

DREAMS AND TIME

THE KNOWLEDGE OF DREAMS

Until now, the analysis of dreams has dealt almost exclusively with their contents and has been concerned with an attempt to extract all their meaning from the images which appear in them. As is well known, the incorporation into science of the analysis of dreams began with Freud, who, upon discovering a basic hypothesis or subject, quickly arrived at a kind of metaphysics of which dreams are the manifestation: the libido, which is, in essence, desire.

But, in dealing with the phenomenon of dreams as a part of human life, one must first study their form: the form of the dream, first of all; later, the species of dreams, if such species exist. One must, that is, arrive at a phenomenology of the dream and of dreams. Such a phenomenology does not exhaust the study of dreams; it is simply a first approach to knowledge of dreams, an introduction.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE DREAM

In the first place, we must make clear the sense in which we are using the term "phenomenology." We mean by it the study of the "phenomenon," and phenomenon is what becomes manifest, what appears. This does not imply, or require, the use of the phenomenological method of Husserl,

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because the original meaning of the word “phenomenon” is the one accepted here.

THE PSYCHIC PHENOMENON

The relationship we have with our psyche is immediate. But the psyche is a phenomenon for us, for the knowledge-seeker who is confronted by it as by a reality which is “given.” What we ourselves term our soul or “psyche,” and what occurs in this soul or psyche, is something that we can know only partially and on certain occasions: in actions which we ourselves have produced, when we have decided to do so, in what is understood to be a “voluntary act,” an expression of liberty. But “liberty” and “will” are employed here in the traditionally established sense; hence the use of quotation marks.

Below and beyond those voluntarily determined actions lies the spontaneous life of our psyche, which only in exceptional situations is known to us in an inner way. In this life there are facts and situations entirely unknown to us and which defy our efforts to understand them; they are reality.¹ This reality appears in an especially pure form in dreams. Freud was right about this.

But, in consequence, we must approach an understanding of it by treating it as a reality which is independent of us and which, nevertheless, is most truly “ours,” because it is the most immediate and spontaneous kind of reality.

To approach directly the contents of dreams amounts to the same thing as approaching what we receive in the perception of the so-called outer world when only the content of those perceptions is analyzed but not the perception as such; that is, without having constructed a psychology and a phenomenology of perception and without having posed, philosophically, the problem of reality as such. This kind of approach is an attempt to understand the value and meaning of dreams without having first asked one’s self about the dream in itself. What are dreams and how do they differ from waking, in which we perceive what has always been understood by the term “reality”? The reality of dreams, however, is an aspect of the phenomenon of our own reality, because in dreams our lives appear as pure phenomena, which we witness. The dream state is the initial state of our lives; we waken from the dream—wakefulness, not dreaming, supervenes. We leave dreaming for wakefulness, not vice versa.

1. “The nature of reality is resistance,” says Ortega y Gasset; we accept this idea as a point of departure. Later we shall define other aspects of the nature of reality in terms of time.

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This is apparent in the growth of the individual from child to adult, in the course of human history, in its successive periods of awakening to consciousness. Dreams are at one and the same time the most spontaneous and the most alien form of our lives; they are the state in which we are farthest from ourselves and freest from intervention. Hence, the ambiguity of dreams.

In dreams we are objects to ourselves. The aspect of our lives which appears in dreams is an object. It is an object because it resists us, because it is independent of us, but, most especially, because we cannot change it. And it is at the same time the most subjective aspect of our lives, since it is spontaneous, pure action without thought, and since everything in it is for us immediate and aproblematical.

This is a state in which the subject-object relationship has not yet appeared; the subject has not yet been differentiated from the object. What, then, is dominant?

This question conjures up two kinds of dreams or two forms of the appearance of dreams, which will be more fully described later. One must first observe that which is characteristic of all dreams—of the very state of dreaming—and why, while the dream state is indeed the primary state, it could never have become the whole form of human life.

OUTLINE OF A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DREAMING

One of the characteristics of dreams is that in them people and even events rapidly give place to others and mingle with them; this brusque shifting has a quality which poetry has always expressed in metaphors derived from dreaming: they *disappear*. But there is something stranger still, and that is that we are not astonished by this process; in dreams we never wonder about anything, and we never stop to think, as we do in reality. In some dreams we follow what happens logically, with a form of reasoning which adapts itself to them; we never dissent from what happens in the dream as we do from the events of reality which we experience during wakefulness. In literature there are works which have a dreamlike quality; these are tragic works, Greek tragedy, for example, or in modern literature works like Kafka's *The Trial* or all the novels of Dostoevski. These works have this dreamlike quality because the protagonists do not wonder and are not astonished; they appear immersed in anguish or in any other state of mind and are at home in these states.

