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## DREAMING AND CERTAINTY

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In *Meditation I*, Descartes considers whether it is reasonable to doubt that he is seated by the fire attired in a dressing gown. He writes

But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment.<sup>1</sup>

What is the argument in this passage? Is it sound? This paper is a response to these questions. I isolate the argument in Section I. In Section II, I maintain that it ultimately depends upon a fallacy, namely, the inference from the fact that I can believe that I am wide awake when I am asleep to the conclusion that I cannot know that I am wide awake when I am wide awake. Being wide awake, I maintain, is self-recognizing: I know that I am wide awake when I do *because* I am wide awake, and this is compatible with my mistakenly believing I am wide awake when I am not. But is the knowledge that I am awake sufficient to enable me to know that I am not dreaming? I consider this question in Section III and conclude that if dreams are hallucinations there is no epistemological advantage to knowing that I am awake. In Section IV, I present an account of dreaming which, if true, solves the skeptical problem. I argue that this account is more plausible than its rivals.

### I

What is the argument in this passage? Let's *provisionally* take Descartes's pronouncement that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep as the major premiss. We complete the argument by adding the premiss that if there are no such indications then we cannot tell for certain that we aren't dreaming. This, combined with the first, leads to the consequence that we can never tell for certain that we are awake.

According to Peter Markie (and many others), this reading requires a sig-

nificant revision of Descartes's argument since (according to Markie) Descartes presents "(On) many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions..." as his first premiss.<sup>2</sup> However the passage alludes to the argument more than states it; there is considerable room for interpretation. Descartes's observation that he has been deceived in dreams may function not as a premiss but as background for an argument that is contained in the rest of the sentence. This is the way to read the passage if we are to be charitable to Descartes. The simple fact that Descartes has been deceived in dreams cannot, by itself, entail that there are no certain indications, for certain indications might exist and Descartes could be deceived nonetheless because he doesn't know what they are or uses them carelessly. Descartes believes that dwelling carefully on his past deception reveals some *special* feature of dreaming which precludes the existence of certain indications entirely, however knowledgeable and careful he may be. Surely that feature is this: whatever the indication of wakefulness, it is possible that I am merely dreaming that it is present whenever I believe it is. Descartes doesn't bother to spell this out; he is moving quickly at this point in the *Meditations* and reckons the point will be sufficiently obvious to his reader. This is a plausible interpretation and it attributes a stronger argument to Descartes; if so, we ought to construe Markie's account as the revision.

Supposing the major premiss of Descartes's argument is "there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep" (call this *A*), what does it mean? George Nakhnikian construes *A* to assert that "if a contingent proposition entails that a certain man is not dreaming, then it is possible that in his dream that man attentively believes that that proposition is true".<sup>3</sup> Nakhnikian takes this claim to be a necessary truth, following from the "everyday conception of dreams".<sup>4</sup>

The trouble with this account of *A* is that it simply isn't what Descartes says. When Descartes asserts that there are no certain indications he means that there is no *indubitable* or *certain* proposition that entails that he is awake. Nakhnikian's account of *A* doesn't mention certainty; he seems to have confused *A* with its ground. Nevertheless, Nakhnikian would surely maintain that his account of *A* is logically equivalent to *A*, that these statements mutually entail each other with the addition of only necessarily true propositions. For instance, the entailment from the account of *A* to *A* itself could be set out in the following argument:

(1) If a contingent proposition entails that a certain man is not dreaming, then it is possible that in his dream that man attentively believes that that proposition is true.

(2) It is incorrigible for  $S$  at  $t$  that  $p$  if and only if “At  $t$   $S$  attentively believes that  $p$ ” entails “At  $t$  it is true that  $p$ ”.

Therefore, by (1) and (2)

(3) Every contingent proposition that entails that a certain man is not dreaming is corrigible for that man whenever he believes it.

(4) A contingent proposition is certain and indubitable for  $S$  at  $t$  only if that proposition is incorrigible for  $S$  at  $t$  (or is entailed by another proposition that is incorrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ ).

Therefore, by (3) and (4)

(5) No contingent proposition that entails that a particular man is not dreaming is certain and indubitable for that man when he believes it.

