

PROFESSOR MALCOLM ON DREAMS

I

Malcolm's "Dreaming" is a monograph in which he consistently applies a principle of Wittgenstein to dream-experiences the principle that there cannot be any significant talk of a private object, that "an inner process stands in need of outer criteria"¹.

If dream be understood as an inner process involving thoughts, feelings, images, etc. of which the dreamer is directly aware and of which no one else can (logically) be aware, then the following difficulty arises. 'Dream' is a concept and, like any other concept of a language, must have a rule of application, so much so, that, its wrong application always remains a possibility. Now, if 'dream' means a private inner experience, there can be no criterion of its application, no way of detecting whether a particular case is a wrong application of the concept, because in the case of inner states, what an individual says is not a case of following a definition, but a case of laying down a definition. What one says about his private experience cannot be checked up, not only by others, but not even by the individual himself. The distinction between correct identification and being under the impression that the identification is correct is obliterated. Such an identification has to be incorrigible. In the case of dream, memory cannot provide a criterion, because it itself needs one. If one tries to find out whether his identification is correct by the help of memory, his position is like Wittgenstein's man who buys several copies of the morning paper to assure that what is said was true.² Thus, my identification of my dream experience may go wrong, not only sometimes, but always get rid of the idea of the private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice"³. In other words, the 'supposition of

private experience is a knob that turns nothing.⁴ Therefore, "what went on within me 'is not the point at all'"⁵.

For this reason, in Chapter 14 of "Dreaming", Malcolm calls dream "a queer phenomenon", because "one tells a dream under the influence of an impression-as if one was faithfully recalling events that one witnessed"⁶, while in fact, there was no event to recall, no dream-experience which the telling reproduces. Dream-experience is an unintelligible hypothesis because, "nothing can count for or against the truth of this hypothesis. We can say either that there were experiences during sleep or that there were not, as we like"⁷. And, then, he approvingly quotes the last sentence of section 271 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: "A wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism". In other words, the point that Malcolm wants to make is that "telling the dream" and "having the dream-experience" are logically the same, since there is no way of knowing what dreams are a-part from descriptions. The descriptions may not be backed by anything; conversely, there might be experience without narration. But then, how to know? Thus, we can meaningfully say only that description is all that "dream" connotes. The private dream-experience is no part of the dream language-game.

In short, if the concept 'dream' we meant to refer to inner states, it would cease to be a concept, because, in that case, we can never be sure that it has as a concept must have, a definite field of application. Thus, it has to be admitted that as a concept 'dream' means, not the dream-experience, but only the description of it that one gives after waking from sleep. The description is its criterion, that is, the logical definition and not its evidence. The concept does not mean anything beyond and besides the description.

II

It is normally supposed that dream is a private inner experience, because we speak of 'remembering a dream' and 'remembering' means recapitulating a past experience. But, it is to be noted that 'remembering' in the context of telling dreams has a meaning quite distinct from the meaning it has in the context of factual memory, because it cannot be checked up. In a paper

entitled "A definition of factual memory" Malcolm holds that the knowledge that one dreamt is a case of factual memory "when one knows that one had a dream last week or last month. But if a person awakened suddenly from sleep and immediately declared that he had a dream, should we call this remembering a dream"?⁸ Malcolm answers the question in the negative, since in the ordinary sense 'remembering' always presupposes previous knowledge and there can be no question of having previous knowledge that one was dreaming.

Not that "I remember I dreamt P" has no use in language. What is to be noted is that this is a special use, so much so, that this use does not justify the fact that what I now remember was during sleep an experience, or, that 'remembering that I dreamt' is logically 'the same as 'remembering that I met X at a party'. It is this logical assimilation of the distinct uses of 'remembering' that has done mischief in the philosophy of dream and, to avoid confusion in thought, it is necessary to keep before mind the distinct uses of the term. It is to be noted that remembering a dream is not an instance of what is commonly known as factual memory. Malcolm makes this quite clear in the concluding para of his paper referred to above: "The conclusion I draw is, not that our definition of factual memory is wrong, but that this special sense of remembering that one dreamt differs sharply from the central use of factual memory locution. Our definition gives a correct account of the central use, but perhaps not of absolutely every use of this locution"⁹ This meets the charge of D. F. Pears: ".....must every type of memory claim be verified sometimes, or atleast confirmed sometimes? If so, what counts as a type?"¹⁰.

