

On the Scientific Importance of Dream

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IT is extremely interesting, at the present stage of thought, to trace the influence of what we may call "the occult wave" upon the minds of our scientists, and to see how many of them are reluctantly forced to come to conclusions that twenty years ago they would have repudiated with scorn, and how many of them go through long and severe processes of argument and experiment to convince themselves of what to us appear self-evident truths. In several quarters, just at present, the subject of the multiple nature of man has been taken up, and the main object of Baron du Prel's *Philosophy of Mysticism* is to prove that there is a Higher Consciousness in man, and that that Higher Consciousness is identical with Spirit, one and universal. As he approaches his subject from a purely scientific standpoint, and as his book is a long and elaborate one, I have endeavoured to sum up, as briefly as possible, the main points of his argument as based upon the phenomena of our dream-life.

The problem of the work, as Baron du Prel states it in his preface, is the question whether our Ego is wholly embraced in self-consciousness, and his position is, that analysis of the dream-life leads to a negative answer; it shows that self-consciousness falls short of its object, that the Ego exceeds the self-consciousness.

The circuit of the knowledge and self-knowledge possible to an organized being is determined by the number of its senses, and by the strength of the stimuli on which its senses re-act; that is, by what is called the psycho-physical threshold of sensibility, or the boundary-line between the conscious and the unconscious. As life rises into higher forms, so does that threshold rise; that is, the higher a race stands in the scale of being, the wider its limits of knowledge. But this mobility of the threshold in the race must also exist in the individual. This is susceptible of proof from the analysis of our dream-life, but is more strikingly apparent in somnambulism. The displacement of the threshold of sensibility is thus common to the biological process, and to somnambulism, and we [Page 4] may therefore infer from somnambulism not only the mode of existence of our higher consciousness, but also the possibility of a future and more highly developed form of life, where these extraordinary faculties will be normal and usual, instead of exceptional.

It is the rule that only when the activity of the senses is suppressed can the inner working of our higher Ego be perceived, as the stars are first visible with the going down of the sun. This is why the study of the sleep state is so important, particularly in that deepest phase which we call somnambulism. As soon as it is shown that our sleep-life possesses positive characteristics peculiar to itself, it will become the duty of philosophy to make as thorough a study of this third of our existence as it has of our waking life.

The endeavour of the human intellect is to explain the significance of the world and of ourselves, and we find that the moral progress of humanity is thoroughly dependent on the evolutionary capacity of science. The first condition of intellectual progress is that we should realize that true progress is always in the depth, and not in extension on the same level. As Bacon said: "No perfect discovery can be made upon a flat or a level; neither is it possible to discover the more remote and deeper parts of any science if you stand but upon the level of the same science and ascend not to a higher science".

It was formerly believed, for instance, that the world lay outside of us, and through our senses produced an image of itself upon our brain, and truth was to be captured by study of the object. But when Kant exposed the fallacy of this assumption, and urged the prior examination of the subject and its cognitions, research was begun upon another and a higher plane of investigation.

From the stand-point of every animal organism we can divide external nature into two parts, the lower the grade the more unequal the division, the one including that part of nature with which the said organism is related through its senses, the other that which remains outside this limit, and is therefore transcendental to the organism in question. As development goes on, the boundary of consciousness continually rises. But as there are parts of nature which remain invisible to us, being out of relation to our sense of sight — like the microscopic world, for instance — so there are parts of nature not existing for us, owing to entire absence of relation to our organism.

Science has now herself acknowledged that when she shall have explained the world we see, it is only a represented world that will have been explained, a secondary phenomenon, a mere product of our sense and understanding. Not only are there more things than senses, but things are other than they seem. We are not truly cognizant of things, but only [Page 5] of the modes in which our senses re-act upon them. Whence it follows that differently constituted beings must have different worlds.

We may, therefore, conclude that consciousness does not exhaust its object, the world. The second great problem to be explained is man. As the world is the object of consciousness, so is the Ego the object of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness may be as inadequate to the Ego as consciousness to the world; or the Ego may as much exceed self-consciousness as the world exceeds consciousness. This is not only logically thinkable, but has also in its favour analogy, and the doctrine of evolution. If the existence of a transcendental world follow from the theory of knowledge accepted in this age, the theory of self-knowledge belonging to the next age should bring with it the recognition of a transcendental Ego. The question of the soul, which has been stationary for centuries, would be advanced to a wholly new stage if it could be shown that self-consciousness only partially comprehends its object. There are not only boundaries of knowledge which are historically surmountable, but also limitations of consciousness and knowing which are only biologically surmountable.

