

The Denial of Dream Experience: By Norman Malcolm

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ABSTRACT

Interest in Dream can be traced from the dawn of the human race. At the same time, it has been the human nature to enquire its reality. Since the 20th century, philosophical interest in dreaming has increasingly shifted towards questions related to philosophy of mind. Are dreams subjective experiences during sleep? It is like something to dream, or is it only like something to remember dreams after waking? Can dream reports be a trustworthy evidence for saying that dreams are conscious experience at all? The goal of this article is to investigate the relationship between dreaming, dream reporting and subjective experience during sleep. The core area of my article is Dream Skepticism, which was traditionally been the most famous and widely discussed topic by the different philosophers. I begin with an overview of received view of dreaming, formulated by Rene Descartes and then I discuss anti-experience thesis of Norman Malcolm and critical evolution of his theory. The goal of this article to show that the skepticism about dream reporting is misguided.

INTRODUCTION

Dreaming is supposed to be some kind of mental phenomena occurring in sleeping state. Interest in dream can be traced from the dawn of the human race. At the sometime, it has been the human nature to enquire its reality. From the psychologists to physicians, philosophers to authors, skeptics to ordinary people subject of dream remain the most popular as well as the most mysterious topic for discussion.

Since the 20th century, philosophical interest in dreaming has increasingly shifted towards questions related to philosophy of mind. On the one hand, commonly regarded as conscious experience during sleep. On the other hand, dream reports are taken to be untrustworthy at all. Dream recall is a known as highly unstable-phenomena and research has shown that a majority of dreams are forgotten. Such worries are strengthened by different versions of philosophical skepticism about the trustworthiness of dreams.

This paper I try to discuss skeptic approach of dreaming from Norman Malcolm's point of view. An evaluating the analysis, some recent arguments against Malcolm's theory, I have briefly discussed also.

The phenomenon of dreaming is used as key evidence for the skeptical hypothesis that everything we currently believe to be true could be false and generated by a dream. Descartes holds the common sense view that dreams, which regularly occur in all people, are sequence of experience often similar to those we have in waking life. This has come to be labeled as the 'received view' of dreaming. According to this theory, dreams are conscious

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experience we have during sleep which are sometimes reported upon waking. This can be separated into two parts- (1) Dreams are experiences that occur during sleep and (2) Dreams are reported upon waking. This view not only widely accepted in the literature but it is also the common sense view of anyone who has remembered a dream. Everything that we can do in waking life, we can also do in dreams. The exact same mental States can occur in dreams just as they do in waking life. We can believe, judge, reason and converse with what we take to be other individuals in our dreams since we can be frightened in a dream- we can be frightened during sleep. According to received view of dreaming, we do not wake up with misleading memories. I might wake unable to recall the exact details of certain parts of dream, but I will not wake up and believe I had a dream involving contents which did not occur.

Aside from concerns about empirical plausibility, it is important to note that Cartesian dream skepticism in the newer literature has been to question these assumption and deny either the dream are experiences at all (Malcolm, 1956), or that they are deceptive in the ways envisioned by Descartes.

Malcolm's Analysis of Dreaming.

Norman Malcolm's study of dreaming first appeared in an article "Dreaming and Skepticism" and this article was later elaborated in his monograph "Dreaming" (1956). Both represent a direct attack against the 'received view' or the 'traditional approach' of dreaming. Malcolm's main aim is to refute the opinion that dreams are identical with

images, thoughts or emotions occurring in sleep. Malcolm observe that philosophers like Descartes to Augustine to Russell believed that dreams are conscious mental state present during sleep. Many psychologists as well as ordinary people also agreed with this view. Malcolm claims that our dreams are not delusive experiences because they are not experiences at all. We can separate Malcolm's challenge against received view into three arguments

1. dream reports are unverifiable
2. sleep and dreaming have conflicting definitions
3. making assertion and judgment during sleep is not possible at all.