In this case, Malcolm is following Wittgenstein strictly. In "Philosophical Investigations", Wittgenstein says: "The question whether the dreamer's memory deceives him when he reports the dream after waking cannot arise, unless indeed we introduce a completely new criterion for the report's 'agreeing' with the dream, a criterion which gives us a concept of 'truth' as distinct from 'truthfulness here'"¹¹.

To follow the connection between Malcolm and Wittgenstein a little farther. Wittgenstein denies that a sensation-word denotes an item in our (private) consciousness, because a private image cannot

be identified. But he does not deny that in common usage there is something like identifying mental images as when one says that the pain he now feels in the chest is the same as what he felt last month. In his review of "Philosophical Investigations" Malcolm says: "Wittgenstein who has no interest in reforming language, would not dream of calling this an incorrect use of 'identify.' But, Malcolm points out, Wittgenstein would insist on recognising the distinct meaning of the word when so used. To quote his words again: "His identification of his sensation is an expression of sensation... the identification is incorrigible." We have here a radically different use of 'identify' from that illustrated in the examples of alcohol and rabbit".¹² The philosophical problem arises because the former sense of 'identify' is taken to be the same as the latter one. Similarly, the mistaken notion of dream is due to taking 'remembering a dream' as a case of factual memory when, in fact, it is entirely different. In "Dreaming" Malcolm as a true follower of Wittgenstein, is only "assembling, reminders for a particular purpose."¹³

III

A great stumbling-block in the way of accepting the thesis that description is all that the concept of dream implies is the fact that in the case of one's own dream, impression that one dreamt and not any description of it, is what determines that one dreamt. In other words, I know that some one has dreamt from the fact that he tells me his dream. But, surely, I do not need any telling to know that I have dreamt. I know that from my impressions of my 'dream-experience' but, then, 'I had a dream' and 'He had a dream.'—the first and third person statements have no doubt the same sense which these could not have if the criteria in the two cases were different. so, it follows that 'dream-experience' constitutes the meaning of the concept of dream, since only thus interpreted can the first and third person statements of dreaming be interpreted in the same sense—the descriptions of dreams in the case of others pointing to their 'dream-experiences' as one's impressions do in one's own case.

Against this objection to his theory of dreaming, Malcolm points out that, 'in the same sense' is determined in different cases by different moral uses, so much so, that it is fallacious to deduce any

normal use from any case of 'in the same sense'. In other words, it is fallacious to suppose that 'in the same sense' must always imply one and the same normal use in all cases, namely, the application of the same criterion of verification. 'I weigh 170 pounds' is said to be used in the same sense as 'He weighs 170 pounds', because both are verified with the same or similar method of weighing. But this does not mean that it must be so in every case of first and third person pair of statements. As a matter of fact, this is not the normal use of 'in the same sense' in the case of the pairs 'I had dreamt' and 'He had dreamt.' Here 'in the same sense' does not imply the application of the same criterion of verification. The normal use of 'in the same sense' here is only that none refers to, say, day-dream. In short, 'in the same sense' does not determine the normal use, as the objectors wrongly suppose, on the contrary, it is determined by the normal use. To quote Malcolm's own words: "What it is to use the sentence of a first person third person pair 'in the same sense' depends on what their normal use is. One cannot deduce what their normal use is from the fact that they are used in the same sense"¹⁴ Thus, though 'I had dreamt' and 'He had dreamt' are used in the same sense, it does not necessarily follow that the pair must have the same criterion of verification. In other words, it is not illegitimate to suppose that in this case 'in the same sense' has a different normal use. As a matter of fact, one knows that he had dreamt, not because of having subjective impressions, but because of finding that these impressions are not confirmed by, or tally with, waking experience. This is what makes one think that he had dreamt, even when the fact was really experienced waking up for a short while at midnight in a half-sleep half-waking state, if others who were present at that time conspire to deceive him. "As one can know one dreamt, so can one be mistaken. You wake up, for example, with the impression that a police man come into your room during the night; other people in the house say this did not occur; you conclude you dreamt it; but the event really happened and the others, conspired to deceive you".¹⁵ So the impressions by themselves, are of no account. They do not and cannot establish that one dreamt.

One of the intriguing points in Malcolm's analysis of dream is that he altogether denies the possibility of having any experience during sleep. On his analysis, 'I dreamt' does not mean 'I was

aware of anything during sleep.' Had I been aware of anything, it would not be dream but hallucination. His point is that if one can be said to have any experience in dream, it must be conceded that he is capable of making assertions in sleep of the type, for example, as cited by Aristotle, "some object approaching is a man or a horse" "the object is white or beautiful," and so forth. But, then, to concede that it is possible to make assertions in sleep is to further concede that it is possible to make the assertion "I am asleep" in sleep. But "I am asleep" is such a statement that it can be asserted only falsely. In other words, its falsity is a necessary condition of its being made. This being so, Malcolm contends, "I am asleep" can not be said to be a genuine assertion, since a genuine assertion, though may not actually be true, must at least have the logical possibility of being true.

