

## Lecture 6: 'Dreaming and the Will II'

### I. Recap: Dreams as Agential Imaginings

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':

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

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

(3) **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.

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, via rejecting (3).

### II. Three Objections to Ichikawa's Imagination Model of Dreaming

#### I. 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.

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.

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 agentive role in producing their experiences, which is why they don't seem to us like imaginative experiences.

A worry: This line of response relies on the idea that there is a deficit in our ability to recognize our own agency over our dreams. Why not just give up on the idea that non-lucid dreams are genuinely agential?

#### II. An Empirical Objection

A recent finding: 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).

This suggests that the visual quality of REM sleep dream imagery is more similar to perception than imagination.

### III. The Objection from Aphantasia

Aphantasia: a recently rediscovered imagery generation disorder. People with aphantasia lack the ability to visually imagine at will.

Might you be aphantasic? You can take the Vividness of Mental Imagery Questionnaire to find out (VVIQ): <https://aphantasia.com/vviq/>.

What can this tell us about dreaming? recall the work of Mark Solms from last week on the neuropsychology of dreaming. This suggests that the agentive 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.

### III. 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.

It falls out of an analysis of wakeful consciousness as a general state of capacitation.

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 it's 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.

Brian O'Shaunessey: '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'.

**When we dream we imagine that we are awake:** we imagine that we are mentally active, whilst lacking a capacity for agency.

Matthew Soteriou: “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; emphasis added).

#### **The Involuntary 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 not subject to the will: it is not essential to imaginings that they are subject to the will.

#### **IV. Lucid Dreams on an Involuntary Imagination Model**

An obvious objection: do lucid dreams not pose an obvious counterexample to this model of dreaming?

Recall the empirical objection above: “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).

**Response:** perhaps lucid and non-lucid dreams are **not the same kind of thing** 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).”

“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).

#### **V. Taking Stock: The Scope of the Will**

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 so-called ‘hybrid’ views of lucid dreaming?

- Even within lucid dreams, how does agency manifest itself? Are they as agentive as first thought? What happens to the capacity to form intentions in lucid dreams?
- What about other sorts of sleep experience like parasomnias, can they also be analysed in terms of agency and/or deficits to the will?
- Can we use the conceptual tool kit developed here with respect to dreaming to analyse other psychiatric deficits of will like addiction? (Crowther 2016).

### **Important References**

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