

“Philosophy of Dreaming: A New Kind Of Reality”

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The reality and full knowability of the dreaming world is and has been heavily debated by philosophers and scientists alike for hundreds of years. There has been much research into the data that has been collected from studies as well as individuals' accounts of their own dreams. Some philosophers such as Augustine questioned the accountability that dreams so demand, and found his own answer by the explanation that dreams happen against a human's own will—therefore they are not accountable for their actions. The epistemology of dreaming stems from lucid dreaming—how a person can know for a fact that they are in a dream and eventually control the dream, being in charge of their own learning. The morality of dreams is talked amongst many professionals and has yet to come to a definitive conclusion as well as whether or not dreaming is a completely conscious experience. **If dreaming is really not a conscious experience, then morality should not hold the dreamer accountable for their actions; however, if dreaming is a conscious experience, then the standards of morality should be set in place for the dreamer.**

Metaphysic of Dreaming

The world of dreaming is itself a kind of reality that philosophers have been debating about. Norman Malcolm, a noted philosopher of dreaming suggested that, ““Dream reports are insufficient to believe the metaphysical claim that dreaming consciously takes place during sleep”,”(Malcolm, as referenced from “Philosophy of Dreaming”). He is implying that the dream itself is experienced through the retelling of its components, not during the actual sleeping dream. He thinks that during the dream, it is not being perceived by the dreamer, therefore the dream world has no kind of reality. It is only a memory in a 2D experience. He goes on to explain his stance by clarifying that if a person wakes up with the recall of the dream, there is no

factual evidence that the person was conscious during this experience. In most cases, the dreamer will admit they had no idea that they were in a dream because it felt so close to reality as it is. Furthering his point, he responds to the Received View of Dreaming that proposes humans can only remember a dream in all trueness. Malcolm believes this view is inaccurate-the dream report is connected with the memory and human memory is not flawless. Lucid dreaming complicates this view which is defined as, “Lucid dreaming occurs when an individual is aware during a dream that it is a dream. Lucid dreaming is therefore an example of experiencing a dream whilst one is asleep, therefore dreams must be experiences that occur during sleep,” (Springett, referenced from “Philosophy of Dreaming”). Because lucid dreaming claims that it is a conscious experience of dreaming, Malcolms belief is challenged. He says that dreaming is not an experience because the dreamer is not consciously aware they are in a dream.

In a lucid dream, as claimed by those who can do it, the person is fully aware they are in a dream and can control the happenings of the dream. Controlling a dream would essentially put the person managing the information that they take in. Because of this claim, a lucid dream is similar to waking life-in that the person is conscious and moving through daily tasks. Some philosophers such as Daniel Dennett did not believe in lucid dreaming, confronting the perceived reality of lucid dreaming. This is because “experience implies consciousness; sleep implies a lack of consciousness; therefore the claim that dreams could occur during sleep implies consciousness and a lack of consciousness,”(Springett, referenced from “Philosophy of Dreaming”). If a person is certainly lucid dreaming, they are therefore not truly asleep and are awake in some fashion. This was disproved in a study that Stephen LaBerge conducted on subjects who claimed they could lucid dream. There was decided upon eye movements that the

person would make in the lucid dream to prove that they were consciously aware in their dream world and through EEG graphs, their eye movement was recorded. The dreamer then explained, before even looking at the graph, the movements on the graph. Reality is genuinely experienced through lucid dreaming because of the consciousness that takes place within the person's own mind-though the kind of reality experienced is still under debate. Modern day philosophers and scientists have been fascinated with dreams, however, questioning and contemplating dreams has been going on for thousands of years. As Diogenes of Oenoanda once stated, ““The visions we behold in sleep are not, as the Stoics claim, ‘empty and illusory representations of the mind,’”(Diskin, as referenced from “An Epicurean Interpretation of Dreams, pg.349). Diogenes was always interested in the reality of dreams and was one of the early epicurean philosophers to engage in the dream world. Both modern and historical philosophers have been entering into what kind of reality that dreaming brings people into.

