

# The continuity and discontinuity between waking and dreaming from the perspective of an analytical psychological construct

Commentary on “The continuity and discontinuity between waking and dreaming: A Dialogue between Michael Schredl and Allan Hobson concerning the adequacy and completeness of these notions”

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**Summary.** The dialog between Michael Schredl and Alan Hobson (Hobson, Schredl 2011) addresses a number of questions relating to the continuity hypothesis and Hobson’s alternative hypothesis of discontinuity (based on his protoconsciousness theory). The dialog eventually focuses on the question that if continuity and discontinuity are both present in dreaming, and thus if dreaming is not entirely derived from waking experience, then just what is the source of the anomalous content and what is its function? My commentary addresses the dialog surrounding this question by referencing the arguments to a psychological model, not previously introduced into the dialog, but which has enjoyed a lengthy history and which incorporates the synthesis of both continuity and discontinuity similar in any many ways to the descriptions the discussants use in their dialog. The model does not necessarily provide conclusive answers but rather provides an alternative psychological construct for reflection and further exploration of these questions.

The dialog between Schredl and Hobson (Hobson, Schredl 2011) begins with a bounding of the definition of the continuity hypothesis and with Hobson pointing out the limitations as he understands the term to be used by many psychologists and psychotherapeutically oriented researchers. Michael Schredl argues that dreams often contain elements of our waking life on a thematic level and that the continuity hypothesis does not imply an exact replay of a waking event but simply says that we dream of our waking life experiences (thoughts, feeling, events etc.). Hobson argues that he does not doubt that some recent experiences are represented in dreams but points out that the continuity hypothesis is incomplete in that it does not account for the greater source of dream content which is not an apparent reproduction of prior waking experience. He feels that continuity theorists consider continuity to run in one direction, from the waking experience to the dream, and are obliged to regard dream elements as distorted or disguised transformations of prior waking experience – which he is very skeptical of.

Hobson proposes an alternative discontinuity hypothesis which asserts that the continuity arrow primarily runs in the other direction, from dream into waking consciousness. He agrees that dreams contain elements of our waking experiences but reflect more of a replay of the waking state (universal features such as seeing moving and feeling) than of waking experience. He considers discontinuity (or continuity in that direction) to be generic; referring to his protocon-

sciousness theory (Hobson 2009) which suggests that the development and maintenance of waking consciousness and other high-order brain functions depends on brain activation during sleep. Hobson argues that dreaming is not simply a replay of waking experiences but a synthesis of “misrepresentations” of wake state events and completely original dream features. He considers dream content to be synthetic and that dreaming is a predictor as well as a reflector of waking consciousness, explaining that REM sleep-dreaming creates an infinitely varied set of possible scenarios at the same time that it processes scenarios that have actually occurred; a practice session for a wide range of wake-state challenges.

In the concluding dialog both Hobson and Schredl appear to agree that the continuity hypothesis and the protoconsciousness theory complement each other and fit together well. Hobson states that it is not so much a question of either/or as it is a question of both/and.

In commenting on the dialogue I am drawn to two basic question which Hobson and Schredl raise and attempt to address to some degree. The first is how one tests the validity of each hypothesis and its effect on waking life. The second is that if continuity and discontinuity are both present in dreaming, and thus if dreaming is not entirely derived from waking experience, then just what is the source of the anomalous content and what is its function? I will comment on the second question, because it became the source of further discussion points throughout the dialog regarding whether dream content has any bearing on development and/or adaption to waking consciousness, whether it helps the dreamer to mature in a psychological sense and whether the content contains new information which is useful in psychotherapy.

Although the discussants generally approach the subject from a research background their views on this particular

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## Box #1

Carl Gustav Jung, M.D. (1875 to 1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and a founder of Analytical Psychology. Much of his life's work was spent exploring the processes of the human psyche and the archetypal patterns which emerge, that he found to be common to dreams as well as conscious human activities and mythology. Many psychological concepts were originally proposed by Jung, including the Extroverted and Introverted personality types, Archetype, the Collective Unconscious, the Complex, Compensation as a function dreams, the Transcendent Function and Synchronicity. Jung was thirty when he made his association with Sigmund Freud. Shortly thereafter the two began an intense six year collaboration and eventually Freud support of Jung's election as chairman of the International Psychoanalytical Association. The friendship ended in 1912 when Jung published *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (Psychology of the Unconscious) resulting in a theoretical divergence between him and Freud. Jung's total amount of work is very large, estimated at over 200 papers much of which is now contained in his *Collected Works* (completed in 1972).

