

## NORMAN MALCOLM'S ANALYSIS OF DREAMING

The Wittgensteinian philosophy of mind is mainly concerned with (1) determining the criteria of application of the psychological terms (2) the first-person third-person asymmetry in their application (3) learning the use of expressions which have psychological terms and (4) analysing how the psychological concepts are framed in the context of the impossibility of private language. Malcolm's analysis of dreaming is Wittgensteinian in all these aspects.

I have here referred to Malcolm's analysis of dreaming (Part I). Some recent objections by D. M. Armstrong and H. D. Lewis are then briefly stated (Part II).

In evaluating the objections (Part III) I have argued that (1) Armstrong's objections do not undermine Malcolm's analysis because Malcolm is not a philosophical behaviourist. (2) Armstrong's own account of dreaming is incompatible with his contingent-identity theory. (3) The objections raised by H. D. Lewis have considerably weakened Malcolm's position.

In the concluding section (Part IV) Malcolm's Criterion of dreaming has been discussed. I have pointed out some genuine difficulties in extending Wittgensteinian concept of Criterion to dreaming, in view of the Malcolm's argument that remembering a dream is a non-standard use of remembering and telling a dream is talking about something subsequently discovered as a non-event.

Malcolm's argument that physiological criterion changes basically the concept of dream is inadequate because I believe that unless one is a physiologist who subscribes to Identity Theory, this conclusion does not follow.

Malcolm denies that the sentence "I am asleep" is a meaningful claim about anything. It does not have a use that is homogeneous with the normal use of the sentence "He is asleep". The sentences "I am asleep", "I am unconscious" and "I am dead" cannot assert anything.<sup>1</sup>

No one can make assertions during sleep. Having argued for this, Malcolm further argues that the sentence "I am asleep" cannot be used to make a judgement. Nothing would count as its verification here and no correct use is available for such a sentence. Arguing in the style of Wittgenstein, Malcolm makes out a case against private ostensive definition of dreaming or being asleep. Sleeping man cannot judge that he is asleep and it makes no sense to say that his judgement is true or false.

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. For the correct use of "I am asleep" there is no such criterion.

Malcolm observes,

"A connection in sense between "I am asleep" and "He is asleep" is exactly what cannot be established, since the fulfilment of the criterion of truth, relative to the third person sentence can play no part in the fulfilment of the criterion of understanding relative to the first-person sentence" (p. 17).

Malcolm agrees that even though "I am asleep" has no sense, its negation "I am not asleep" has a sense. Again, "Are you asleep"? has the grammatical form of a question, but it is not actually used as a question.

For the sentence "He is asleep", we have two criteria and hence it has a correct use. We have, (1) Criterion of behaviour and (2) Criterion of testimony. Malcolm points out that "Criterion of testimony is merely supplementary to the criterion of behaviour" (p. 25).

Malcolm, having fully analysed "I am asleep" as a claim of assertion and judgement, extends his analysis and applies the same logic in coming to the conclusion that thinking in sleep, reasoning in sleep, imagining in sleep and so on are all unintelligible notions. But what about dreams? Malcolm states that "dreaming while asleep" is a

meaningful notion as contrasted with 'judging while asleep' which has no sense.

It is clear that if Malcolm denies that we can judge, assert, reason, think and argue during sleep and if he also accepts that we dream while asleep, then the strange conclusion irresistibly follows that dreams are not experiences, images or hallucinations or any other type of mental acts at all. Malcolm boldly accepts the conclusion "Indeed I am not trying to say what dreaming is. I do not understand what it would mean to do that" (p. 59). Malcolm, on the one hand, clearly distinguishes between 'dreaming' and 'telling a dream'. He also rejects the suggestion that "dream is the waking impression that one dreamt". On the other hand, Malcolm refuses to tell us what dreaming is. Dreams and waking impressions are two different things but they are not logically independent. Telling of a dream is the criterion of the occurrence of a dream. This criterion is applied to the third-person statements like "He had a dream". "I had a dream" — this sentence does not require such a criterion. Malcolm emphasises the point that if a man wakes up with the impression of having seen and done various things and if it is known that he did not see and do those things, then it is known that he dreamt them. I dreamt that 'p' implies 'not-p'. "Telling a dream is telling a kind of story". Malcolm is very cautious in drawing many-types of distinctions among various types of discourses. He closely follows Wittgenstein here and he is explicit about it in his discussion of the criterion of dreaming.