Epistemology of Dreaming

Through the metaphysic, the epistemology is also found. When a person lucid dreams, they can fully know and gain knowledge. They can objectively know they are in a dream and truly experience reality in the dream world. In the modern era, Descartes doubted all knowledge in waking life, therefore making the claim that the dreaming world is no different and his “dream argument began with the claim that dreams and waking life can have the same content”(Springett, referenced from “Philosophy of Dreaming”). Humans can be deceived by sensory information they can gather while awake. Dreaming is also capable of deception. Through the use of Descartes’ example of sitting by the fire-how a person can be sitting by a fire, smell the smoke and feel the heat-and it could all be a dream. The dreamer would be

experiencing the fire, however, would not be sitting next to a real fire in the waking reality. This is illustrated further in *The Matrix* movie, when ordinary humans believe they are experiencing total reality and knowledge, when they are actually encased in an artificial capsule that is deceiving their mind into thinking they are living a different life. Knowledge is no longer trustable in reality because “*The Matrix* systematically equivocates between different uses of the concept of dreaming, where one involves “industrial-strength deception”, or instances in which both sensory experience and intellectual functioning are exactly the same as in standard wake-states,”(Windt, referenced from “Dreams and Dreaming).

Because lucid dreams, unlike “normal” dreams, are experienced reality, they hold true knowledge of existence. Some indicate that since most dreams cannot be connected to perceptual experience, they fail to have the same role as waking knowledge. Because of the heightened experiences some individuals face in their lucid dreams, they beg to differ on that stance. The knowledge they have gained from their experiences is just as correct as any kind of experience they could accomplish in waking life. Knowledge in a dream that is not consciously experienced by the dreamer is challenged more because during the dream, the person is not actively enrolled in the knowledge of the dream and its detail. Once the dreamer has gained awareness in the dream, they are experiencing knowledge in a very real way. For many people in history, knowledge in a dream can be transferred to waking life. Albert Einstein had a dream as a young adult that helped him figure the principle of relativity (“Einstein’s Dreams”). The knowledge he gained in his dream was epistemologically real in the dream and therefore it was real in waking life. Knowledge can be found through lucid dreaming because of the realization that one is in a dream and can make rational decisions as well as be thoughtful. Being able to make a rational

decision is part of being aware of reality, and the knowledge that a person holds. With this in mind, a person can operate in a lucid dream just as they would in waking life.

Is there such a thing as Morality in Dreams?

Humans have been recording dreams for thousands of years, and Augustine was one of them. He worried about whether or not morality applied to the dream world because he battled sexual dreams even though he committed his life to celibacy. (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming) He wanted to know if right or wrong was a concept in the dream world that would then follow him back into the waking reality, “ In trying to solve the problem Augustine appealed to the apparent experiential difference between waking and dreaming life. (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming”) His approach to finding out the difference between waking life and dreaming experience was to put the two kinds of experiences into categories: happenings and actions. Due to the fact that “normal” dreams, not lucid dreams, happen to a person, dreams are considered to be in the first category. He explained that the experiences he went through in his dreams were not what “he chose” and so by removing human agency-humans are not responsible for what they do in their dreams.

However, as rational as Augustine’s theory, this does not quite explain the actions of lucid dreaming. As a result of full consciousness in lucid dreaming, the experiences people choose are entirely of their own accord, therefore “challenging Augustine’s idea that dreams are not actions,”(Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming”). It has been discussed that because dreams have no consequence, they are permitted to act in any way they see fit. For example, a consequentialist will say that if dreams really have no consequences, “then they are not morally evaluable or should be deemed neutral,” (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of

Dreaming’’). They also argue that if there is no consequence, then it is alright to harm someone in a dream because they are not actually hurt. They think that it can even be beneficial to the person because they are releasing tension in their dream and not in waking life. An advocate of deontology would like to act morally regardless of the outcome. Because harming someone is morally wrong, a person should not do it solely based on that fact. Considering that dreams often involve friends or close acquaintances, if a person harms them in their dream, they are not treating that person with respect regardless. The consequence is feeling bad in waking life and having to deal with the guilt of harming them in a dream. Virtue Ethics is another position that touches on the morality of dreaming; ‘‘This moral approach involves going beyond actions of right and wrong, avoiding harm and maximizing pleasure, and instead considers an individual for his or her overall life,’’ (Springett, as referenced in ‘‘Philosophy of Dreaming’’). Being virtuous is the end goal of this ethic, and if a person is immoral in a dream, then their virtue is taken away.