question appear influenced to a degree by differing psychological perspectives. Schredl indicates that in his experience, dreams help the dreamer to mature in this psychological sense, especially those that show thematic continuity to waking life, and that dreamwork on this basis helps the dreamer understand him or herself better. Hobson argues that from his experience as a psychotherapist, with a background of Freudian training, dream content has revealed nothing that he did not already know. He further states that all who try to interpret dreams in psychotherapy miss the important point that dreams are auto-creative, explaining "how could you ever interpret a dream if you thought it was a wide open set of expectations rather than a narrow mirroring of experience?" What struck me at this point is that there exists a theoretical psychological construct, which had not entered into the discussion, which might be equally supportive of both discontinuity and continuity as Hobson and Schredl describe them. My objective in introducing such a model is in no way intended to promote the validity or completeness of the model in answering the question, but rather to provide an alternative psychological construct for reflection on the discussion points, since the arguments being made align so well with this model.

Hobson's protoconsciousness theory and discontinuity hypotheses, as he describes them here, are strikingly close to the theoretical model, on dreaming and the nature of the human psyche, of Analytical Psychology as hypothesized by Carl Jung (see box #1). A brief summary of some of the key aspects of Jung's theoretical model as relates to this dialog might be useful in establishing the areas where the hypotheses intersect as well as a perspective on the question of whether continuity or discontinuity makes any sense in regard to a possible function of dreaming.

Carl Jung, much like Freud and many others, described the nature of the human psyche as composed of a conscious self (where ego resides) and an unconscious. But Jung went further by dividing the unconscious into a personal unconscious (containing material that was once conscious, arising out of experience) and the collective unconscious (content which has never been conscious and independent of personal experience). He broke from the strictly environmental

determinism of the mind showing that evolution and heredity provided the blueprints of the psyche just as it does the body and brain. The collective unconscious is not an etheric mental concept, but is described in this model as the inherited mental characteristics of the evolutionary pre-configuring of the brain-mind (Hall & Nordby 1973); not unlike the "genetically encoded experience of our biological ancestors" that Hobson referred to in describing his proto-consciousness theory. Jung claimed that the unconscious makes its influence known in dreams, stating that, "dreams are the most readily accessible expression of the unconscious" (Jung 1971, p. 283) and are self-representations of the psychic life-process (Jung 1971, pp. 75-76). In his writing he did not always distinguish between the function of dreaming and that of the unconscious, considering the collective unconscious as the creator, organizer and source of dream images (Jung 1964, p. 161).

This theoretical construct of a collective unconscious independent of personal experience, which expresses itself in dreams, is quite supportive of Hobson's contention that there is a greater source of the anomalous dream content which is not an apparent reproduction of prior waking experience. Hobson emphasized the universality of formal features in dreams that have little to do with the replay of waking experience, and likewise Jung observed the universality of collective and instinctive manifestations and patterns which appear in dreams, that are innate and inherited, that function in the same way in all of us (Jung 1964, p. 64). He termed these patterns and motifs "archetypes" and devoted much of his work to demonstrating how these patterns appear both in dreams as well as in conscious human tendencies and mythologies. The notion of archetypal patterns appears conceptually similar to Hobson's hypothesis of "orientational maps," provided in REM sleep, that could be fit to the orientation realities of waking.

Hobson's protoconsciousness theory states that primary consciousness (dreaming state) is an important building block on which secondary consciousness (waking state) is constructed (Hobson 2009). He suggests in the dialog that the development and maintenance of waking consciousness and other high-order brain functions depends on brain activation during sleep. Hobson further argues that dreaming is a predictor and developer as well as a reflector of waking consciousness. Jung likewise considered dreams to have an "anticipatory and prognostic aspect" (Jung 1964, p. 66). Jung supported the notion that the development and maintenance of waking consciousness originates from the unconscious, stating that the unconscious is not just a reactive mirror-reflection of conscious events but an independent productive activity which constantly supplies us with contents which....extend the range of consciousness (Jung 1971, p. 135). Jung further stated that the collective unconscious contains the organizing principle of the personality (termed the Self) from which the structural development of consciousness stems (Jung 1964, p. 169) and which directs the whole buildup of ego consciousness (Jung 1964, p. 169).

