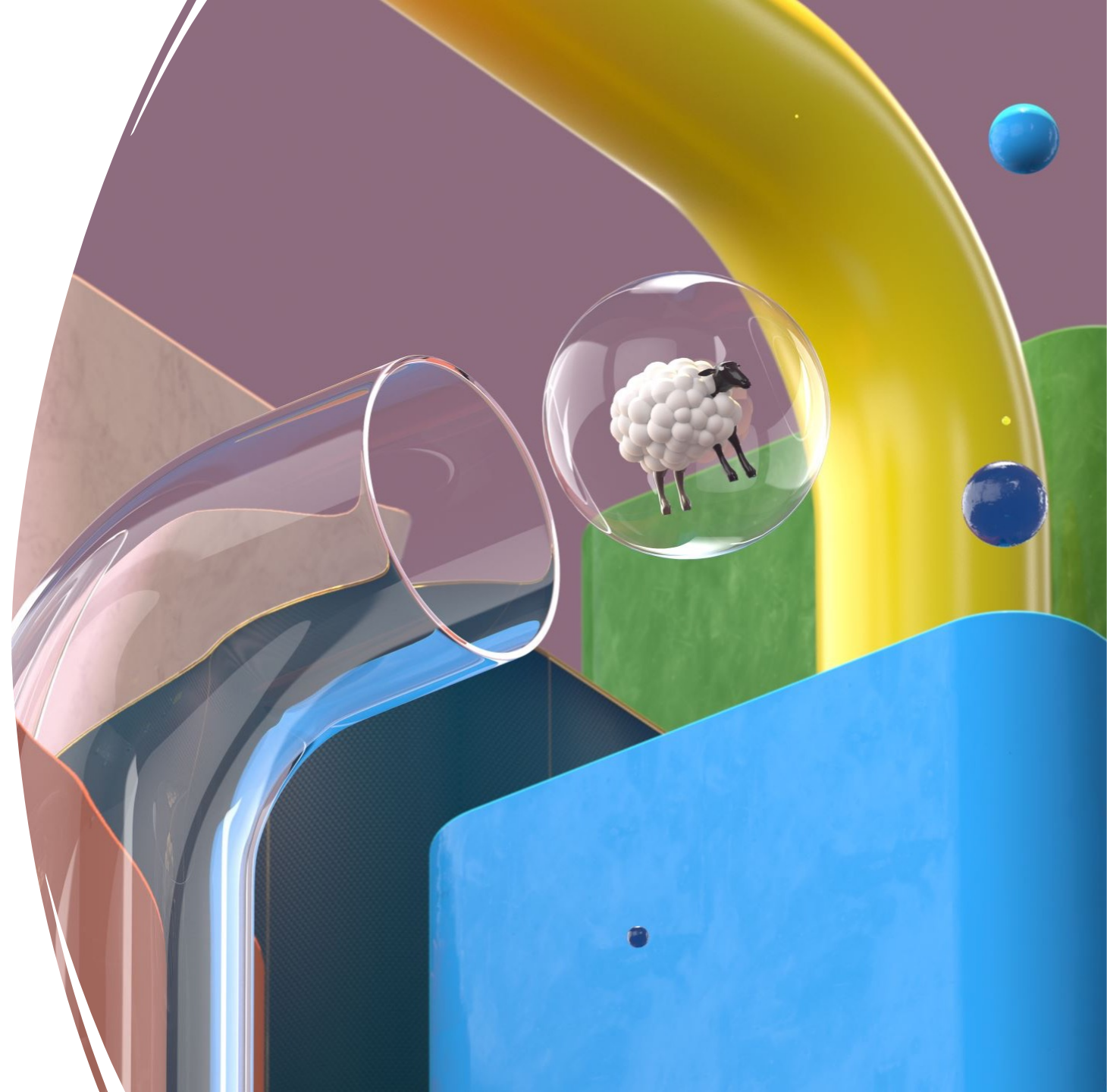
Empirical support for hybrid views of lucid dreaming?

“The quantification of subjective experience in dream lucidity led us to assume that when the brain-mind shifts from non-lucid to lucid dreaming, it becomes a hybrid state with elements of both waking and dream consciousness”. (Voss and Hobson 2014).



Taking Stock

- The involuntary imagination model of dreaming rejects the idea that the will is operative whilst we are asleep
- This paints a different picture about the scope of the will in our mental lives
- It suggests that dreaming is also a deficit of the will



Open Questions

How plausible are these 'hybrid' views of lucid dreaming?

Even within lucid dreams, how does agency manifest itself?
Are they as agentive as first thought?

Parasomnias and agency – deficits of the will also?

Can we use the conceptual toolkit developed here with respect to the involuntary imagination model of dreaming to shed light on other deficiencies of will like addiction?

