

A Virtue Epistemology

*Apt Belief and Reflective
Knowledge, Volume I*

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Lecture 1

Dreams and Philosophy

Dreams: the orthodox conception

Are dreams made up of conscious states just like those of waking life except for how they fit their surroundings? The orthodox answer is rendered poetically in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep . . .¹

Dream states and waking states are thought intrinsically alike, though different in their causes and effects.

That conception is orthodox in today's common sense and also historically. Presupposed by Plato, Augustine, and Descartes, it underlies familiar skeptical paradoxes. Similar orthodoxy is also found in our developing science of sleep and dreaming.² Despite such confluence from common sense, philosophical tradition, and contemporary sleep science, the

¹ *The Tempest* IV. i. 156–7.

² In his *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 108, Allan Hobson writes: “[Positron emission tomography studies] . . . show an *increase* in activation of just those multimodal regions of the brain that one would expect to be activated in hallucinatory perception. . . . In other words, in REM [Rapid Eye Movement] sleep—compared with waking—hallucination is enhanced.”

orthodox view is deeply flawed, or so I will argue, before suggesting a better view. To dream is to imagine, not to hallucinate.

Skepticism: hyperbolic versus realistic

Skeptics propose scenarios of radical deception: the brain in a vat, Descartes' evil demon, Hollywood's Matrix. Such radical scenarios are often dismissed as "irrelevant alternatives" to our familiar common sense. They are alternative, incompatible ways that the world might have been, but not ones that are *relevant*. Why, exactly, *do* they fail the test of relevance? According to one popular view, a possibility is relevant only if it is not *too remote*, only if it might really happen. Possibilities like that of the evil demon or the brain in a vat are said to pose no real threat, being so remote.

The notion of safety thus employed is in a family that includes those of danger and of risk. These being matters of degree, we try to minimize our exposure. We keep our distance from threatening possibilities.

Skeptical scenarios are fortunately quite remote; they *might* happen, but not easily. That is why they are dismissed as irrelevant. Of all familiar scenarios, only one cannot be dismissed so easily: the most famous of all, the dream scenario. Unlike those outlandish possibilities, dreaming is a daily part of our lives.

The dream argument stands out because the dream possibility is too close for comfort. If while dreaming we have real beliefs based on real phenomenal experiences, then a normal perceptual judgment could always be matched by a subjectively similar, similarly based judgment, made while one

dreams. Too easily, then, we might right now be dreaming when we form perceptual beliefs. On the orthodox conception, a dreaming subject might form such a belief in his dream, and thereby in reality. No doubt it would be a false belief, based on illusory phenomenal experience. Any given perceptual belief, or one intrinsically just like it, might thus too easily have been false though formed on the same experiential basis. This possibility, too close for comfort, threatens perceptual belief more than any radical scenario.

Fortunately, the orthodox conception is not beyond question. A lot rides epistemically on just how dreams are constituted.

What are dreams made of?

Do the characters in my dreams have beliefs and intentions? They do in general, but do I myself also have them as protagonist in my dream? Unquestionably I do believe and intend things *in my dream*.³ In my dream I am conscious, I assent to this or that, I judge or choose.⁴ This all happens *in the dream*, of course, but does it thereby *really* happen, albeit while I dream? This simple question is easy enough to grasp, but surprisingly hard to answer.

When something happens *in my dream*, reality tends not to follow suit. When in my dream I am chased by a lion, this poses no threat to my skin. No physical proposition about the

³ Here I distinguish between first-person participation in the dream and third-person participation, as when one sees oneself do something as if in a movie or on a TV screen. One can figure in one's dream as a victim of a recent knockout, and would not thereby undergo any present experience.