We stand in the presence of an inexorable alternative: either there is a progress for the future, in which case we must always and *à priori* grant the existence of facts which contradict our theories, or there are no such facts; and then we must also deny future progress to which, at the highest, only a labour on the level could be ascribed. Owing to the capacity for development, we must expect to be perpetually confronted with fresh problems, for which solution must be sought on deeper lines.

The fact that much that was forgotten emerges again from the unconscious in dreams, proves that in dreaming there is activity in those folds of the brain which in waking are either functionless or whose functions do not result in consciousness. If the deepening of sleep implies the cessation of function in the whole cerebral nerve-system, and yet the inner waking continues and is even exalted, we are forced to suppose, as consciousness presupposes nerves, that in deep sleep the organ of dream is that nerve-system of ganglia, with the solar plexus for centre, which is still so little understood by our physiology. [Here is certainly an unwarranted jump at a conclusion] Physiology cannot demonstrate that the dream organ is incapable of significant dreaming. It has long proved that consciousness is not co-extensive with the material senses; that there is more relation between us and nature than we can be conscious of; tones we cannot hear, colours we cannot see, etc. Sleep can only suspend the *sensuous* relation to nature, but not that which is unconsciously present in waking existence; therefore it may set us free [Page 6] to arrive at the wider consciousness in our inner awakening. Are there, then, forces of Nature of which we become aware in sleep that have escaped the consciousness of sense? We must reply in the affirmative. Wienholt found that healthy sleeping children were disturbed by passes made with an iron key (or other metal object) at a distance of half an inch from the face, or merely approached to the ear. Sleep, therefore, may be accompanied by a perception at a distance, and announces the presence of substances which do not excite feeling in the waking man.

The dreams of deep sleep are lost to recollection, but should be the most significant since the displacement of the threshold of sensibility progresses with the deepening of sleep. Remembering dreams can usually contain only insignificant phantasms, as they are those which immediately follow the falling asleep, or immediately precede the wakening, and are thus connected with the slightest displacement of the threshold. As the failure of memory in the case of deep dream can only be ascribed to the want of a common organ with the waking consciousness, the survival of memory between the light dream and waking must result from at least partial community of organ. The withdrawal of the bridge of memory proves physiologically the change of organ and *vice versa*.

The dreams of light sleep are remembered because the organ is partly the same as in waking consciousness, and are senseless, because of this mixed activity of the two organs. The dream-organ can only exhibit its unmixed activity in deep sleep. It is in somnambulism that the deep sleep exhibits itself in connection with ideas, and in sleep-walking in acts founded on ideas. It needs only to be proved that sleep, somnambulism, and sleep-walking are intimately related conditions, to dispel the last objection against the possibility of orderly and significant dreams.

In our waking state, a constant, even if slight and unconscious, effort of the will is necessary to keep our attention fixed on the point that immediately concerns us, and this strain is productive of fatigue. But a dream, though ever so long, does not tire, no aim being kept in view, and the inner consciousness being merely passive. Associations, memories, external stimuli, internal agitations of the brain, or of the nutritive processes, are all disturbers of the dream of light sleep, and, therefore, its confusion is very explicable, and the difficulty of retaining incoherent fragments, even in waking, shows how hardly these unconnected bits of dream can be recoverable by memory.

But as the bridge of memory fails between deep sleep (when the dream-organ is undisturbed) and waking, the existence of significant and orderly dreaming can only be proved when the dreamer translates his [Page 7] dream into acts, as in sleep-walking, or accompanies it with words, as in the somnambulant state, or when, contrary to the rule, it is recollected.

Somnambulism, which splits the consciousness into two persons — the "I" of daily life, and the "I" which emerges only in the somnambulatory condition — thus shows us not only that deep sleep is not dreamless, but that our daily consciousness does not exhaust its object.

Schopenhauer says that in dream, somnambulism, and related conditions, we obtain the objectively represented institution by a different organ than in waking, and he speaks, therefore, of a special dream-organ. The teachings of both Fechner and Reichenbach also favour the view that in sleep an organ is active which in waking is either functionless, or whose functions remain below the threshold of sensibility. But even if every impression of consciousness could only be connected with the brain, it must yet be conceded that in deep sleep there must be other avenues of perception leading to the brain than in waking. But if we consider the fact of absence of memory on waking from deep sleep, that fact suggests an actual transposition of the stage of consciousness, and thus an interchange of functions between the brain and the ganglionic system.

If we have two consciousnesses, rising and sinking like the weights in a scale, then from the definition of both can we first attain to the definition of man.

If self-consciousness does not exhaust its object, then corresponding to the transcendental world must be a transcendental Ego, and our sense of personality, by which we know ourselves as mere willing beings, does not coincide with our whole Ego.