Lucid dreaming takes these two approaches even further, stating that ‘‘Lucid dreaming invokes our ability to make choices, often to the same extent as in waking life,’’ (Springett, as referenced in ‘‘Philosophy of Dreaming’’). It is assumed that in a ‘‘normal’’ dream, a person has no choice in the matter of harming a person in any way, however Virtue Ethics and Deontologism still assume that a person should still act morally. Lucid dreaming, with choice furthering reality-adds to the needed morality of dreams. Augustine’s thoughts were limited in his conclusion that he was not responsible for the immorality of his sexual dreams. If he was having a ‘‘normal’’ dream, with no perceived consciousness, then he would certainly have no control over his actions. If he were to ever become lucid in one of his dreams, then he would

therefore become responsible for his actions. Morality is seen as existing in dreams according to Virtue Ethics and Deontologism, however is not seen as legitimate to consequentialists.

Is “Normal” Dreaming a Conscious Experience?

There has been a case for lucid dreaming being perceived as a conscious experience, however, “normal” dreaming has also been explored if it is also a conscious experience. There is a good argument against “normal” dreams being experienced when Malcolm explains that there is no real experience to a dream; there is only the memory of the dream. Dreaming is used as a model for consciousness as referenced in Springett quotes Revonsuo arguing that dreaming “should also have a place alongside visual awareness, as a special instance of consciousness and therefore a worthy model to be studied” (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming”).

As stated before, dreaming is its own kind of reality. People can experience the dreaming world as it is. It has been claimed that dreams are a kind of “pure” consciousness because there is not continuous absorption and should be studied further. (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming) Furthermore, because the dream world is entirely similar to the waking reality, the consciousness in the dream world is comparable to the consciousness of the waking world.

Scientific fields such as neurology points out that the neural processing is different in dreaming as it is in waking life evidently because of the sleeping paralysis that goes on and different firing of brain stem. Dreaming can be so intense that the emotions felt are actually experienced by the dreamer. There is high activity in the thalamus, motor, limbic and paralimbic areas that suggest the dreamer’s body is also experiencing the dream world, not only the mind. (Springett, as referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming) It has been shown in studies that some people wake up with localized pain that they felt in their dream to to an injury or sickness. (Springett, as

referenced in “Philosophy of Dreaming) Does this mean that the body can’t tell that the dream isn’t physical reality, and takes the dream world to be waking life? This is an interesting question to further investigate. Philosophy can be enriched by other professions in science to aid in the knowledge of the dream world and all that it entails.

Reflection

Much evidence has concluded that there is a reality of dreaming. I do think reality is experienced in dreaming whether it be lucid or not. God showed himself in dreams to his people such as Abraham and his nation, and He gave Daniel the gift of being able to interpret dreams. (Daniel 2, NIV) Dreams inhabit a powerful reality that many people do not understand and perhaps should not understand.

Lucid dreaming seems to be an entire reality where a life can be truly lived through lucid dreaming. A whole dream world could be planned by one person-if they were to be so efficient at lucid dreaming. For the epistemology, there have been philosophers who have concluded that knowledge can come from a dream and is in fact, verifiable when a person is completely aware and can make choices in a lucid dream. In a “normal” dream, knowledge can become a little more challenging because the person is not aware of the learning and might not consciously experience the knowledge that the dream is intending to portray. Augustine’s argument that humans are not morally responsible for their actions in their dreams because they cannot choose it is, in my opinion, an insufficient answer to a larger problem. Augustine was human and therefore sinful. What he struggled with was entirely human and perhaps if he tried harder, the dreams might have truly departed him. There is still so much to be accomplished with the reality of dreaming and the depths of reality that people can experience. It is a completely different

world to explore. From a Christian perspective, I can know that God created dreams for a reason and he has used dreams to talk to people and for his angels to talk to people before. I think He will continue to reveal truths in dreams to people He knows will eventually understand. In Acts 2, Peter says “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” (Acts 2:17) Dreaming has been a concept since the Old Testament days and has even been noticed in the New Testament. God has always had a plan for dreaming, and perhaps He will reveal it one day. As many philosophers say, an individual’s own truth is subjective—and that is the case with dreaming. My perspective is that dreaming and the dream world is a reality, but to others, it is not a reality or an accessible one. The truth of the dream world is different according to each person and their experience with dreams, and the question remains if there is truly a factual reality within dreaming that could one day become objective.

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