(6) The proposition that a certain man is not dreaming is not entailed by any necessary truth (that is, it is contingent).

Therefore, by (5) and (6)

(7) There is no indubitable and certain proposition that entails that  $S$  is not dreaming at  $t$ . (Descartes’s  $A$ ).

Here premiss (1) is Nakhnikian’s account of  $A$ . Premiss (2) defines incorrigibility.<sup>5</sup> Premiss (4) makes the bridge between incorrigibility and certainty that enables us to get to  $A$ . Nakhnikian identifies indubitable certainty with incorrigibility;<sup>6</sup> plainly this identification is an essential underpinning of the Dreaming Argument. Premiss (6) is necessary. But now we are close to a new formulation of the Dreaming Argument itself. We add another necessary truth:

(8) “I am not dreaming now” entails that I am not dreaming now.

Therefore, by (7) and (8)

(9) I cannot be certain that I am not dreaming now.<sup>7</sup>

## II

We have arrived at the argument to which I believe Descartes alludes in the *Meditations*; it appears in *The Theaetetus* as well.<sup>8</sup> I believe this is the Dreaming Argument, the logical skeleton which ultimately underlies all appeals to dreaming as a source of skepticism. Is it sound? I believe that premisses (1), (2), (6), and (8) are unassailable; further the argument is valid. But is premiss (4) true? What connection is there, if any, between corrigibility and uncertainty? It might seem easy to show that corrigibility entails uncertainty by the following argument. Suppose that  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ . It follows that

(1) It is logically possible that  $S$  attentively believes  $p$  at  $t$  and  $p$  is false (by definition of incorrigibility).

(2) If  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  at  $t$  entails  $p$  then (1) is false.

Therefore

(3)  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  does not entail  $p$ .

(4) If  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  does not entail  $p$  then  $p$  is dubitable for  $S$ .

Therefore

(5)  $p$  is dubitable for  $S$  at  $t$ .

Plainly (2) is false. Suppose that  $E$  is  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  and  $E$  entails  $p$ . Then there is no possible world in which  $S$  believes  $p$  on account of  $E$  and  $p$  is false. Nonetheless, there are other possible worlds in which  $S$  believes  $p$  at  $t$  on the basis of *different* evidence  $G$  (which he mistakenly believes is conclusive) and  $p$  is false. But this is sufficient for the truth of (1), and so (1) is consistent with the assertion that  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  at  $t$  entails  $p$ . Of course if  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  is inconclusive in all possible worlds then  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ . But the converse is false. Corrigibility only requires that  $S$ 's evidence for  $p$  at  $t$  *could* be inconclusive, not that it is.

However this suggests another far more powerful argument for the conclusion that corrigibility entails uncertainty.

(1) Suppose that  $S$  believes attentively  $p$  at  $t$  on the basis of  $E$ ,  $E$  entails  $p$ , and  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ .

Therefore

(2) There is a possible world  $W$  in which  $S$  believes attentively  $p$  at  $t$  on the basis of evidence  $S$  believes is conclusive and nonetheless  $p$  is false.

Therefore

(3)  $S$  knows that  $E$  is conclusive for  $p$  only if  $S$  knows that  $a$  (the actual world) isn't  $W$ .

Therefore

(4)  $S$  knows that  $E$  is conclusive for  $p$  only if  $S$  has *additional* evidence that  $p$ : there must be a test or criterion to show that  $a$  isn't  $W$ .

(5) But  $p$  is indubitable for  $S$  at  $t$  only if  $S$  knows that he has conclusive evidence for  $p$ .

Therefore, by (4) and (5)

(6)  $p$  is indubitable for  $S$  at  $t$  only if there is a proposition  $q$  which describes this additional evidence such that  $q$  entails  $p$ .

(7) If  $q$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$  then the argument repeats for  $q$ .

Therefore, by (6) and (7)

(8)  $p$  is dubitable for  $S$  at  $t$  (unless there is a proposition  $q$  which is incorrigible for  $S$  at  $t$  such that  $q$  entails  $p$ ).