In classical literature such situations are resolved by awakening to reality. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* this happens in a typical fashion when

Oedipus becomes aware of the reality of his situation; he then awakens and tears out his eyes, the organs of sight. That he should do this is by no means a matter of chance. Once awakened, he finds himself thrust outside of life; he is really lifeless, but he has time for . . . anything that may happen. In any event, he has *time*.

The dreamer is not surprised that a figure or an event in a dream should vanish; he is not astonished that figures or dreams should persist monotonously; he is not sufficiently surprised to adopt a questioning attitude. Neither does he feel any concern about the multiplicity of events which occur. But he does not fail to understand them. And if he does become sufficiently surprised to adopt a questioning attitude, he awakens. He awakens not only at moments of great suffering but also at moments of great happiness, and sometimes, in dreams which should be distinguished as possessing special value, when there is an obstacle to overcome, a threshold to cross (a door, steps to climb, a street which is closed off), or when he is only a fraction of an inch from an object which is held out to him and which seems precious to him, and yet that distance cannot be traversed. In dreams we never perform a genuine action in which we overcome an obstacle or find a solution to a problem which has arisen.

To be sure, there are dreams in which a conflict is resolved; but that is precisely the way to describe what happens: the conflict is resolved or appears so, or the solution unexpectedly emerges from a painful situation which has been carried to its limit and emerges in the form of the appearance of some other image. In dreams, then, we are present at a conflict which concerns us, something which is taking place in our presence and which we may or may not feel is related to us, but which never causes us to take action. In dreams we never think, properly speaking, although it may happen that we find the solution for a problem which tortured us when we were awake. But this is not thinking. It is finding; it is being present at a revelation or at a disclosure, but always just being present.

The examination of a series of dreams on the same subject, with the same images in which there is an obstacle, finally overcome, will bring us still closer to the decisive characteristic of dreaming. This, for example, is a dream which recurs: there is a street which is closed off, until, finally, it is thrown open—perhaps someone may appear to guide us. But, on the other hand, there are no dreams in which the protagonist who sees the street become closed to him succeeds, after self-interrogation, the adoption of a questioning attitude, or a moment of thought, in passing through the street.

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There is no place in dreams for the privileged and exceptional moment, the one moment, set apart from the others, in which we question ourselves or decide for ourselves to do something; this moment of pure activity that represents thinking, desiring. Everything happens as if the dream were determined from the beginning, as if it were a historical fact that had already happened and which can neither be added to nor subtracted from. In short: Time does not exist in dreams. While we are dreaming, we do not possess time. When we awake, time is restored to us.

What we are deprived of during dreams, then, is time. This deprivation occurs in all probability without regard to whether or not the dream is instantaneous; for this dream state can be prolonged in time, during a measurable period of time. And even if the dream takes place in an instant, this fact does not cause us to be deprived of time. What causes this deprivation is the fact that we are not permitted the use of time, we are in time, immersed in it, but unable to use it; we are present in time which has no master. And the consequence of this is the non-appearance of the instant, of that unique, privileged instant—our moment, in which we experience astonishment and wonder, the moment void of any occurrence. The use of time, time in the human sense, arises from a void, from a gap in the flow of time. For in dreaming there is a succession of events, images which disappear and give place to others, but there is not that empty moment which is what causes something actually to happen. When, during waking, we say, “This has happened to me,” the fact is that there has been a gap and after it something has happened, and after that another gap, which is what causes the event to become past. Consciousness is what places the events of our lives in the past. If this were not so, all that has happened to us would coexist, continuing to weigh heavily upon us. Whether the dream were a happy one or a sad one would not matter; life would be a nightmare.

The structure of time in dreams is, then, without gaps; it is a compact time into which we cannot enter. So, in a certain sense, we are outside what is happening to us; consciousness does not participate; it is merely present. Consciousness watches what is happening, even if what is happening is the explication of a desire.