⁴ Let's here use "affirmation" for conscious assent to a propositional content and "volition" for conscious assent to a possible course of action (including simple actions, even, as a limiting case, those that are basic and instantaneous).

layout of the world around me is true in actuality just because it is true in my dream. What about mental propositions about how it is in my own mind? Must any such proposition be true in actuality whenever it is true in my dream? No, even if *in my dream* I believe that a lion is after me, and even if *in my dream* I intend to keep running, *in actuality* I have no such belief or intention. What is in question is the *inference* from <In my dream I believe (or intend) such and such> to <In actuality I so believe (or intend)>.

My exposition relies heavily on distinguishing between two expressions: “in my dream” and “while I dream.” From the fact that *in my dream* something happens it does not follow that it happens *while I dream*. From the fact that in my dream I am chased by a lion it does not follow that while I dream I am chased. Moreover, from the fact that while I dream something happens, it does not follow that it happens in my dream. From the fact that while I dream it rains and thunders, it does not follow that in my dream it rains and thunders.

At any given time nearly all one’s beliefs remain latent. A belief might be manifest when formed, or it might occasionally rise to consciousness from storage. To make one’s belief explicit is to *judge* or *assent* or *avow*, at least to oneself.⁵ The same is true of one’s intentions, few of which surface at any given time. One does of course retain countless beliefs and intentions while asleep and dreaming. Among these are intentions recently formed: to stop by the library the next day, for example; and beliefs recently acquired: that the weather will be fine in the morning, say. If so, then what one knows as

⁵ However, as will emerge, one might judge or assent or avow something that one does not believe, and even something that one disbelieves.

one dreams is that one is in bed; one lay down in the knowledge that one would be there for hours, and this knowledge has not been lost. *Lying in bed until the morning* is what one intended through most of the day, even as one thought about other things, as one had dinner, and so on. That was still one's intention as one lay down, and there is no reason to suppose that it was lost as one fell asleep. One does not lose one's intentions for the coming morning. One retains intentions as to what one *will* do upon awakening. One retains, as one drifts off to sleep, beliefs about the layout of the room: the location of one's shoes, for example, of the alarm clock, and so on. It is hard to see how one could then concurrently believe that one is being chased by a lion, rather than lying in bed, with the shoes a certain distance and direction from where one lies.⁶

Granted this for states of belief and intention, with their crucial functional profiles, perhaps conscious episodes are different. These one may perhaps *really* undergo while dreaming whenever one does so *in one's dream*. Conscious assent to a proposition does not guarantee that it is really believed, nor does conscious assent to a course of action guarantee the corresponding intention. One might even consciously assent to the opposite of what one really believes, or intends. Actions speak louder than words; louder than conscious assents, too. A deep-seated prejudice might be disavowed sincerely while still surviving, firmly entrenched. Similarly, a belief might survive in storage while consciously disavowed in a dream. Conscious affirmations and volitions might thus contradict stored beliefs and intentions, and dreams may provide just

⁶ Might not contradictory beliefs exist in separate compartments of the mind? Perhaps. But how plausible can it be that the whole person might believe that *p* and *concurrently* believe also the very negation of that first belief, i.e., that not-*p*? This seems absurd.

a special case of that general phenomenon. The fact that one retains stored beliefs and intentions while dreaming thus seems compatible with real affirmations and volitions to the contrary, made not only in one's dream but thereby also in reality, while dreaming.

What then of propositions about your own *current* conscious states, whether conscious experiences or conscious assents? Even if you do not while dreaming really *believe* that a lion chases you, perhaps you do still consciously *affirm* it. If in a dream one is in a certain conscious state, is one then *actually* in that state, while dreaming? If in my dream I make a conscious choice, do I thereby really make that choice, while dreaming?