Is the inference from (3) to (4) valid? Certainly (3) is true; it is logically equivalent to the innocuous claim that if  $S$  knows that  $E$  is conclusive for  $p$  then  $S$  knows that  $a$  isn't  $W$ . This provides us a strategy: we can show that the inference from (3) to (4) is invalid if we can give an account of how  $S$  can know both that  $E$  is conclusive for  $p$  and that  $a$  isn't  $W$  *solely* on the basis of  $E$ , an account which, at the same time, is consistent with the fact that  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ . For then  $S$  will know that  $a$  isn't  $W$  without additional evidence.

Supposing, then, that  $S$  believes that  $E$  is conclusive for  $p$ , how can he know that his belief is true and that  $a$  isn't  $W$  solely on the basis of  $E$ ? Of course he can attend to his evidence and consider whether it is conclusive, but he does the same thing in  $W$  and gets it wrong. How does  $S$  know this isn't  $W$ ? But suppose that  $S$  is in a mental condition (C) which is sufficient to *enable* him to recognize the fact that  $E$  entails  $p$ ; then he won't get it wrong. But the trouble is,  $S$  must know that he is in  $C$  if he is to know that he

recognizes that  $E$  entails  $p$  – in  $W$  he *mistakenly* believes that he recognizes this – and he must know it solely on the basis of  $E$ . But suppose that  $p$  asserts that  $S$  is in  $C$ . Then, as  $E$  entails  $p$  (by premiss (1)), it follows that  $S$  is in  $C$ , and this (by hypothesis) is sufficient to enable him to recognize that  $E$  entails  $p$ . But then  $S$  recognizes that he is in  $C$ , hence he knows that he knows that  $p$ . Consequently  $S$  knows that  $a$  isn't  $W$  solely on the basis of  $E$ ; he needs no additional evidence.

In  $W$ , on the other hand,  $S$  attentively believes that  $p$  when  $p$  is false. That is,  $S$  believes that he is in a mental condition which enables him to recognize that his evidence that he is in this condition is conclusive, and he is not. This explains why  $S$  gets things wrong in  $W$ : when he is not in  $C$  then he is at an epistemological disadvantage on account of which he can believe attentively that he is in  $C$  and not detect his mistake. Therefore the attentive belief that  $p$  does not entail  $p$ : it is logically possible that the belief is mistaken, but when  $S$  has conclusive evidence that  $p$  then  $S$  knows that  $p$  solely on the basis of the evidence to which he is attending. Here corrigibility is consistent with indubitable certainty.

Suppose, for example, that  $S$  is wide awake at  $t$ : his mental faculties are operating maximally – he is lucid, alert, attentive, and clear-headed. Suppose that his mental processes manifest these virtues in abundance and that nothing is happening that would lead  $S$  to believe that this is not the case. Therefore  $S$  has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake. But anyone wide awake who has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake is thereby enabled to recognize that he is wide awake. Being wide awake *is* the mental condition that is sufficient to enable  $S$  to recognize that his evidence that he is wide awake is conclusive. And anyone who isn't wide awake might well believe that he is wide awake when he isn't. Therefore  $S$ 's belief that he is wide awake is corrigible, but when he has conclusive evidence that his belief is true he knows it because he is wide awake.

We may say (provisionally) that  $R$  is a *self-recognizing state* if

- (1)  $R$  essentially involves an epistemological virtue which is sufficient to enable the subject to recognize that he is in  $R$  whenever his evidence is conclusive, and further,
- (2) not- $R$  necessarily involves a corresponding defect on account of which  $S$  may believe that he is in  $R$  and not be able to detect his mistake.

$S$  is in a self-recognizing state when he is wide awake. Therefore, when  $p$  is the proposition “ $S$  has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake” and  $p$  is true, then  $p$  is indubitable for  $S$  at  $t$  even though  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ . We may say that a proposition is *T-incorrigible* for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if  $p$  is corrigible for  $S$  at  $t$ , and the fact that  $p$  is true entails that  $S$  knows that  $p$ . The proposition “ $S$  has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake” is *T-incorrigible* for  $S$  for every  $t$ .