The dream world is the world of Parmenides: it is “being,” one, identical with itself, without gaps, outside of time. In it the psyche is like the “one” of which Parmenides speaks, “without gaps.” But the identity is a pre-identity, since there are events which, paradoxically, take place within the atemporal or pretemporal unity of the dream, of the dream-

quality, or, rather, of the dream-reality. That is why in dreams everything is possible and real. The arrow reaches its target before it has been shot, or never reaches it, and Achilles never catches the tortoise.

Zeno's "aporias," intended to prove the impossibility of motion—that motion is not a part of being—becomes fact in dreams; dreaming, like Parmenides' one, is without gaps. It is for this reason that in dreams everything is either impossible or already exists; everything is or is not, in an absolute way.

Dreaming is the static appearance of life. But since psychic life is, by its very nature, movement, or happening, dreaming is paradoxically the immobilizing of movement, the absolute of movement. This occurs also at the other extreme of human life: in artistic creations, and especially in the art which is more movement than any other, music. Music is organized dreaming—dreaming which, without ceasing to be dreaming, has passed through time and has learned from time, has made use of time. And every successful life (while at the same time remaining basically a dream) has developed in time and made use of time in the process of realizing fully its vocation, love, and knowledge; this is to say, whatever man has created. Human creativity as a process submits to time, passes through time without being destroyed by it, without becoming fragmented in it or controlled by it.

For real human time is the time which shatters the primitive unity of the psychic process, to which outside happenings are subjected as they come into being. What has happened to us during waking enters into the world of dreams, into the basic psyche, experiencing the absence of time, becoming motionless. That is why events which have occurred in different and widely separated circumstances during the life of the dreamer are interrelated; that is why fragments from infancy or from periods far removed from the present appear. For in fact in the psyche, which is timeless, no movement occurs; and what comes from outside contributes to the formation of a single event, fragments of which emerge like monstrosities.

This absence of gaps and of void in the temporal flow, which causes time not to exist as such in dreams, is the inverse of the spatial form of dreams. Empty space in dreaming appears as a place. Every dream takes place in empty space, to such an extent that we might say that spatial emptiness is the natural place for dreams.

In this empty space images float or glide without gravity or weight. And so all the intensity of perception, all the strength of these images, arise

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from the images themselves, from their mere signification, their mere meaning. During waking many of the things which we perceive would not even be perceived if they were not under the influence of gravity, if we did not realize that they have weight. This emptiness, which is the inverse of the absence of temporal gaps in dreams, is perfectly appropriate to them, since emptiness is actually absence of space.

The fact that movements occur in dreams does not invalidate what has been said. On the contrary, we perceive in this way the nature of the motion which occurs in dreams, a movement which is, so to speak, "pure," without time or space: motion of the thing itself, the motion characteristic of a primary psyche which has no connections with reality, the psyche impermeable to space and time which reveals itself as pure action, not conditioned in any way, free and automatic at one and the same time.

By empty space we mean that space which has no weight or resistance (distance to be traversed), and by space we mean that which has resistance to bodies and movement—a distance to be traversed.

What, then, is the nature of the movements performed in dreams or of those which occur in dreams? They have the nature not of being effected but of motion-being, of developing in apparent motion, in motion-rest, substantial motion, so to speak. Therefore, this movement cannot be changed or corrected. That is why in dreams which contain an obstacle to be overcome, a distance, however brief, to be traversed, the obstacle is not overcome and the distance is not traversed. And if these were to be accomplished, there would be no sense of having performed any action.

For example, an object of any kind, the possession of which is valuable, may appear in a dream to be at a distance from the hand so small as scarcely to be perceptible; when the hand moves to grasp it, the dream vanishes. And the dreamer would probably awaken if there were any desire to seize the object; that is, if the tension which precedes a real movement was present. In dreams nothing can be done; the only action which we are permitted is that of waking, of doing everything possible to wake up.

That is why when we wake up we are free. The analysis of dreams is the counterproof of liberty. In wakefulness, then, we possess time, and being free depends upon being able to dispose of time. Liberty and thought, which are movements, not simple traces of events, depend on the possession of time.

This point provides the basis for an investigation of the intrusion of

dreams into waking and of actions which are automatically amoral: crime, madness, absence of will, of liberty, and of time.

The only action possible in a dream is waking up. But this can occur only if something happens; that is, if there is an interruption which creates emptiness through a discontinuity. "If only something would happen," is what one longs and hopes for when in a state of desperation. Let something happen, even if it is only a mosquito flying by. What is important is the empty space, the rupture which begins the discontinuity which we need in order to be free.