In a dream you may covet thy neighbor's wife, in the dream a sultry object of desire. Do you then violate the biblical injunction? If you go so far as to succumb, are you then subject to blame? Having sinned in your heart, not only in your dream, but in actuality, you could hardly escape discredit. Is one then blameworthy for choices made in a dream? That has near-zero plausibility, about as little as does blaming a storyteller for his misdeeds as protagonist in a story spun for a child. (One might blame him for telling such a story to such an audience, but that is different; one does not thereby blame him for doing what he does *in the story*.)⁷

⁷ Compare Augustine in Book Ten, Chapter XXX of his *Confessions*: "Verily Thou enjoinest me continency from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the ambition of the world. Thou enjoinest continency from concubinage; and for wedlock itself, Thou hast counselled something better than what Thou hast permitted. And since Thou gavest it, it was done, even before I became a dispenser of Thy Sacrament. But there yet live in my memory (whereof I have much spoken) the images of such things as my ill custom there fixed; which haunt me, strengthless when I am awake: but in sleep, not only so as to give pleasure, but even to obtain assent, and what is very like reality. Yea, so far prevails the illusion of the image, in my soul and in my flesh, that, when asleep, false visions persuade to that which when waking, the true cannot. Am I not then myself, O Lord

If while dreaming one does *actually* assent to misdeeds, even to crimes, does its being just a dream protect one from discredit? That seems implausible. If sudden paralysis prevents you from carrying out some deplorable intentions, this does not protect you from discredit, from the full weight of the biblical injunction. How then can you be protected by the disengagement of your brain from the physical causal order? How then can you be protected by the disengagement of your inner mental life, as in a dream?

Is dreaming perhaps like being drunk or drugged? These disabling conditions lighten responsibility. Perhaps when dreaming you do make conscious choices, while your disabling state lightens your responsibility. Is *that* why we don't blame people for sins in their dreams? No, it is not that one is *less* responsible for what happens in one's dream. Rather, one is not responsible in the slightest.

Dreams seem more like imaginings, or stories, or even daydreams, all fictions of a sort, or quasi-fictions. Even when in a dream one makes a conscious choice, one need not do so in actuality. Nor does one necessarily affirm in reality whatever one consciously affirms in a dream.

What then of current *phenomenal* experiences? Does their presence in a dream entail their real presence in the conscious life of the dreamer, albeit while he dreams? Here at least,

my God? And yet there is so much difference betwixt myself and myself, within that moment wherein I pass from waking to sleeping, or return from sleeping to waking! Where is reason then, which, awake, resisteth such suggestions? And should the things themselves be urged on it, it remaineth unshaken. Is it clasped up with the eyes? Is it lulled asleep with the senses of the body? And whence is it that often even in sleep we resist, and mindful of our purpose, and abiding most chastely in it, yield no assent to such enticements? And yet so much difference there is, that when it happeneth otherwise, upon waking we return to peace of conscience: and by this very difference discover that we did not, what yet we be sorry that in some way it was done in us." (E. B. Pusey translation)

it may be thought, we can plausibly draw the line. But consider the consequences. In respect of such experiences it is supposedly just as if a lion is after me. Yet I may form neither the belief that this is so nor the intention to escape. Am I not now deserving of discredit? Even if such a belief and such an intention are formed *in the dream*, they are not thereby formed *in actuality*, despite the actual experiences that would seem to require them in anyone rational. If the phenomenal experiences in dreams *are* real experiences, while dream beliefs are not real beliefs, then every night we are guilty of massive irrationality or epistemic vice.

Or so it seems at first thought. When we watch a movie, however, we undergo phenomenal experiences without being at fault for failing to take them at face value. We use them rather in an exercise of “make believe,” in which our imagination is guided by what we see on the screen and hear from the sound system. We do have real visual and auditory experiences (as when we view a documentary, or the nightly news), but we have switched off our full cognitive processing for the duration of the film, so as to immerse ourselves willingly in the offline illusion. And there is no irrationality in this. Similarly, then, it may be that in vivid dreams we do have phenomenal experiences, just as we do at the movie theater, but that our full cognitive processing is switched off, enabling our immersion in the imaginative illusion of the dream.