It is worth noting that none of this entails that  $S$  knows whenever he is wide awake. For if  $S$  is confronted with events which appear to violate the laws of nature (e.g., he is suddenly confronted by a man he believes is long dead) then  $S$  may doubt that he is wide awake even though he is. Here  $S$  has evidence that he is not wide awake for he has reason to believe these events aren't really happening. We may stipulate that  $S$ 's evidence that he is wide awake is *conclusive* if and only if none of it appears to  $S$  to count as evidence to the contrary and, further, it entails that  $S$  is wide awake. All that follows from the fact that being wide awake is self-recognizing is that  $S$  knows he is wide awake whenever he has *conclusive* evidence that he is wide awake.

There is another feature of being wide awake that is worth capturing: if  $S$  is wide awake and no evidence is revealed to him to the contrary, then he has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake. That is, when none of my evidence appears to count as evidence to the contrary, and I am wide awake, my evidence cannot fail to entail that I am wide awake. Let us generalize this and add it to the other two conditions for a self-recognizing state:

- (3) If  $S$  is in  $R$  and no evidence is revealed to him to the contrary then his evidence that he is in  $R$  is conclusive.

It follows that  $S$  knows for certain that he is in a self-recognizing state whenever he is in one and no evidence is revealed to him that he isn't.<sup>9</sup>

The addition of (3) gives our definition considerable bite. Intelligence is excluded, for example, for when  $S$  displays intelligence and no evidence is revealed to him to the contrary, he still needn't recognize that he is displaying intelligence. Beginning philosophy students sometimes display considerable intelligence without realizing it because they cannot yet distinguish intelligent from foolish comments. Further, the claim that  $S$  is intelligent can be true of  $S$  when he is sleeping or unconscious. Intelligence is the ability to behave intelligently: abilities needn't be manifest to exist. There will be plenty of

occasions, therefore, on which it is true of *S* that he is intelligent, *S* has no evidence to the contrary, and no evidence is revealed to *S* that he *is* intelligent either. By contrast, being wide awake is never latent; barring counter-evidence it is always manifest to the subject.

Veridical perception is another epistemological virtue that isn't self-recognizing. It is constituted by the fact that my experience is caused by its object – a state of affairs external to my consciousness – hence it is inaccessible to me except by experiences that could have been caused by something else. No matter what *S*'s sense-perceptions are like there is a possible world in which *S* has qualitatively similar experiences that aren't veridical. Therefore, the fact that *S* has veridical perception is never sufficient to enable *S* to recognize that his experience is veridical, because the evidence is never conclusive. This accounts for the corrigibility of perceptual claims.

By contrast, being wide awake does not depend upon a relationship to something external to *S*'s mind: its presence is constituted by a constellation of qualities of consciousness. But these qualities of consciousness are immediately accessible to a consciousness that manifests them in abundance; barring counter-evidence, such a consciousness is self-recognizing. Here the evidence is conclusive: the corrigibility of my belief depends wholly upon the fact that there is a possible world in which I mistakenly believe that I am wide awake *because* I am not. This is consistent with the fact that I know that I am wide awake right now (and know this isn't *that* world) solely on the basis of the evidence to which I am attending, that is, because I am wide awake.

How does all of this affect the debate with the skeptic? Suppose that being wide awake is self-recognizing and that *S* has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake. It follows that *S* is wide awake and, as this is sufficient to enable *S* to recognize that his evidence is conclusive, he knows that he is wide awake, hence he knows that he doesn't believe that he is wide awake because he is asleep. Thus, when the skeptic asks *S* "How do you know that you are wide awake?" the correct response is "I have conclusive evidence that I am wide awake". As the response is true, *S* knows it. The skeptic continues "But how do you know that you don't believe that your evidence is conclusive because you are asleep?" Again the correct response is "I have conclusive evidence that I am wide awake". This is correct because *S* knows the response is true and its truth is sufficient for *S* to know that he doesn't believe that his evidence is conclusive because he is asleep.