Malcolm, for example, distinguishes between historical use of the first-person psychological sentences and their corresponging dream-telling use. Suppose someone says "Last night I was very angry with my brother"; this statement as a historical statement would be open to correction, verification or revision, but the same statement in dream-telling context would not be open to correction. Discrepant appearances would require explanation in the context of historical statements; on the contrary, discrepant appearances would be required for dream-telling context. The

consequences of the same statement in the different contexts are also different.

Malcolm concludes, "First person past tense psychological sentences have sharply different grammars in these two modes of discourse" (p. 98). Malcolm firmly believes that waking testimony is the sole criterion of dreaming and physiological criterion employed by contemporary research on dreams would alter the normal concept of dreaming beyond recognition.

## II

I now consider two of the recent criticisms of Malcolm's analysis of dreaming. It would be interesting to note that a recent supporter of Materialist theory of Mind, D. M. Armstrong (1968), discusses Malcolm's thesis under the section "behaviourism" and argues that as dreams are events that occur in the minds during sleep, the existence of dreams falsifies behaviourism.<sup>2</sup> Professor H. D. Lewis (1968), a recent defender of dualism, has also subjected Malcolm's analysis of dreaming to an exceptionally close and critical study.<sup>3</sup> Malcolm thus faces objections from both materialists and dualists. Let us review the objections in order.

### (a) *Armstrong's Objections :*

Armstrong argues in support of psychophysical identity theory by claiming that the concept of mental state is the concept of inner cause of outward behaviour. These inner causes are in fact brain states and this means that mental states are brain-states. Armstrong tries to explain dreams in the context of such a theory.

"The core of dreaming is a perceptual experience involving belief. Dreaming is simply the total hallucination occurring during sleep" (p. 304).

Armstrong agrees with Malcolm in granting the possibility that the linguistic institution of telling one's dream may be a part of our ordinary concept of dreaming, but his main argument against Malcolm is that dreams are inner

events and Malcolm has only concentrated on outward criteria without proper analysis of dreaming as a mental event. Armstrong claims that dreams are perceptual experience during sleep. As Armstrong advocates reductive analysis of perception, he further argues that as illusory perception, "dreams are acquiring of false beliefs about the nature of current situation and environment". Carrying the reductive analysis further, he concludes that acquiring of such false beliefs are events within us which would give us the capacity to discriminate the various features of environment. The main thrust of Armstrong's argument is that images and dreams can be analysed in terms of central-state materialism without undermining their unique differences from perception.

(b) *Objections by H. D. Lewis :*

The objections raised by Lewis (1968) can be summarized as under :

- (1) It is not necessary for a dreamer to be aware that he is asleep, in order to give an account of dreams on awaking.
- (2) Malcolm's position requires us to draw a very sharp distinction between waking and dreaming. Lewis wonders whether we can make such a distinction in absolute terms without disregarding the processes of gradually falling asleep and of slowly pulling ourselves awake again.
- (3) Lewis fully agrees with Malcolm that if a waking person makes the judgement "I am asleep" it would be odd to the point of self-contradiction, but Lewis denies that on the basis of detecting such an absurdity in a particular claim, Malcolm can support the general conclusion that there can be no process or experience of dreaming.
- (4) Lewis is not impressed by Malcolm's argument from memory and verification because Lewis is of the opinion that it is not a "misuse of Language" to talk about 'remembering dreams' and complete verification of a dream-report is not even expected.
- (5) Malcolm's acceptance of Wittgenstein's advice to philosophers to know when to stop does not convince Lewis.

On the contrary, Lewis argues that Malcolm stops exactly where his position is unsupportable. For example, Malcolm maintains that dreams and waking impressions are not identical. This is a perfectly sound observation. On the other hand, Malcolm refuses to answer the question "what is a dream?" by declaring "I do not understand what it would mean to do that" (p. 59).

Commenting on this strange position, Lewis concludes, "Malcolm has decided to stop not where the logic of the situation requires him but where it best suits his argument".

### III

It would be interesting to evaluate the arguments of Armstrong and Lewis.

(a) Armstrong's claim that existence of dreams would falsify behaviourism does not damage Malcolm's analysis of dreaming for the simple reason that Malcolm is neither an ontological behaviourist who would deny the existence of mental processes nor a linguistic behaviourist who would reduce all psychological statements to behavioural statements. On the contrary, Malcolm has strongly insisted on the first-person third-person asymmetry regarding psychological statements. In fact, in his recent book *"Problems of Mind — Descartes to Wittgenstein"* (1972), Malcolm quotes from Wittgenstein in emphasising such asymmetry as constituting a valid objection to behaviourism. In the preface to his above-referred book, Malcolm just refers to Armstrong's Identity-Theory but does not develop any detailed objections specific to Armstrong's version of Identity-Theory for lack of space, but the conclusion of the book is unmistakably clear. Malcolm rejects mind-body dualism, mind-brain monism and behaviourism. He admits that the outcome is too negative but this can not be helped.