We need not here choose between these two options on phenomenal experience. What is important for epistemology, as will emerge, is that in dreaming we do not really believe; we only make-believe.⁸

⁸ My view on dreams is thus virtually the opposite of Colin McGinn’s in his recent *Mindsight* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), where it is

Dreams and skepticism

Let us now explore what follows for philosophy from the view of dreaming as imagining.⁹ If that is the right model, then traditional formulations of radical skepticism, Descartes' included, are not radical enough. The possibility that we dream now threatens not only our supposed perceptual knowledge but even our supposed introspective knowledge, our supposed takings of the given. It is now in doubt not only whether we see a fire, but even whether we *think* we see a fire, or *experience* as if we see it. How so?

With my hand in view, I may ask: do I now *think* I see a hand? Well, might it not be just a dream? Might I not be only *dreaming* that I think I see a hand? If I am only dreaming, then I do not *really* think I see a hand, after all.

If I do *ask* whether I think I see a hand, however, I cannot thereby be dreaming that I think I see a hand. If in my dream I ask myself a question, and answer it with a choice or an affirmation, the asking would seem to belong with the choice or the affirmation. If the latter belongs only in the dream, not in reality, the asking would also have its place in that same dream. So, again, if I really ask whether I think I see a hand, I cannot thereby be only dreaming that I think I see a hand. Is this not privileged access after all, protection from the possibility that it be just a dream?

argued that in dreaming we have real beliefs but not real percepts (as opposed to certain objects of imagination, called "images"). By contrast, I think that in dreaming we have no real beliefs but may well have real percepts (as we do in watching a movie or a play).

⁹ The epistemological problem of dreams appears already in several passages of the *Theaetetus*, as when Socrates asks: "How can you determine whether at this moment we are sleeping, and all our thoughts are a dream; or whether we are awake, and talking to one another in the waking state?"

Fair enough. But compare my question whether I *see* a hand. If I really *ask* whether I see a hand, I cannot thereby be dreaming about the hand and my seeing it. So, we seem to have similarly privileged access to the fact that we see a hand, at least similarly privileged *in respect of protection from the dream argument*.

What might possibly make the *cogito especially* privileged? What could give it a status not shared by perception of the hand? One advantage at least it turns out *not* to enjoy: it enjoys no special protection from the possibility that one is only dreaming.

The *cogito* has got to be different nonetheless from our knowledge of a hand we see. We might try to defend the *cogito* by retreating to a thinner, less committing, concept of thinking, where even dreaming and imagining are themselves forms of “thinking.” On the *thicker* notion of thinking, if I imagine that p, hypothesize that p, or dream that p, I do not *thereby* think that p; I may not even think that p at all. On the *thinner* notion of thinking, by contrast, in imagining that p one *does* thereby think that p. And the same is now true of dreaming. On the thinner notion, in dreaming that p, one does thereby think that p. More idiomatically, let’s say rather this: in dreaming or imagining that p, one *has the thought that p*. So, “thinking that p” in the thinner sense would amount to “having the thought that p,” a thought one can have even by just asking oneself whether p.

Compare (a) one’s affirming that one affirms something, with (b) one’s having (the thought) that one has a thought. The latter is also a self-verifying (thin) thought. But it has in addition something missing from the former: namely, being dream-proof. If one were now dreaming, one would affirm nothing. But one would still have the thought that one was having a thought.

So, my present thought that I am having a thought is not only guaranteed to be right; in addition, I would not so much as *seem* to have it without having it, not even if I were dreaming. Compare my *affirming* that I am affirming something. This too is guaranteed to be right. But, unlike the thinner thought, it *could* be mere appearance. I might right now be dreaming that I was affirming something, while in fact affirming nothing. So, things might in a way seem subjectively just as they do now, although I would *just* be dreaming: thoughts would be crossing my mind, without my really affirming anything.

However, the more defensible thinner thought falls short crucially in the dialectic against the skeptic. It is not the sort of thought that suffices to constitute knowledge. Knowledge requires something thicker than merely having a thought. Accordingly, the move from thick thought to thin thought is not a way to save the *cogito*, after all.