Does the response beg the question against the skeptic? Certainly *S* knows that he has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake only if he knows he isn't asleep. But, as we have seen, this simply means that if *S* knows his evidence is conclusive then he knows he isn't asleep. The response begs the question only if *S* must *first* know that he is not asleep in order to know that it is true; knowing the former must be an epistemological precondition for knowing the latter. For then, when *S* asserts that he has conclusive evidence that he is wide awake, he is *assuming* that he is not asleep, and this is the issue in question. But if being wide awake is self-recognizing, the truth of the response is sufficient for *S* to know that he is not asleep. Therefore, as the response is true, *S* knows that his evidence is conclusive without assuming anything; so he doesn't beg the question. The skeptic, on the other hand, must maintain that even when *S* is wide awake and has no counter-evidence, he cannot know it. If being wide awake is self-recognizing, this view is incoherent.

The skeptic might try to rephrase the matter in this way: "Right now you believe that you have conclusive evidence that you are wide awake. Your belief is either true or false. If it is false you are deluded. If it is true you know it and know that you know it and so on. But how do you know which it is?" *S* responds: "You admit that if my belief is true I know it and know that I know it and so on. Very well, it *is* true and that is how I know which it is. You are not maintaining that my belief is false; for all you know, this is the right answer and I know it. I can't *prove* to you that I know it is correct, but why should that bother *me*? Whether I can prove it to you or not, it is the truth of the matter and I know it." If being wide awake is self-recognizing, when *S* is wide awake he knows that this response is true.

### III

I know that I am wide awake now because I am wide awake: my condition is self-recognizing. But here we must face a difficulty: If I know that I am wide awake, does it follow that I know that I am not dreaming? The propositions "*S* is wide awake" and "*S* is dreaming" are hardly contradictories: both can be false. Can they both be true as well? David and Jean Beer Blumenfeld write

But it should be pointed out that we also speak of daydreams, and the dreams of an opium eater (some of whose hallucinatory experiences occur when he is awake). So it is not clear that an experience must occur during sleep in order to count as a dream.<sup>10</sup>

Further, even supposing that it is part of the concept of dreaming that dreams are experiences of a certain kind that occur *during sleep*, surely this feature of the concept is merely a technicality just so long as it is possible that instances of this *kind* of experience occur when we are awake. For instance, if dreams are hallucinations *during sleep*, then dreams and waking hallucinations are both the same kind of experience, namely, hallucinations. A waking hallucination would have been a dream if *S* had been asleep when he had it, and a dream would become a waking hallucination if it continued into *S*'s waking life. But it seems implausible that any kind of experience has, as an essential characteristic, that it occurs only during sleep. Therefore, either we can dream while we are awake or we can have the very same *kind* of experience as a dream when we are awake. But if we can, for all intents and purposes, dream while we are awake, then knowing I am awake is insufficient to know that I am not dreaming. What epistemological advantage is there to knowing I am wide awake, if I may still be dreaming?

Descartes construes dreams as a series of hallucinations (“illusions”) during sleep; the previous quotation suggests this is the Blumenfeld’s view as well. Hallucinations are typically defined as actual sense-experiences caused by something other than their objects. Plainly it is possible to hallucinate while wide awake and not to know it. Certainly if *S* is wide awake and *S* attentively believes that he is having vivid sense-experiences then he cannot be mistaken. But vivid sense-experiences needn’t be veridical; for any set of sense-perceptions there is a possible world in which qualitatively similar experiences are caused by something other than their objects. The evidence for veridical sense-perception is always inconclusive, and the fact that *S* knows he is wide awake doesn’t enable him to close the gap. There is no epistemological advantage to knowing that I am wide awake if dreams are hallucinations. The epistemological problem about dreaming collapses into the problem about hallucinating; we need never have mentioned dreams at all.

#### IV

Is there a separate epistemological problem about dreaming? We can best proceed by considering another question: What must dreaming be like if there is a decisive epistemological advantage to knowing that one is wide awake? Obviously dreaming must be different from hallucinating. We need an account of dreaming according to which

- (1) Dreams aren't hallucinations.
- (2) It is possible to dream while wide awake.
- (3) When *S* isn't wide awake it is possible for *S* to mistake a dream for veridical sense-perception.
- (4) When *S* isn't dreaming and knows he is wide awake, then *S* knows he isn't dreaming.

