
Just in Time—Dreamless Sleep Experience as Pure Subjective Temporality

A Commentary on Evan Thompson

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In this commentary, I propose a strategy for extending Evan Thompson's argument on the existence of dreamless sleep experience. My first aim is to show that the Indian debate on reports of having slept peacefully is importantly similar to debates in scientific dream research and contemporary Western philosophy on the trustworthiness of dream reports. This analogy leads to a surprising conclusion: the default view of conscious experience as that which disappears in dreamless sleep, though widely accepted in cognitive neuroscience, is in fact inconsistent with the methodological background assumptions of scientific dream research. Importantly, the methods already used in scientific dream research, as well as the theoretical justification on which they are based, can be extended to the investigation of dreamless sleep experience. Second, I sketch the outlines of a conceptual model of dreamless sleep experience as involving pure subjective temporality, or phenomenal experience characterized only by the phenomenal *now* and the sense of duration, but devoid of any further intentional content. I suggest that understood in this manner, dreamless sleep experience is a candidate for minimal phenomenal experience, or the simplest form in which a state can be phenomenally conscious. This model also extends existing work on minimal phenomenal selfhood in dreams. Third, I discuss three empirical examples that I take to be particularly promising candidates of dreamless sleep experience. These are certain forms of minimal or imageless lucid dreams, white dreams, and sleep-state misperception of the type most dramatically seen in subjective insomnia.

Keywords

Dreaming | Dreamless sleep | First-person reports | Insomnia | Lucidity | Minimal phenomenal experience | Minimal phenomenal selfhood | Sleep-state misperception | Time consciousness | White dreams

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