Should man be a double being in the sense indicated, with an earthly personality represented by a smaller circle included in the larger circle of the transcendental Ego, the boundary between them being the line between the conscious and the unconscious, these two positions of his being must be related to each other as the scales of a balance, or as the stars, which optically appear only when the sun disappears. And as the emergence of the transcendental Ego can only take place when the empirical Ego is in abeyance, which is the case in sleep, and as sleep forms one-third of our existence, it is evident that the dream-world affords most chance of proving a metaphysical individuality. (The weighty and primary fact is *that we dream*; the content of dream being of secondary consideration)

Even the empirical Ego must encounter influences from the transcendental world, inasmuch as the two Egos are indeed identical, but for the empirical consciousness such influences are below the threshold of sensibility, and, though we have evidences of its capacity of evolution, it is still only in germ, and even in trance, ecstasy, and similar conditions, it may not be susceptible of a development which would correspond to a biological [Page 8] process of millions of years. This consideration alone should suffice to restrain us from an over-estimation of dreams. And dream-images of true transcendental content can be only symbolical, as they must necessarily clothe themselves in the form of our everyday consciousness.

Still more distinctly than by the alternation of waking and dream is the duplication of our nature revealed by that remarkable class of dreams wherein we are given information by other persons on subjects of which we are ignorant — an example that clearly shows the psychological possibility of the identity of the subject with the contemporaneous difference of persons.

If philosophy, starting from the empirical facts of dream, shall be able to establish the doctrine of the soul, then, and only then, will it be time for it to attack the further question, whether that which is proved in dream in relation to the Microcosm, repeats itself in a larger sphere in relation to the Macrocosm. The question then will be whether there is an all-embracing World-Subject dramatically sundering itself in millions of suns and milliards of beings in space and time, for it is a logical consequence of the dramatic division in dream that the science of the future, far from giving up the conception of soul, much more probably will find itself necessitated to set up, besides the physical aspect and the soul, Spirit as a third element, or a self-consciousness comprehending both body and soul.

In connection with these leading ideas in Du Prel's philosophy of dreams, it will be found interesting to make a brief analysis of an article contributed by him to "*Le Lotus*" for December, 1888, upon "The Intuition of Time; or, the Cerebral Clock"; *i.e.*, the faculty of self-waking at a given hour.

In this article, Dr. du Prel undertakes to prove that this faculty, which is common to so many persons, is another proof of the existence of that transcendental Ego that manifests itself in the phenomena of dreams and somnambulism. His argument may be summed up as follows: —

1. The cause of self-waking must be internal, not external; *something*, but not *some one*.
2. It depends upon three conditions: (a) Consciousness that the time for sleep has passed, (b) Capability of measuring the passing of time. (c) Capability of putting an end to that physiological condition of the brain of which sleep is the result, and introducing into the cerebral consciousness a transcendental idea, that is, an idea outside the limits of our ordinary consciousness.

Only a conscious, willing being can be capable of uniting these conditions. The normal will and consciousness are absent during sleep, therefore they cannot be the cause. If they were, we should need no [Page 9] clocks when awake. (This is another of Dr. du Prel's unwarranted assumptions, because many persons have the faculty of telling the time accurately in their waking hours, and *not*, as Dr. du Prel asserts, by a guess at the amount of time elapsed since some fixed period, but as intuitively as in sleep.) To resume:

1. The cause then must be part of our being, but not in the physiological sense.
2. It is not part of our conscious personality, yet it must be conscious, and especially of time.
3. It is part of our will, but not of our conscious will.

It is then self-conscious, but for us unconscious; it resides in our *being*, and not in our person.

These contradictions can only be reconciled by the assertion that the cause is found in the

transcendental subject (or higher consciousness), to which all mystic phenomena must revert.

Like all transcendental faculties, the intuition of time is most exact in somnambulism, where the conscience and will are less active than in the waking state, which proves it to be a problem of the higher consciousness. It must be a continuous condition, for we cannot conceive the sudden and causeless perception of the right moment of waking. To prove this is difficult, because it must be done on the narrow frontier between sleeping and waking; the ordinary consciousness must be able to take cognisance of the *question*; the higher consciousness must be still clear enough to give the correct *answer*. (Dr. du Prel gives two instances of persons who could answer correctly in their sleep when questioned as to the hour.)