A. The impossibility of verifying Dream Reports:

Malcolm's claim that the received view is unverifiable because dream reports are insufficient to believe the metaphysical claim that dreaming consciously takes place during sleep. Malcolm strongly mentions that dream cannot be a serious of thought, image etc. -occurring in sleep. According to him, he also added that psychologists have come to be uncertain whether dream occurs during sleep or during the moment of waking up. For this, Malcolm argues that, it is 'impossible to decide- between the two '(Malcolm, 1956 p-29). Therefore, the question when, in his sleep, did he dream? is fence less. He also states that, the concept of the time of occurrence of a dream and how long a dream might last -has no specific justification. "In this sense, a dream is not an 'occurrence' and, therefore, not an occurrence during sleep" (Malcolm: Dreaming, 1959, p-30)

To support his view, here Malcolm discusses a statement made by renowned philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who also questioned about verifiability of what we should do about a man who has a bad memory. How we can trust his reports of dream? According to received view when we recall dreams, we recall the same content of earlier experience. On the contrary, Wittgenstein's view establishes the possibility that an individual could recall content that did not occur.

According to Malcolm, 'dream' does not refer to anything over and above the waking report. This is why Malcolm thinks that the notion of 'dreaming' is an exemplar of Wittgenstein's idea of prejudices "produced by 'grammatical illusions"(Malcolm: Dreaming, 1959, P- 75)

B. The conflicting definition of "sleep" and "dreaming"

According to Malcolm's 2nd argument, he accuses that the received view contradicting itself. The hypothesis concerning the presence of mental activity during sleep, are, in a certain way, self contradictory.

We all are aware that sleep means lack of consciousness. On the other hand dreaming is said to involve conscious experience. Experience implies consciousness, sleep implies lack of experience; therefore the claim that dreams could occur during sleep implies consciousness and lack of consciousness. So the received view involves in a contradiction.

This alleged contradiction of sleep and dreaming support Malcolm's first argument the dreams are unverifiable because any attempt to verify that dreams could possible occur during sleep.

C. The impossibilities of communication or making judgement during sleep.

Malcolm claims that if anyone can make assertion in his sleep, (like 'I am sleep') than it bound to be false. For from the fact that someone made such an assertion it follows that he is awake. Malcolm argues that the Supposition that sleepers make judgment would be logically impossible to verify, because any behavior showing that a judgment was made would ipso facto show that the person was not asleep. For Malcolm adds that the notion of a sleeper's making judgment is "... it is senseless in the sense that nothing can count in favor of either its truth or falsify."(Malcolm 1959 p-)

Malcolm's account of how dream reports function suggests a close parallel between dream telling and storytelling. The expression 'I dreamt' often operates in a manner analogous to "let's suppose". But whereas "let's suppose" suggest that the described event did not occur.

Another argument to refute traditional dream theory is that, "remembering dreams" seems to be misuse of language. Ordinarily it at time 'T', I remembered that x occurred, it follows that at some time prior to "T" I was aware that 'x' occurred. Malcolm however argues that his previous awareness condition is incompatible with sleep. An underlying problem with this view is what exactly Malcolm means by 'conscious experience'

[...] The phrase "mental activity", "mental phenomenon", "conscious experiences" are so vague that I should not have known what I was asserting. (Malcolm: Dreaming 1959, p- 52). Moreover, if having experiences in sleep involves having thoughts, impressions, beliefs etc. in sleep; the dreams are not, according to Malcolm experiences.

Malcolm again claims that another evidence such as sleep walking or sleep talking not count as evidence for saying that dreams are experiences, occurring during deep sleep, because they would show that the person at least partially awake. Similarly, any physiological criterion of dreaming (such as EEG measures of brain activity during sleep) would change the concept of dreaming.

Malcolm discusses a study by Dement and Kleitman where they try to prove that people woken from a REM sleep could remember accurately the duration of the dream and subjects of the dream. According to him, dream science has a wrong starting - point; ' The interest in a physiological criterion of dreaming is due, I believe, to an error that philosophers, psychologists and everyone who reflects on the nature of dreaming that a dream must have a definite location and duration in physical time. " (Malcolm: Dreaming 1959, P-75)

Malcolm further argues that, even if dream is an event, it does not have to be in Time and Place in the physical sense. Actually the Time and Place in dreams are very vague and they are merely super added to events when people wake up ("just before", "right after"). He also believes that there seem to be a time - structure, but this can be explained by somatic reasons - for example, blanket is taken away would introduce "then it became very cold".

Furthermore, Malcolm claims that the sentence "I am asleep "cannot be used to make a judgment due to lack of

verification. Of course, Malcolm admits that the first – person present tense indicative use of “I am in pain” is meaningful because there is a Criterion for determining whether someone uses the sentence “I am in pain” correctly. But in the case of “I am asleep” there is no such criterion.