I believe that Armstrong has missed some points of Malcolm's analysis of dreaming because Armstrong seems to think that Malcolm is a reductive behaviourist, "who makes a gallant attempt to argue that going to sleep and

dreaming is simply being disposed after waking to tell certain stories of how things seemed to be". This would amount to a dispositional analysis of dreaming. Malcolm does not subscribe to such analysis because he does not reduce dreaming "to a disposition of telling a dream".

I further believe that Armstrong's own version is not free from difficulties. Armstrong appears to be accepting the inner mental states in his arguments against Wittgenstein, Malcolm, Ryle and Skinner, but when Armstrong carefully distinguishes between Central-state materialism and behaviourism, he observes as follows:

"Unlike behaviourism, the Central-State theory does not deny the existence of inner mental states. On the contrary it asserts their existence; they are physical states of the brain" (p. 75).

Our question would be, "What does this assertion mean?" It would definitely mean the denial of mental states because to say that they are only physical states is exactly to deny that they are mental states. Armstrong's brilliant analysis of images, dreams, perceptions etc. is vitiated by his epistemological ambivalence regarding the mental and the physical.

Armstrong refers to physiological research on dreaming (p. 340) and the possibility of finding out that a man is dreaming while he is still asleep. But if the mental state is nothing but physical state then the E.E.G. records definitely indicate the pattern of brain events and the question of further finding out whether a person is dreaming would make no sense, because there is nothing else to find out.

Armstrong begins by stating that there are inner mental events and ends by saying that these are inner physical events. If anyone submits that dreaming is an inner physical event and nothing else then he is open to all the attacks against behaviourism. Malcolm's earlier objection<sup>4</sup> that brain-processes can be located but we have no independent test for locating mental events, applies to Armstrong's version too.



(b) The objections raised by Lewis against Malcolm's analysis of dreaming help us in evaluating Malcolm's view from the standpoint of a dualist ontology.

I believe that Malcolm's bold declaration to the effect that he does not understand what dreaming is, is not very illuminating. The comments of Lewis on Malcolm's Wittgensteinian silence on the issue are entirely justified. The same can be said of the comments of Lewis regarding the verification of dreams and remembering. A person reading a book on 'Dreaming' (1959-Malcolm) expects to be told what dreaming is and Lewis admirably criticises Malcolm for not having completely enlightened the reader on this crucial point. Lewis has been successful in surveying at length some of the strained arguments of contemporary philosophers of mind in explaining the inner experience. But in order to be clear about the basic issues and to be fair to Malcolm, it must be emphasised again that neither Malcolm nor Wittgenstein is a behaviourist.

#### IV

Since Wittgenstein, the concept of criterion has provoked a new controversy in Philosophy. Criterial relation is different from correlation. It is also distinguished from statements describing symptoms. Criterion is to be treated as a decisive piece of evidence. In "Philosophical Investigations" Wittgenstein stressed the need for outward Criteria of inner experiences but in the discussion of pain, images, memories, etc. it was found that (1) As lying is possible, behavioural criterion is not absolutely decisive in spite of it being absolutely essential to the understanding and employment of sensation-language and (2) First-person statements are not Criterion-governed. One does not establish that one is in pain by employing the Criterion of pain.

Malcolm explicitly employs Wittgensteinian concept of Criterion to dreaming. Malcolm makes the following observations.

- (1) The concept of dreaming is derived not from dreaming but from the descriptions of dreams (p. 55).



- (2) Our concept of dreaming has for its Criterion not the behaviour of sleeping person, but his subsequent testimony (p. 63).
- (3) "If a man wakes up with the impression of having seen and done various things and if it is known that he did not see and do those things: that it is known that he dreamt them. No problem remains whether a dream really existed or whether anything corresponds to his memory of dreams" (p. 66).