If Jung's model appears supportive of the theory of proto-consciousness and discontinuity then how does the model answer the questions which Schredl poses, whether continuity or discontinuity makes any sense in regard to a possible function of dreaming and whether it helps the dreamer to mature and adapt psychologically. Hobson states that there is a "redundant mix and match process going on in REM

sleep dreams which associates emotion and mental content, real or imagined, experienced or merely anticipated" emphasizing that it is effective because of its unconstrained scope, generality and redundancy. Jung made a similar observation; "our dream life creates a meandering pattern in which individual strands or tendencies become visible then vanish then return again." Jung attributed a function to this activity, however, indicating that there is a hidden regulating or directing tendency at work creating a slow imperceptible process of psychic growth – the process of individuation or self-realization (Jung 1971, p. 134). By coming to terms with one's own inner center or Self in this meandering (or mix and match) process, Jung contends that a wider and more mature personality gradually emerges (Jung 1964, p. 161).

But what of the continuity arrow running both ways and the question of whether or how dreams reflect our waking life experiences? Hobson defines dream content, from the standpoint of his discontinuity theory, as a synthesis of "misrepresentations of wake events" with completely original dream features. Jung would agree with the synthesis with original dream features, but might argue that the distortions of waking content are not misrepresentations but the "unconscious aspect" of the waking event which is revealed to us in dreams not as a rational thought but as a symbolic image (Jung 1964, p. 5) an emotionally charged pictorial language (Jung 1964, p. 30). In other words the continuity of external events may indeed be quite present in dreams, but expressed in terms of their unconscious associations (more obvious as thematic associations as Schredl termed them). This construct might also involve emotional salience as a factor related to incorporation of external events into dreams. Ernest Hartmann theorizes that dreams place the feeling-state of the dreamer directly into the image to form picture-metaphors which serves the function of noting emotional similarities in a more efficient picture form than could otherwise be achieved (Hartmann 2011, p. 49, 57). So the distortions of prior waking events may not be so much "misrepresentations" but rather a very robust and more complete synthesis (or condensation in Freud's terminology) of conscious and unconscious associations with the waking event - along with the more "interesting" autocreative elements that Hobson describes.

But what function does this serve? Schredl argues that thematic continuity from waking experiences to dreams might be important to self-actualization and agrees that dreams may be predictive in that "old" waking life material is put together in a creative way in order to prepare the person for future experiences in waking life. Hartmann (1996) also hypothesizes that dreaming makes connections between recently experienced material (day residue) and old memories, stating that dreaming often combines (condenses) two different people, two different places, two different parts of our lives. Jung indicates that one purpose these connections serve is that of "compensation" (Jung 1964, p. 56) whereby conscious misconceptions are placed in juxtaposition to unconsciously synthesized material to re-establish the psychic equilibrium. Hartmann agrees that making connections and bringing material together in dreams can compensate for the limited nature of waking thought in which material is kept separate (Hartmann 2011, p. 83). Things are being put together in a new way, which may or may not be immediately obvious, however those broad, loose connections of dreaming can provide a different perspective and can help us make important decisions and discoveries

(Hartmann 2011, p. 121).

In terms of the self-actualization Schredl was addressing, this is all part of a Jung's Transcendent Function (Jung 1971, p. 273) where a sense of completeness and self-realization is achieved through a union of the consciousness with the unconscious contents of the mind such that they are integrally connected and move together (Jung 1964, p. 146). Hartmann and Jung agree that this integration allows us to arrive at a new attitude and helps establish our emotional being - our basic sense of self (Hartmann 2011, p. 107; Jung 1971, p. 279). Although Hobson argues that he "never learned anything from a dream that he did not already know" he also argued that waking consciousness is affected by this synthesis stating that, "dreaming as a prelude to and predictor of waking consciousness is a clinically significant and powerful adaptive notion".

Whether this psychological model answers all the questions raised in the dialogue is doubtful, but perhaps it provides an alternative theoretical construct for reflection on these questions. The model appears to intersect with and incorporate many of the characteristics of synthesis of continuity, discontinuity and protoconsciousness as described by Schredl and Hobson, and furthermore conceptually incorporates all three as necessary elements in the functioning of the human psyche. Jung's model does not always distinguish between the function of the unconscious and that of the dream within which it acts and reveals itself, but perhaps the elusive question on the "function of dreams" may be more a question of the "unconscious brain function" and the way in which it adapts the dream state to reveal and play itself out; perhaps taking advantage of the unconstrained nature of dreaming to synthesize and integrate conscious and unconscious material and make connections that aid the development and maintenance of waking consciousness.

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