This position of Malcolm appears to be puzzling, because if "I am asleep" is not a genuine statement, its use could not be learnt or taught. But, then, how do we know that when such a statement is made, it has got to be false? To know that whenever it is used, it is wrongly used implies that one knows that a given instance of its use is not a case of its right use. But how is that possible, unless one knows what a case of its right use is?

This difficulty may be put in another way by applying what Wittgenstein calls the principle of significant negation. Whatever proposition has a significant negation must itself be significant. Thus, it may be said that, since "I am not asleep" can be significantly said and so taught and learnt, how can its negation "I am asleep" be non-sensical and cannot be taught and learnt?

The sentences "I am asleep", "I am unconscious", "I am dead" are of the same logical type, in as much as their assertion entails their falsity. The peculiarity of these sentences is that, though it is logically impossible to assert them truthfully in the present tense, these can be, and often are, asserted truthfully in the past tense (of course, taking 'dead' to mean 'not alive'). I can meaningfully say "I was asleep", "I was unconscious", "I was not alive" (when, for example, Russell was born). But, then, these sentences in the past tense only indicate that I was not having the normal waking, conscious, living experiences. If something extremely unusual happens which it is difficult for us to integrate with our normal waking experience, we wonder if we

are awake or dreaming, that is, asleep. Similarly to say in the present tense "I am asleep", "I am unconscious", "I am dead" would only indicate that I am now devoid of normal waking, conscious, living experiences. But then, the utterance of 'I' would not be consistent with such statements, because the very utterance of 'I' would show that I am having the experiences which I deny by the use of the verb and the predicate. In other words, "I am asleep" cannot be truthfully said, because the very utterance of 'I' shows that I am not asleep. Similarly, "I am not asleep" does not make any specific statement, does not give any definite information about any particular subject matter. In other words, it does not report or describe anything but only shows that I am awake, that is, having normal waking experience which any utterance whatsoever of mine, nay, even any ejaculation or gesture of mine will show. For example, if some one referring to me remarks "He is asleep" when I am really not, I may show him that I am not asleep just by turning over, or by the movement of my limbs or by producing some relevant sounds or just by opening my eyes. Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, makes a distinction between saying and showing. In proposition 4.1212 he says: "What can be shown cannot be said." Saying is asserting or describing that a state of affairs exists or does not exist. A proposition says or states something. Showing, on the other hand, is 'showing forth itself', 'manifesting itself', 'exhibiting itself', and so forth. "I am not asleep", Malcolm maintains, does not say or describe any state of affairs but only shows a fact which can be done without using any sentence whatsoever. Thus, "I am not asleep", being not a significant statement, it is no wonder that its negation "I am asleep" also has got to be so on the principle of significant negation. That I am awake or conscious or living can not be said, but only shown. Prof. Ayer is wrong in supposing that "I am not asleep" or "I am awake", on Malcolm's analysis, "expresses a significant statement, which has no significant negation."¹⁶ I can learn or teach the use of such sentences, because in such cases the only thing to learn or teach is how to use a demonstrative, here functioning as a subject, so much so, that the addition of the predicate does not add anything new.

V

Malcolm considers instances of dream which may falsify his theory. For example, during sleep some one may display behaviour—utter the name of someone, smile, sigh, and the like—which may be taken to indicate that he is dreaming in the sense of having some experience in sleep. Now, suppose on waking he is not able to tell any dream. Does this prove that he did not have any dream to tell? What about dog's dreaming?