It must be proved also that this knowledge of time is not based on clairvoyance — which is only a modified vision (?), the intuitive knowledge of time being a purely internal phenomenon. This has been proved over and over again by many experiments with somnambulists and hypnotized persons, who invariably act upon a knowledge of the true time, and not that of the clocks around them, often purposely altered, as a further test. Furthermore, an order given to a hypnotised person is executed at any given hour after that person has passed out of the hypnotic state, or, as Dr. du Prel puts it: the posthypnotic order is executed by means of the cerebral clock, or the transcendental perception of time. Dr. Beauris, of Nancy (author of *Le Somnambulisme provoqué*) says that such phenomena are among the best known, the most credible, and the most easily produced of the phenomena of hypnotism. He says that this perception of time "*acts like an alarm-clock, which goes off only at the moment for which it is set*".

These facts evidently imply an unconscious faculty of measuring time far more precise than that of the ordinary condition. It is also a well-known fact that somnambulist patients have not only the intuition of [Page 10] time as to the limitation of their sleep (whether voluntary or induced), but also as to the length of their nervous crises, and the frequency of their recurrence.

This shows that the organic modifications of our bodies, as well as certain maladies, such as intermittent fevers, for instance, must be subject to certain determinate laws of time, and that the transcendental subject (or Higher Self), to which we must attribute the faculty of measuring time, must be conscious of these laws also; in other words, it must be identical with our organizing principle, unless we establish a special principle for the organic activity, and thus transgress that scientific law that forbids the unnecessary multiplication of explanatory causes. The "organizing principle" is explained by Dr. du Prel (in Vol. II, of his *Philosophy of Mysticism*, p. 156) to be the life-principle lying behind all organic nature — "it is transcendental nature, and as in somnambulism it exhibits the faculty of critical self-inspection and cure, it must also be the organizing principle in us, thus a willing, not less than a cognitive being. In a word, the life-principle in us is the transcendental subject.

Our organism has its rhythmic movements, such as respiration and pulsation. It possesses the faculty of measuring time for its periodic functions, [Is not this an inversion of the right order for the organism? Do not hunger and thirst measure time] such as hunger and thirst; and it oscillates between sleeping and waking, and is thus united to terrestrial life. On the other hand we could not distinguish between one sound and another, or one colour and another, without the unconscious faculty of estimating the difference in the number of their, vibratory waves, which would seem to prove, says Dr. du Prel, the identity of the organizing with the sensational principle. The rhythmic movements of the body are

insufficient of themselves to solve the problem of the intuition of time; we need besides a special consciousness, which measures them, counts them, and remains unrecognised below the threshold of sensibility; which appertains, that is, to the Higher Self, for the content of our unconsciousness is comprised in our transcendental consciousness. Unconsciousness is such only in relation to our sense-consciousness, as is proved by most of the psychic faculties, and especially by this intuition of time.

We can see by the evidence of somnambulists, although they do not express their thought directly, but clothe it in the language of sensation, that their indications of time come from the transcendental region to take form in that of cerebral representations, but that they do not originate in the latter. Prof. Wolfart (*Eclaircissements sur le Mesmérisme*) having questioned his somnambulists as to their intuition of time, found [Page 11] that some reported that they saw before them a brilliant dial upon which they read the hour, some heard a voice, or saw a human form that spoke to them, while others had a perception of the time which they were unable to explain.

We recognise in the reports of these patients of Dr. Wolfart, that ordinary dramatization of internal sensations which makes up a large part of our dream-life. We all know how in our dreams we sometimes seem to be quite other people than our waking selves, and how we more often still, invest the men and women of our dreams with either original and special characteristics, which make them new people to us, or with the bodily and mental characteristics belonging to them in real life; that is, the *dramatis persona* of our dreams are either entirely creations of our own brains, or characteristic presentments of people we really know. This Dr. du Prel calls "the dramatic separation of the Me in dreams", and maintains that the threshold of sensibility is the plane where this sundering of the Ego occurs, and that which leaves the state of unconsciousness is taken objectively, and ascribed to a foreign source or a foreign speaker. And as we find the explanations of Dr. Wolfart's somnambulists as to their knowledge of time taking this dramatic form, it follows that with them also the sentiment of time must emerge from the unconscious, that is to say, the transcendental consciousness.