Consciously and affirmatively thinking that I think does have a special status: one could not go wrong in so thinking. It can thus attain high reliability and epistemic status. It attains this status through its *being* a conscious state of thinking that one thinks. Moreover, this status is not removed, or even much diminished, by the threat of an impostor state, one subjectively very much like it. A vivid and realistic dream is, of course, subjectively very much like its corresponding reality.¹⁰ Perhaps it is only *in my dream* that I now affirmatively think that I think. Despite being subjectively much like the state of thinking that one thinks, in dreaming one does *not*

¹⁰ Much as someone with a powerful visual imagination can picture a scene so vividly that the imagined scene and the one earlier seen are very much alike in content, despite the failure of the two conscious states to share any actual sensory experiences.

think; one does not so much as think that one thinks. That is to say, even if *in one's dream* one affirmatively thinks that one thinks, this does not entail that in reality one so thinks that one thinks, while dreaming.

Two states can thus be hard to distinguish subjectively, though in only one is the subject justified in thinking such and such. Of course the two states are constitutively different. One is an apparent state of thinking one thinks, doing so (thinking one thinks) *only in a dream*, so that it is really only a state of *dreaming* that one thinks one thinks. By contrast, the other is a state of thinking one thinks, doing so (thinking one thinks) *in actuality*. Only the latter yields justification for one's thought that one thinks. The former not only yields no such justification: in it there *is* no such thought—this despite the fact that, by hypothesis, the two states are indistinguishable, as indistinguishable as is reality from a realistic enough dream.¹¹

Have we here found a way to defend our perceptual knowledge from the skeptic's dream argument? Even if we might just as easily be dreaming that we see a hand, this does not entail that we might now be astray in our perceptual beliefs. For, even if we might be dreaming, it does not follow that we might be thinking we see a hand on this same experiential basis, without seeing any hand. After all, in dreaming there is no real thinking and perhaps not even any real experiencing. So, even if I had now been dreaming,

¹¹ This is not to say that there are no important intrinsic and relational differences between a realistic dream and a correlative stretch of waking life. It is only to say that in a very realistic dream we take the goings-on to be certainly real, which leads naturally to the thought that "this," referring to the contents of one's present waking consciousness, insofar as one takes notice of them, could all be (the contents of) a dream. One could of course protest that though *in the dream* one is taken in, this does not show that one's *waking* consciousness could mislead in that way. The topic is far from exhausted, however; we return to it below.

which might easily enough have happened, I would not thereby have been thinking that I see a hand, based on a corresponding phenomenal experience.¹²

That disposes of the threat posed by dreams for the safety of our beliefs. Does it dispose of the problem of dream skepticism? It does so if dreams create such a problem only by threatening the safety of our perceptual beliefs. *Is that the only threat posed by dreams? We next take up this question.*

Are dreams indistinguishable in a way that matters?

One need not be a Freudian to believe that dreams have causes, in which case most of us might be picked at random, in a futuristic scenario, and made to dream in a connected, realistic way so that our lives become lengthy dreams. Under that Matrix-like supposition, can I be said to know that I now see a hand? I might of course be dreaming in a maximally realistic way that I see a hand. Could I reason my way out by noting that, since I am wondering whether this is just a dream, *therefore* I cannot be dreaming? Can I conclude that this must be reality, not a dream, and that I really do see a hand? No, that certainly would not satisfy. If I wonder

¹² I argue in “Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide” (in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Cambridge, MA, and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 145–58) that rational intuition has a similar epistemic profile: that one could be intuitively justified in believing that p even though in another situation, not distinguishable in any relevant subjectively accessible respect, one still would not be intuitively justified in believing that q. Though subtly different from our conclusion about the *cogito* and dreams, it is closely related. In both cases, it seems that one can be in relevantly indistinguishable situations, yet epistemically justified in only one of them.

whether I am one of the dreamers in the first place, my doubt must extend to whether I am *really* wondering, or only *dreaming* that I am wondering.