What follows is just such an account. Of course, I cannot pretend that I am in a position to prove its truth (though I certainly believe it is true). Still, it is worth considering an account of dreaming which, if true, would solve the skeptical problem. Further, this account is interesting because it is far more plausible than its rival and is, I suspect, pretty much what we have in mind when we talk about dreaming anyway.

If dreams aren't perceptual hallucinations, what are they? The obvious alternative is that dreams are self-generating fantasies during sleep very much like day-dreams. When we dream then we aren't presented with visual objects in perceptual space, we merely fantasize that we are.<sup>11</sup> Apparent differences in the vivacity of waking versus nocturnal dreams are explained by the difference waking and sleeping make to the perception of fantasy. As psychologist Jerome Singer writes

In daydreaming, of course, we are constantly aware of being awake. Our processing of stimuli from the physical environment (unless we lean back and shut our eyes for a period of time) goes on, to some degree. Our waking fantasies therefore tend to be less vivid and are not, of course, taken as "real" in the same way that nocturnal dreams are.<sup>12</sup>

This theory has obvious advantages: it provides a more unified and conservative account of mental life than its rival, for it assimilates dreaming to a familiar mental process, fantasizing, common in waking subjects, as opposed to a bizarre process, hallucinating, something most waking subjects never do. It provides a simpler account of the relation between dreaming and day-dreaming: they are essentially the same phenomenon. (If they were radically different it would be more difficult to explain why they share important features, for example, why both often function as wish-fulfillments). All things being equal, we ought to construe dreaming in a way that makes it easier, not more difficult to understand. Other considerations favor this theory: Many dreamers testify that they do not dream in colors.<sup>13</sup> It seems unlikely that actual perceptual experiences are colorless, though fantasy images are often indeterminate in this way. This indeterminacy is worth

emphasizing: if I fantasize that a well-dressed man is standing before me, questions like “How many stripes were visible on his tie” need have no answer; as Sartre puts it “the image ... suffers from a sort of essential poverty.”<sup>14</sup> But if I have the visual experience these questions *do* have an answer, even if I didn’t notice – the experience contains this information. Dreams are typically indeterminate in this way; they have only the detail that we give them.<sup>15</sup>

This account drives a wedge between dreaming and hallucinating. Fantasies are thoughts, not sense-experiences. We would never say that a man who is actively hallucinating is day-dreaming. Macbeth, for instance, confronted with the hallucinatory dagger isn’t day-dreaming. Further, I can day-dream (or fantasize) that I am in pain, but I cannot hallucinate that I am in pain. Hallucinations are actual sense-experiences caused by something other than their objects, but the sense-experience of pain *is* pain, so if I hallucinate that I am in pain I have it and lack it both. Also, I can day-dream (or fantasize) that I am in pain and not be in pain, but I cannot have the sense-experience of pain and not be in pain. Therefore day-dreams (and dreams on our account), unlike hallucinations, aren’t sense-experiences.<sup>16</sup>

This account satisfies the first two of the four conditions I listed earlier: dreams aren’t hallucinations and it is possible to dream while wide awake. Of course, if I am absorbed in a day-dream I am merely awake, not wide awake; to the extent that I am absorbed in fantasy I am not alert or attentive. But I needn’t be absorbed in a day-dream to have one. There is nothing impossible about having a self-generating fantasy and observing it in an utterly lucid and attentive manner, though of course this isn’t typical.

The account satisfies the third condition too: When *S* isn’t wide awake it is possible for him to mistake a dream for veridical sense-perception. For when I am not wide awake then I am liable to be inattentive and confused; further, in sleep I may not have sense-perceptions to use as a point of comparison. As Mary Warnock observes “... we have no concept (or a very faint one) of actual perceptual objects, at the time when we experience the dream objects”.<sup>17</sup> In this condition I can readily become completely absorbed in a self-generating fantasy, so that I come to believe it is real. Muddled, inattentive, completely absorbed in fantasy in a sensory vacuum, it is possible (indeed it is sometimes actual) that I believe a fantasy is veridical sense-experience.