The passage, then, from dreaming to waking occurs in that moment of emptiness in which time begins to flow. Waking is a flowing. Dreaming is something compact and closed, in which takes place something which was conceived of beforehand, whose intention and whose originator are unknown. ("We are shadows of dreams," says Pindar.)

Dreaming, then, is the manifestation of the psyche in its ambiguous character of being both real and unreal. The ambiguity is due to the absence of time. It is the appearance in undifferentiated unity of what will be dissociated later, when consciousness has intervened, into good and evil, positive and negative, beautiful and ugly—opposites which appear together in a certain kind of horror, and the attractive and the repellent which occur together in representations of an erotic, not yet amorous, nature. It is a kind of rotation of that which contains everything, a unity not differentiated because of the absence of time.

Thought destroys the ambiguity, or begins to do so, because it creates the past. The past is past because thought casts it behind; thought casts behind the present or the past which is there, the past which has not departed (as in periods of obsession, which are dreams in wakefulness); thought makes it past. Thinking creates the past as past.

THE TIME OF CONSCIOUSNESS, THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE PERSON

A human being makes use of the time which consciousness makes available to him, consecutive time, a co-ordinate to which any event may be referred. But this does not mean that during wakefulness we are constantly concerned with that time. We may leave it to fall into the atemporality of dreaming. Astonishment and surprise, for example, create a sort of casting-loose from that consecutive kind of time; they constitute a closed interlude, and a moment later the subject has installed himself in the appropriate moment of time—he seizes time on the march, so to speak; and this means that he uses time as an instrument.

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A human being makes use of time because he is able to stop it; he may ignore what is happening and withdraw from it. "Self-absorption" is a withdrawal from time to the time of dreaming—atemporality—or to a slower rhythm. It is the withdrawal during which thought is born; this is also a closed interlude, blank time, in which thought is born.

The human being is made in time. He fulfils himself in time. Temporality is not decay but a means of fulfilment. At the intersection of what is immobile in the person, with time, is human life. There are two kinds of immobility: the act, actual being—the person as a principle—and the inertia of the eager and immobile psyche, incapable of moving by itself, capable only of passive desire.

The psyche is the material of human life; time is the environment. Adaptation to the environment is, for man, adaptation to his environment. All animals have an environment to which they must adapt themselves. Man does not, says Max Scheler. But man has time, his multiple times.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of time in dreams is directed toward the investigation of the multiplicity of times in which man, at least contemporary man, lives:

1. Atemporality of the initial psyche which appears in dreams. Absence of time which may be used to stop, to be astonished, to ask questions of self, to think, of time for thought and liberty.
2. Time established by consciousness: present, past, future. Measurable time.
3. States of lucidity: appearance of a unity of meaning in which time, without having disappeared, has been transcended by this unity where the beginning is already informed by the end.

This last time, insofar as it is creation and thought, is not transferable, just as with dreams. But shared dreams exist, at certain periods of collective, historical life. Certain moments in history are lived as if outside time and history; they are, nevertheless, decisive moments, historical moments.

This investigation tends ultimately toward the establishment of the process of integration of the personality which leads to liberty, to progressive knowledge of self, and to the possession of inner space.

There is a need for a special investigation of dreams of reality in which the situation of the person is shown as well as for an investigation into states such as madness and crime, viewed as extended dreams of the first sort, that is to say, which are characterized by absence of time. The solu-

tion would be to “make something happen,” as language has always put it. It is the point of departure for an investigation into action and knowledge, into time and thinking.

It is also the point of departure for an examination which will show ethics arising from the integrating development of the human personality. Not an ethics conferred from without but one required by the very process of human development: ethics and training in liberty. An ethics of making use of time, of entering into and possessing time down to the last instant: morality as taking possession of time.

The basic thesis is that of the multiplicity of vital times; these may be the three planes which have already been indicated: that of the psyche, that of consciousness, and that of the person. To these correspond three kinds of movement: that of the psyche is the ambiguity which is a sign of the absence of time, the need for temporal unfolding, tension without movement; that of the consciousness is movement which grasps and which dissociates, which surrounds and which rejects, which opens and closes: purposeful movement; that of the person is circular and integrating.

“Life is a dream,” then, can be explained in this way:

We are originally plunged into the absence of time and of liberty. When time is restored to us, when we recover time, we are free—we enter into freedom. Liberty is a question of time, which is to say that human life is taking over and making use of the reality which is within the dream: taking over the truth-liberty which is inside the dream.