Knowledge seems to require more than just safety. As we have seen, on the imagination model, the *safety* of one's belief is not affected by the nearby possibility of a realistic dream. Still, the skeptical force of the internally indistinguishable dream seems undeniable even so. The dream possibility still threatens, even if it is no threat to the *safety* of our beliefs.

How then *are* dreams a threat? What they threaten is not the safety of our beliefs but perhaps their rationality. Can it be rationally coherent to grant that one could be dreaming? How can one rationally allow that possibility, as one must do if unable to rule it out? That would seem incoherent, but exactly how?

Let us step back. Suppose I could now about as easily be dead, having barely escaped a potentially fatal accident. Obviously, I cannot distinguish my being alive from being dead by believing myself alive when alive, and dead when dead. Similarly, I cannot distinguish my being conscious from my being unconscious by attributing to myself consciousness when conscious and unconsciousness when unconscious. But that is no obstacle to my knowing myself alive and conscious when alive and conscious. Might the possibility that we dream not be like that of being dead, or unconscious? Even if one could never tell *that* one suffers such a fate, one can still tell that one does *not* suffer it when one does not.¹³ Why not say the same of dreams?

¹³ Cf. B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), Appendix 3.

Even if we are unable to specify how a Matrix dream scenario is epistemically different from the possibility that one is dead or unconscious, this does little to reassure us. How can I know that I see a hand, once I posit that I could be just dreaming in a Matrix scenario, when only by astronomical luck could I be among the spared? *Something* seems to distinguish the possibility that one now dreams in such a scenario from the possibility that one be dead or unconscious, even if we cannot specify what the difference is, exactly.¹⁴ We still face a threat of irrationality.

Note the first-person way in which the problem is posed. Evaluation of someone else is importantly different; to someone else we might more plausibly attribute knowledge even if they could as easily be dreaming. It pays to distinguish here between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge. When I ask myself whether I know I see a hand even if I might just be dreaming, I take a reflective perspective on my own knowledge. Suppose that, so far as I know, *this (referring to the contents of my present states of consciousness) could all about as easily be the contents of a dream*. In that case, it would seem less coherent for me to believe that I am awake nonetheless.

What more specifically constitutes the threat to our rationality? Is it the arbitrariness in taking myself to be awake? When awake we automatically take ourselves to be awake, rather than dreaming an internally indistinguishable dream. Can that be rational, when nothing in the content of our conscious states would seem to reveal that difference? True,

¹⁴ And the same may apply to the possibility that one is mentally disabled, though in important respects this belongs in a category with dreams, both being eventualities that, too easily for full epistemic comfort, might right now be happening; it will depend on how the possibility of one's being disabled is filled out.

waking states *are* different *in kind* from dream states. In waking life I would *see* a hand, for example, which is different from only *dreaming* that I do. Nevertheless, if while awake I see or believe certain things, *in the corresponding dream* I would also see and believe the very same things, provided my dream was vivid and realistic enough. How then can I non-arbitrarily take myself to be awake, when I cannot distinguish my state internally from that of a realistic dream? Of course that does not prevent my taking it for granted that I am awake. But how can this be more than just arbitrary?

At an unreflective level, epistemic justification can hence derive from the holding of a condition whose absence is no more subjectively distinguishable from its presence than is a realistic dream from waking life. Still, without reflective, non-arbitrary assurance that you satisfy that condition, you cannot know reflectively something you might still know at the animal level. So far at least, we have found no way out of this predicament. Reflectively defensible perceptual knowledge still seems out of reach.

How to resolve the problem of dream skepticism

In conclusion, here is a way out. Consider the claim that one is just dreaming, which could not possibly be affirmed correctly, and is hence pragmatically incoherent. Or take the contradictory claim: that one is *not* just dreaming, which, like the *cogito*, must be right if affirmed. We can now see, reflectively, how these thoughts gain their special status. The impossibility of being affirmed falsely is thought to help give the *cogito* a special status, which we can reflectively see that

it has. The claim that one is not now just dreaming, being equally impossible to affirm falsely, must have an equally high epistemic status, equally defensible reflectively. For it seems to share with the *cogito* its pragmatic safety, and its epistemically favorable features more generally, such as a high degree of self-intimation: when one is awake and one asks oneself whether one is awake, one has a very strong tendency to answer affirmatively.