The fourth condition is that *S* knows he isn’t dreaming when he isn’t

dreaming and he knows he is wide awake. On this account, *S* isn't dreaming when he is having sense-experience as opposed to fantasy. Suppose, then, that *S* is confronted with vivid sense-experience and, further, that he knows he is wide awake. Can he fail to know that he is confronted with vivid sense-experience as opposed to a mere day-dream, a series of images before the mind's eye? Certainly he can mistake a fantasy for vivid sense-experience when he is asleep and deeply absorbed in his imaginings. But as *S* knows that he is wide awake he knows that he is neither asleep nor absorbed in a reverie; he knows he isn't mistaken in *that* way. But there is no other way to be mistaken. A wide-awake man can immediately distinguish vivid sense-experience from mere day-dreams; faced with paradigm sense-experience he knows these aren't merely pictures before the mind's eye in the same way that he knows that he isn't day-dreaming that he is in pain. This is the epistemological advantage to knowing one is wide awake: though waking does not itself exclude dreaming, sense-experience does and, when we are confronted with vivid sense-experience and know that we are wide awake, then we know we aren't dreaming.

But what ultimately *is* the difference between fantasy and sense-experience? Unless we know the answer to this question, how can we justify the claim that we can mistake fantasy for sense-perception when we are asleep, but can immediately distinguish vivid sense-experience from fantasy when we are wide awake? It is worth noting that such theories typically *do* justify these claims. According to Hume, the difference between sense-impressions and ideas is a matter of "different degrees of force and vivacity": impressions are "more lively perceptions" while ideas are "the less lively perceptions".<sup>18</sup> Now if *S* is asleep he might believe a weak perception is a strong one, but if he knows he is wide awake and, further, is having vivacious perceptions, surely he can immediately distinguish them from ideas. According to Sartre, perception "posits its object as existing" while an image "presents its object as *not being*".<sup>19</sup> This makes it difficult to see how we could mistake images for sense-experience; however this theory is the exception that proves the rule, for Sartre struggles mightily to show that we *can* believe images are real when we are sufficiently absorbed in fantasy.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that one of the *constraints* on a theory of this kind is that it justify the two claims above. Any theory of imagination, Sartre writes, "must account for the spontaneous discrimination made by the mind between its images and its perceptions...".<sup>21</sup>

I submit that it must also account for the obvious fact that we can mistake images for vivid sense-experiences when we are asleep; if a theory doesn't do this, we ought to look for another.

To sum up: The state of being wide awake is self-recognizing. I know that I am wide awake right now because I am wide awake, and this enables me to recognize that I am having sense-experience, not fantasy. This recognition isn't enough for me to know that I am not hallucinating, but if dreams are fantasies, that is another matter. Supposing that I am now a brain in a vat, my perceptions the product of electrical stimulations by the evil demon, it is still indubitably certain that I am wide awake and not merely fantasizing. Certainly I can believe this and be mistaken but when my belief is true it is indubitable that I am not deceived. If dreams are fantasies, sense-experience is a certain indication by which we can clearly distinguish the fact that we aren't dreaming. Descartes need only pinch himself.

## NOTES

\* I am indebted to many people for commenting on this paper, especially John Fisher and Charles Marks.

<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. Haldane and Ross, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Markie, 'Dreams and Deceivers in Meditation One', *Philosophical Review*, XC (1981), p. 192. Also see George Edward Moore, 'Certainty', in *Philosophical Papers* (Macmillan, New York, 1959), pp. 248–249.

<sup>3</sup> George Nakhnikian, 'Descartes's Dream Argument', in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 272–274. According to Nakhnikian, this means that it is possible that the man actually attentively believe that proposition while he is dreaming, not that he merely dreams that he believes it.

<sup>4</sup> Nakhnikian, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> For another definition of incorrigibility see Nakhnikian, p. 270. Nakhnikian defines *attentive belief* as follows (p. 270):

- (D4) At  $t$   $S$  believes attentively that  $p = Df.$  (i) At  $t$   $S$  believes occurrently that  $p$ , (ii) at  $t$   $S$  is paying attention to matters that would be his evidence for judging that  $p$  or for judging that not  $p$ , and (iii) among these matters stands revealed to  $S$  evidence that  $p$ , and no evidence that not  $p$ .