Now there are several difficulties here :

- (1) If dreams are non-events or if dreams are not any kind of experiences, what does the criterion establish? What do we describe when we describe dreams? What would count as framing a concept of a dream from the description of dreams?
- (2) As lying is possible, Malcolm believes, following Wittgenstein, that truthful account of dream would be the Criterion. But if, as Malcolm himself admits, nothing would count as verifying anyone's dream-report how can one ever be sure about the truthfulness of anybody's report? If report of dream qua report is the sole criterion and if there is no sense in talking about the report agreeing with dreams, how can one still talk of sincerity of any report?
- (3) Malcolm agrees that the first-person dream-report is not Criterion-governed and still he makes a distinction between 'knowing that one dreamt' in the sense of 'concluding that one dreamt', and 'knowing that one dreamt' in the sense of 'having applied the Criterion to oneself'. For the statement regarding having of an impression that certain events occurred, one does not require a criterion; concluding that one had a dream would only mean that events did not occur. When one says "It occurred in a dream" one means to say "it did not occur".

Now this is not what we mean by talking about dreaming. Of course, dream-events do not occur in the real world.

This is obvious. But there is something else. 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. For "X did not occur" you cannot always substitute "one dreamt it". They are non-synonymous expressions and not contingently identical either.

The following example by C. S. Chihara and J. A. Foder is an adequate counter-instance to Malcolm's criterion.

"A person, from time to time, gets the strange feeling that shortly before he had seen and heard his father commanding him to come home. One morning he wakes with this feeling knowing full well that his father is dead. Now we are asked by Malcolm to believe that the person must have dreamt that he saw and heard his father; supposedly, it would be logically absurd for the person to claim to have this feeling and deny that he had dreamt it!"<sup>5</sup>

- (4) Story-telling, talking about our fantasies, talking about our past, talking while awake that one was mistaken in having thought that something happened when it did not happen; — all these differ from talking about one's own dreams. Malcolm's account of learning to talk about dreams does not adequately differentiate among our modes of talking about the non-event in many ways. Discovering that certain event did not occur can well take place in our waking life. An investigator may discover that a Crime did not take place by coming to know that he was misinformed. Discovery of a non-event is not a differentia of dreaming.
- (5) Malcolm believes that physiological criterion, if adopted universally, would basically alter the concept of dreaming. Nothing like this would ever happen, unless the physiologists have accepted the mind-body identity theory. If identity-theory is accepted "having a dream" and "being in a brain state" would be contingently theory. If identity-theory is accepted, "having a dream" event during sleep, I do not think that physiological criterion would alter the concept of dreaming.

It appears that Malcolm has unnecessarily restricted criterion of dreaming. Of course, I do not know how one would meet Malcolm's objection regarding the determination of dream-duration through physiological methods. I am not sure as to what would count as duration of dreams and Malcolm has definitely raised an interesting problem here. Still however, in so far as one can establish the duration of sleep and admit that dream is a mental event occurring during sleep, the concept of dreaming is protected from behaviourism and identity theory.

Department of Philosophy,  
Gujarat University

Madhusudan Baxi

#### NOTES

1. MALCOLM NORMAN, *Dreaming* (London 1959).
2. ARMSTRONG, D. M., *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge 1968).
3. LEWIS, H. D., *The Elusive Mind* (George Allen and Unwin 1969).
4. MALCOLM NORMAN, "Scientific Materialism and The Identity Theory" *Dialogue* — III 2 (1964) pp. 115-125.
5. G. S. CHIHARA and J. A. FODER, "Operationalism and ordinary language, A Critique of Wittgenstein", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. II, (1965).

---

## DIALOGUE

Canadian Philosophical Review — Revue canadienne  
de philosophie

Vol. XVI — No. 2 — Juin/June 1977.

Rédaction/Editors: François Duchesneau & John Woods.

### ARTICLES

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| Beyond Materialism and Back Again   | W. E. Cooper      |
| The Surprise Examination Paradox  | Michael Stack     |
| La position des entités théoriques  | Gilles Lane       |
| La conscience de l'observateur: de la<br>physique théorique à la logique<br>mathématique  | Yvon Procençal    |
| Indétermination de la traduction et<br>indétermination de la référence:<br>quelques remarques sur les quatre<br>premiers essais du recueil<br><i>Ontological Relativity</i> | Jacques Largeault |

### NOTE — DISCUSSION

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| Immorality and Self-Deception:<br>A Reply to Béla Szabados | M. W. Martin |
|--|--------------|

### CRITICAL NOTICES — ETUDES CRITIQUES

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Remarques sur le Rousseau de<br>Victor Goldschmidt   | Guy Lafrance     |
| <i>Anarchy, State and Utopia</i> ,<br>by Robert Nozich   | Jan Narveson     |
| <i>The Structure of Scientific Theories</i> ,<br>edited with a critical introduction<br>by Frederick Suppe | Steven F. Savitt |
-