One can distinguish being alive from being dead when indeed one is. It does not matter that one *cannot* tell that one is dead rather than alive, when *that* is how it is. One can also distinguish being conscious from being unconscious if one can tell that one is conscious rather than unconscious when indeed one is. It does not matter that one *cannot* tell that one is unconscious rather than conscious, when *that* is how it is.¹⁵

That suggests a way out of our paradox, even if it has us *distinguish* waking life from a corresponding dream despite the lack of any discernible difference of content. What enables us to distinguish the two content-identical states is just the fact that in the dream state we do not affirm *anything*—not that we are veridically perceiving an external world, nor that we are not—whereas in waking life we do knowingly perceive

¹⁵ Bernard Williams's response to dream skepticism is like mine in one important respect (op. cit., n.14 of Lecture 1), but is substantially different and incompatible on the whole. We both rely on what dreaming shares with being unconscious or dead: i.e., we both rely on your ability to tell that you avoid such a fate, when you do, despite your inability to tell that the fate befalls you when it does. The crucial respect of difference is that for Williams we do have real conscious beliefs and experiences in dreaming. Unlike my account, his preserves the special protection of the *cogito* against dream skepticism, for even if one is dreaming, when one thinks that one thinks (really thinks) one does really think, really believe consciously, or really experience, etc. Correlatively, he is also denied access to my proposed solution for the problem of dream skepticism, whether the solution is applied to the *cogito* or to the fire; according to my proposal, <I am hereby awake> shares the special epistemic status of the *cogito*.

our surroundings. *This* by our lights suffices to make the two states distinguishable.¹⁶

Suppose I have only three possible options on the question whether *p*, which I am now pondering: namely, the options of believing, suspending, or disbelieving, all consciously, since I am consciously pondering my question now. If I know that only one of my options is epistemically undefective, making it the best option, that then would seem the rational option for me to take.

Consider a *cogito* proposition, such as <I think> or <I am>. Disbelieving is in these cases defective, since self-defeating, for I know that if I take that option I will be wrong.¹⁷ Suspending is also defective, but in a different way.

¹⁶ We must accordingly reconsider whether waking life is really indistinguishable from a realistic enough dream. Here is how we had implicitly understood what it is to be indistinguishable:

A possible extended dream and a possible stream of waking consciousness are *indistinguishable* if, and only if, no possible conscious content is at any time contained in either without being contained in both.

Of course, under this definition it is trivial that waking life is indistinguishable from a realistic corresponding dream. But that is not the only plausible way to understand what it is to be indistinguishable. Here is another way:

Two scenarios are *indistinguishable* if, and only if, one can tell *neither* that one is in the first and not the second when that is so, *nor* that one is in the second and not the first when *that* is so.

One can thus distinguish being conscious from being unconscious if one can tell that one is conscious rather than unconscious when indeed one is. It does not matter that one *cannot* tell that one is unconscious rather than conscious, when *that* is how it is. (Alternatively, one might define what it is for state X to be distinguishable from state Y, and then point out that this relation is not symmetric.)

¹⁷ “[I]f I am deceived, I am. For he who does not exist cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am.” St Augustine, *The Essential Augustine*, 2nd edn, selected and with commentary by Vernon J. Bourke (Indianapolis, IN:

For, I know, about a particular alternative option, that I am epistemically better off if I take that other option, since I will thereby avail myself of a correct answer to my question, which I fail to do if I only suspend judgment. Only the believing option is not defective in this sort of way. Only that option is such that I will *not* then be epistemically better off taking either one of the other available options. On the contrary, as I ponder the question whether I think and exist, as I epistemically deliberate, the believing option is the only one about which I know ahead of time that my taking it will obviously imply that I am epistemically right in so doing.