For the sake of simplicity I will define *attentive belief* in terms of (i) and (ii); however (D4) can be substituted throughout *salva veritate*.

<sup>6</sup> Nakhnikian, p. 272.

<sup>7</sup> I have adapted Nakhnikian's ingenious strategy in setting out *his* version of the Dreaming Argument (pp. 272–274), which neglects  $A$  entirely, to exhibit the argument that I believe actually occurs in the *Meditations*. Nakhnikian's account of the argument concludes that there is no proposition *incorrigible* for  $S$  at  $t$  that entails that  $S$  is not dreaming at  $t$ . This requires the addition of (4) to generate the conclusion that there is no

proposition indubitable for *S* that entails that *S* is not dreaming at *t*. If my attack on (4) is successful, it counts against Nakhnikian's version too. Also, it will show that *A* and Nakhnikian's account of *A* aren't equivalent.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Francis Macdonald Cornford, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, (ed.) Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 863.

<sup>9</sup> What is the relation between (3) and the first two conditions? I believe that it can be demonstrated that *R* satisfies (1) and (2) only if it satisfies (3). This is worth showing, but the proof is exceedingly lengthy and intricate, and I have left it for another paper.

<sup>10</sup> David Blumenfeld and Jean Beer Blumenfeld, 'Can I know that I am not dreaming?', in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, (ed.) Michael Hooker (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), Note 22, p. 255. The assumption that opium produces hallucinatory experiences is inaccurate. Opium produces self-generating fantasies, not hallucinations.

<sup>11</sup> This view is current among sleep-researchers. British sleep-researcher Ian Oswald writes

"Dreams are fragments of a *fantasy-life*, just as are our day-dreams ... Day-dreams on retiring to bed tend to lose their status and become dreams."

In Ian Oswald, *Sleeping and Waking* (Elsevier Publishing Company, 1962), p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Jerome Singer, *Daydreaming and Fantasy* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1976), p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Kleitman, *Sleep and Wakefulness* (The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 101–102.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Washington Square Press, 1968), pp. 10–11.

<sup>15</sup> This accounts, in part, for their "dream-like" quality. The other component is that events seem to proceed by mental or symbolic connections – it is the *meaning* of one event that is causing the next – not by physical laws. Psychologists presently have no way to test for hallucinatory sense-experience versus fantasy during REM-period sleep. But what if researchers one day determine that dreams are composed largely or entirely of perceptual hallucinations? If the rest of the argument is correct, this paper will still have an important consequence: the fact that we can mistake *fantasies during sleep* for veridical sense-experience provides no ground for skepticism.

<sup>16</sup> Note that the view that dreams are fantasies like day-dreams does *not* entail that people never hallucinate during sleep (though I think this rarely happens) but only that such hallucinations aren't dreams. Further, this view is consistent with the possibility that dreams and day-dreams sometimes *cause* hallucinations; the fact that dreams cause hallucinations hardly entails that dreams *are* hallucinations. Conversely, the fact that some sense-experiences affect the content of dreams hardly entails that these experiences are part of those dreams. Hence it is consistent that we can incorporate sense-experiences (veridical or hallucinatory) into dreams, for example, the man who hears his alarm and dreams that he is ringing a bell.

<sup>17</sup> Warnock, p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eugene Freeman (Open Court, 1966), p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Sartre, pp. 15–16.

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, pp. 207–229. Sartre's response to the skeptic appears to be very close to that of this paper. He writes (p. 208):

"But I can easily grasp a term of comparison established by Descartes, namely, the consciousness which is awake and which perceives. At each moment I can turn it into an object of a reflective consciousness which will show me its structure with certainty.

That reflective consciousness gives me precise knowledge at once: it is possible that in the dream I am imagining that I perceive; but what is certain is that when I am awake I cannot doubt that I perceive.”

<sup>21</sup> Sartre, p. 117.

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