Malcolm observes that, even though “I am asleep” has no sense, its negation “I am not asleep” has a sense. He also adds that “Are you asleep”? Has the grammatical form of question, but it is not actually used as a question. Malcolm agrees that “dreaming while asleep” could be meaningful notion but as contrasted with “judging while asleep” which has no sense.

As a conclusion, we can draw that, waking testimony is the sole criterion of dreaming and other physiological criterion introduced by contemporary research on dreams would alter the normal concept of dreaming beyond recognition.

Critical Evaluation

Malcolm’s analysis of dreaming faces an enormous amount of criticism. Its early impact is reflected in Dunlop’s (1977) collection “Philosophical Essays on Dreaming” and till date most philosophical publication on dreaming discusses his view at least in passing. The most profound objection is that Malcolm assures an overly strict form at verification as well as a naïve view of language and conceptual change. The main problem is, many thinkers today assume that Justification does not depend on strict criteria with the help of which the truth of a statement can be determined with absolute certainty.

Now I consider another popular criticism of Malcolm’s theory made by **D. M. Armstrong (1968)**. Armstrong is a supporter of Materialist theory of Mind and he makes objection against Malcolm’s thesis under the section of “behaviourism” and claims that dreams are events that occur in the minds during sleep, the existence of dreams falsifies behaviourism. *

Armstrong’s argues in support of psychological identify theory by claiming that the concept of mental state is the concept of inner cause of outward behavior. According to him, that dreams are inner events and Malcolm has only concentrated on outward criteria without proper analysis of dreaming as a mental event. Armstrong believes that dreams are perceptual experience during sleep. “The core of dreaming is a Perceptual experience involving belief. Dreaming is simply the total hallucination occurring during sleep. [Armstrong, A Materialist Theory of mind P-304].

As Armstrong exponents reductive analysis of perception, he further claims that as illusory perception, “dreams are acquiring of false beliefs about the nature of current situation and environment”. The main objective of Armstrong’s argument is that images and dreams can be analyzed in terms of materialism without destroy their unique differences from perception.

Putnum’s objection:

Malcolm’s analysis of dreaming engendered an enormous amount of criticism According to Malcolm’s view, researchers are not really looking into dreaming as the received view understands the concept of dreaming. In a particular, he accused Dement and Kleitman of replacing the retrospective criterion of dream reporting with a new,

physiological criterion. By introducing REM sleep methods, Malcolm founded that, it is produced a misconception of the nature of the concept of dreaming. In trying to investigate dreaming in the laboratory, these researchers had changed the perception of dreaming to something else. Hilary Putnum (31st July 1926- 13th March 2016), a leading American philosopher who rejects Malcolm’s description of dreaming. Putnum thinks that, Malcolm’s argument depends on strong form of logical behaviorism which can be ruled out easily. According to Putnum, science updates our concepts and doesn’t replace them: the received view seeks confirmation from empirical observations. Putnum states the Multiple Sclerosis (MS), disease which is made very difficult to diagnose because the symptoms resemble those of other neurological diseases and not all of the symptoms are usually present. Different neurologists have come up with different diagnosis. Similarly, in the case of Malcolm’s claim it can be found that, we are still talking about the same thing when we talk about the new way of verifying the existence of dream. If Putnum’s attempt is successful that researchers are not inventing a new conception of sleep and dreaming, then we can find the others way of verify our understanding of dreaming and the received view is continuous with empirical results. This is an important step towards making genuinely scientific dream research possible.

Conclusion

From what I have discussed so far the following Conclusion can be drawn:-

It can be said that, Malcolm has unnecessarily restricted criterion of dreaming. If dreams are nonevents or if dreams are not any kind of experiences, what does the criterion establish? Of course, Dream events do not occur in the real world, but there is something in it also. When I say I had a dream, I do not merely want to say that events mentioned did not occur. I also want to say that they did occur in my dream.

Recent advanced scientific study of dream, namely, the REM theory, prove that’s, dreams is a purely experience, not just an illusion. With current technology it is impossible to discern the specifics of dream content, such as characters and events. Furthermore, according to advanced technology neural activation correlated with reports give some evidence that consciousness occurs during sleep. However, Malcolm has definitely raised an interesting problem or dreaming, which is still open for further philosophical discussion.

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