On the imagination model of dreaming <I am awake> shares the noted epistemic status of *cogito* propositions. In its case too, believing is the only epistemically undefective option. Both suspending judgment and disbelieving will share the following feature: that I know ahead of time, as I ponder my question, that I am better off epistemically if I take a particular other option, namely the belief option, since only about that option is it obvious to me now that if I take it I will be right.¹⁸

Hackett Publishing Company, 1973). "If I am Deceived, I Exist," at 33; source of the translation: *City of God*, XI. 26; trans. *The Works of Aurelius Augustinus*, ed. Marcus Dods, 15 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Co., 1871–6), revised by Vernon J. Bourke.

¹⁸ In my view there are at least two ways to fail to be awake. One might be entirely unconscious, whether by sleeping deeply enough or by having lost consciousness in some other way, perhaps as victim of a knockout. Alternatively, one might be conscious while one's state of consciousness is entirely filled by dreaming. It is of course compatible with this (partial) account that in lucid dreaming one is dreaming awake. Lucid dreaming thus becomes a kind of daydreaming, which can come in different varieties, depending, for example, on how much control one enjoys over the proceedings. Suppose you lucidly dream that you face a fire. On the imagination model we are still protected from the dream skeptic. For you will believe that you face a fire *only in the dream*. And from this it does not follow that you really believe it, while you dream. Nor,

What alternative is there to our proposed approach? Should one think that for all we know our current conscious life is nothing but a dream? Given our conception of dreams, how could one even sensibly entertain that possibility? If one is only dreaming, then one cannot be pondering any such question as whether one might be only dreaming, and one could not possibly assent to any answer, whether affirmative or negative. Knowing this, how can one sensibly deliberate on whether one might be dreaming? On our conception of dreams, one is automatically, rationally *committed* to supposing that one is *not* just dreaming, whenever one inquires at all. It is hard to imagine a better answer to the dream skeptic. On this view, knowledge of a fire that I see is no less defensible from dream skepticism than is knowledge of the *cogito*. We can just as well affirm <I think, therefore I am awake> as <I think, therefore I am>.¹⁹

presumably, would the lucid dreamer, who believes the dream to be a dream, be misled into thinking he faces a real fire just because in his dream he does so. In any case, on the present account, <I am awake> remains self-confirming in the way of the *cogito*, as does of course <I am *hereby* awake>.

¹⁹ My interest in dreams and skepticism goes back a long time, and the imagination model has figured in my preferred approach for many years, in courses and seminars. In the spring and summer of 2003 I presented these ideas in more formal settings, at a University of Florida conference in April, and at the Wittgenstein Symposium that summer (later published in its proceedings, *Knowledge and Belief. Wissen und Glaben* (ÖBV&HPT Publishers, 2005), ed. Winfried Löffler and Paul Weingartner, pp. 228–36). I remember helpful comments by Dan Kaufman, Jaegwon Kim, and Kirk Ludwig at the Florida conference, and good discussion with Robert Audi and Jay Rosenberg at the Kirchberg conference.

More recently I have become aware that in his *Mindsight* (Harvard, 2004), Colin McGinn develops similar ideas about the nature of dreams (which he traces back to Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Psychology of Imagination*). Although each account was developed in total ignorance of the other, there is a lot of agreement between us. But there are also important differences and even substantial disagreement. Much of my interest in these issues involves philosophical skepticism, for example, and here we have a looming disagreement. For him, we form beliefs not only in our dreams but also thereby while we dream. At this epistemologically crucial

Having ostensibly rescued our reflective knowledge from the dream skeptic, we still face a further threat, from the more radical skeptical scenarios. How can we non-arbitrarily take ourselves to be safe from these? Unless we can do so, we still fall short of reflective knowledge. We take this up in the second and fifth lectures.

juncture we part ways, as we do also on basic ontological and epistemological issues concerning dreams and the imagination.