That the rhythmic movements of the organism, such as the respiration, are insufficient to explain the problem of the intuition of time is very certain, because the relation between the internal and external rhythm is wanting, as well as the perception of such relation. The ancient Hindus busied themselves with this problem in very remote ages, and they endeavoured to explain the intuition of time by the identification of the transcendental consciousness, or Higher Self, with the Divine, a solution that Dr. du Prel thinks overshoots the mark as far as physiological explanation (*minus* the relation between the internal and external rhythm) falls short of it. He cites a curious passage quoted by Windischmann in his *Philosophie in Fortgang dey Weltgeschichte*, III., 1332: "According to the Hindu conception, the sleeper (*supta*) recognises himself in sleep (*svap*); that is, he becomes conscious of his Higher Self. In the body of the sleeper the five *pranas* are kindled and awakened. To the most secret *prana*, which manifests itself principally by the breath, correspond in the external world, ether (*akasa*) and the luminous sun. *Atma* is the essence, the real being in the sun as in the vital breath; he who becomes conscious of his *atma* finds therein an internal perception of time by which he can measure the time marked by the external sun. In ordinary consciousness the motion of the sun and that of the internal *prana* are separate. Both accomplish their course, the sun once in twenty-four hours, and the *prana* [Page 12] 21,600 times. As the sun is the *Atma* of the world, and the *prana* is the *Atma* of the body, the first enlightens the world, the second enlightens the body, and the two make up one, which is not realized by those who regard only appearances; they only know that 21,600 revolutions of *prana*, or respirations, are produced during one revolution of the sun, and may be counted thereby; but they who are masters of knowledge, who have

complete control over their senses, and can explore their inner nature by their purified *manas*, these unite themselves by *Yoga* with *Atma* (the real being of the sun and the vital breath), and by the movements of their prana know the movements of the sun; respiration gives them the knowledge of the solar movement". To this the Editor of *Le Lotus* adds, that the "respiration" spoken of here has little to do with the bodily function so-called: the fact being that there are two systems of Yoga practised by the Hindus, the *Hatha Yoga*, or the material, dealing with the functions of the body, and the *Raja Yoga*, or spiritual, dealing with the functions of the soul.

In ordinary language, and setting aside the technical phrases in the Hindu theory quoted, the idea seems to be that "the Masters of Knowledge", they who have purified their whole being, physical, intellectual, and Spiritual, can so unite themselves with the Divine Spirit that they partake of its omniscience. This is the "pantheistic explanation" of which Dr. du Prel disapproves, but between which and his own theory of a "transcendental consciousness" persisting during sleep there seems to be very little distinction. He identifies this transcendental consciousness with the Higher Self, which the Hindu philosophers identify with the Divine element in man.

However this may be, this intuitive perception of time during sleep seems to afford a conclusive proof of the truth of the Hindu definition of sleep as a phase of consciousness. In deep sleep the senses and the intellectual faculties are alike dormant, but that *something* of the individual consciousness persists seems to be proved by this power of self-waking, which certainly implies a continuous perception of the lapse of time, and a certain control over the physiological condition of the brain — that is, a certain amount of both will and consciousness. The senses and the intellectual faculties disposed of, there remains only the spiritual element to be accounted for, and as spirit must be identical, whatever and wherever its manifestations may be, is it too much to say that when the soul, by the baptism of its deep sleep, is freed from its earthly impurities, it is enabled to enter into communion with the Divine? This was evidently the idea of the Psalmist in that long-mistranslated passage — "He giveth to His beloved in their sleep. [Or, "while they sleep," And set: Job iv , 13]

"The true Self of man (the *homo noumenon*)", says Kant, "is dormant [Page 13] in dreams, and, therefore, the sense of morality is absent"; for in this state the intellectual faculties hover about the very threshold of consciousness, and are even affected in some degree by sense-impressions, while the spiritual element, the conscience, or Divine voice within, is absent. We can commit any crime in our dreams, or see it committed by others, without the slightest sense of wrong.

Dr. Carpenter, in his *Mental Physiology*, admits that though there is a complete suspension of sensorial consciousness during profound sleep, yet we have no right to affirm with certainty that consciousness is ever entirely suspended even during the profoundest sleep. He also considers that the experiments of Dr. Ferrier on the functions of different parts of the brain conclusively prove the doctrine of unconscious cerebration by showing that important cerebral modifications, of which only the results make themselves known, may take place below the threshold of consciousness (or, as he phrases it, "outside the sphere of consciousness"), and this he asserts to be only the physiological expression of the theory of Sir William Hamilton, Leibnitz, and others, that "the mind may undergo modifications, sometimes of very considerable importance, without being itself conscious of the process, until its *results* present themselves to the consciousness in the new ideas, or new combinations of ideas, which the process has evolved".

This is illustrated by the experience of Dr. Wolfart's somnambulists whose intuition of time emerged from the unconscious plane (or, as Dr. du Prel would say, the transcendental consciousness), to impress itself upon their perceptions either as a sight, or sound, or simply an intellectual conviction.

Whatever deductions we may make from it, spiritualistic or otherwise, this cerebral clock, or intuition of time, is a curious and interesting phenomenon, and one deserving of more study than it has yet received, at least by Western scientists.