Malcolm takes this kind of dream to be uninteresting. In such case, one may have anything or nothing. It is the inexpressible and the unknowable and cannot be talked of and what cannot be talked of cannot be whistled off either. His behaviour is like that of an operated patient who utters words of agony under a nesthesia. When he comes round, he is not able to recall any experience. Did he have any experience all the same? Or was it all due to only unconscious reflex action? "And what meaning has this question?—And what interest?"¹⁷ What would settle the question? so, Malcolm says ".....our primary concept of dreaming has for its criterion, not the behaviour of the sleeping person but of his subsequent testimony.... Dreaming in this primary sense is of great interest to people and also poses philosophical problems. Dreaming that has a purely behavioural criterion is of little interest."¹⁸

Malcolm considers nightmare to be logically distinct from dream because dream occurs during sleep and when one has a nightmare he cannot be said to be fully asleep.¹⁹ The criterion of sleep, according to Malcolm, is mainly behavioural, that is, "present inertness and unresponsiveness"²⁰, so much so, that "a man who was tossing about, crying out and groaning in the thrces of a nightmare " would not be" a good example of a person asleep.²¹

Narration of dreams to a psycho-analyst has importance in so far as these disclose what ideas occur to the mind of the patient, but not as revealing the patient's experience during sleep, since his waking delusions are also of importance to the psychoanalyst.

Prof. Ayer, on the contrary, contends that the fact that the patients are able to "reverse their accounts of their dreams" and "recall incidents, perhaps entire dreams, which they had not previously been able to remember" shows that there is a core of dream-experience round which the report centres. As he says, the recon-

struction of dreams under the influence of psychoanalysis "does not accord very well with the idea that there is nothing to which report of dreams can correspond".²² It is, however, clear that the fact which Prof. Ayer advances goes to prove the contrary of what he intends to prove. Which experience did the patient actually have during sleep? What is the criterion? He might have any or no experience. Anyway, his supposed experience cannot be known and, therefore, cannot be talked of.

For the same reason, Malcolm denies that dreams occur in physical time. What happens in time is an event and an event can be talked of. Conversely, what cannot be talked of cannot, without abuse of language, be termed an event.

VI

The point that Malcolm tries to establish in "Dreaming" is that one cannot be said to use a concept meaningfully if there is no uniform and objective criterion of its use. In this connection, reference may be made to Wittgenstein's denial of the possibility of private language²³. Following Wittgenstein, Malcolm means to say that, as in the case of sensation-words, so also in the case of dream-concept, it is not the inner experience, which is not only beyond all access of others, but also cannot be identified as the same at different times even by oneself, that constitutes the core of the meaning of 'dream'. 'Dream' only means the description of the impressions that one reports after waking from sleep because only these can be checked up in the light of verifiable facts.

What Malcolm means when he denies that dreams are conscious experience enjoyed during sleep is not that there is no dream-experience, but that, since there is no criterion for identifying it and thus for knowing it, no concept can be meaningfully applied to it, whatever it may be. What Malcolm insists upon is the private experience is no part of dream language-game following Wittgenstein's thesis that private sensation, for example, pain, though mistakenly supposed to form the core of sensation-words, is no part of sensation language-game. There cannot be any significant talk about private dream-experience, just as there cannot be any significant talk about mystic or religious experience.

I think, it is wrong even to say that there is no dream-experience, because in that case we use a concept which cannot be significantly used. Since the theists talk non-sense, it cannot be said that the atheists talk sense. Both transcend the bounds of language and try to talk about something which cannot be talked of. What Wittgenstein said of private sensation equally applies to private dream-experience : " It is not a something, but not a nothing either : the conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here "24.

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NOTES

1. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Sec. 580
2. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*; Sec. 265.
3. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*, Part II, XI, P. 207.
4. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*; Sec. 270.
5. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*; Part II, XI, P. 222.
6. P.86.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Included in his *Knowledge and certainty*, P. 240.
9. *Ibid*.
10. D. F. Pears, *Professor Norman Malcolm : Dreaming, Mind*, Vol. LXX, No. 278, April, 1961, P. 152.
11. Part II, XI, PP. 222-23.
12. Included in his *Knowledge and Certainty*, P.127.
13. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*; Sec. 127.
14. N. Malcolm, *Dreaming*, P. 127.
15. *Ibid*.
16. A. J. Ayer, " Professor Malcolm on Dreams ", included in his *Metaphysics and Commonsense*, P. 166.
17. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit*; Part II, VII, P. 184
18. N. Malcolm, *Dreaming*, P. 63.
19. " His state was, however, so unlike the paradigms of normal sleep that it is at least problematic whether it should be said

that he was 'asleep' when those struggles were going on".

N. Malcolm, Op. Cit, PP. 62-63.

20. N. Malcolm, Op. Cit, P. 23.

21. N. Malcolm, Op. Cit, P. 28.

22. A. J. Ayer, Op. Cit, P. 161.

23. See My "Wittgenstein on Private Language." Bharati, Utkal University Journal of Humanities Vol. IV, No. 7, Dec. 70, PP. 55-62.

24. L. Wittgenstein, Op. Cit, Sec. 304.