Dream Immorality[1]

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This paper focuses on an underappreciated issue that dreams raise for moral evaluation: is immorality possible in dreams? The *evaluational internalist* is committed to answering 'yes.' This is because the internalist account of moral evaluation holds that the moral quality of a person's actions, what a person does, her *agency* in any given case is completely determined by factors that are internal to that agency, such as the person's motives and/or intentions. Actual production of either good or bad effects is completely irrelevant to the moral evaluation of that agency. Since agency can be expressed in a dream, the internalist is committed to dream immorality. Some may take this as a *reductio* of evaluational internalism, but whether or not this is the case the issue reveals what such a theory is committed to.

In this paper I explore the significance of dreams to morality, and argue that the absurdity of dream immorality supports an account of moral evaluation with an externalist component, rather than a purely internalist account of moral evaluation.

Though dreams can be very vivid and realistic some may question whether or not agency can truly be expressed in dreams. It seems to me that it can be so expressed, and that it is possible for an

[1] Earlier drafts of this paper have been read at The University of Texas at Austin, The University of Oklahoma, St. Louis University, The University of Colorado, Boulder, The University of St. Andrews, Bristol University, University of Reading, Vanderbilt University, Bilkent University, and the University of British Columbia. I thank the members of those audiences for their stimulating questions and comments. Thanks are also owed to Michelle Mason and Roy Sorensen for helpful comments on an earlier draft. I first began thinking of this general issue when thinking about the moral status of actions in 'non-real' circumstances—as in *The Matrix*. It turns out, though, that the matrix the character Neo inhabits in that film isn't really like a dream state since the matrix constitutes its own world. For more on this issue, connected to dream immorality, see my 'Artificial Ethics', in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix* Christopher Grau (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 208–17. In that article I briefly discuss dream immorality and argue, however, for disanalogies between the matrix and a dream.

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agent to have mental states while dreaming. Indeed, the view that one can have mental states such as beliefs in a dream is part of what some philosophers call the 'orthodox conception' of dreams.[2] A portion of the paper will be spent defending this claim. I will also be maintaining, however, that there exists a morally very significant distinction between dream experiences and those of the actual world. Typically, dream experiences do not generate consequences that can be expressed in true statements—that is, their consequences typically fail to match up with the real world. However, there is nothing about dreams that makes this lack of connection *necessary*. One could certainly imagine scenarios in which there is such a match up.

I. The Problem

Henry David Thoreau made a lovely case for the moral significance of dreams when he wrote:

> In dreams we see ourselves naked and acting out our real characters, even more clearly than we see others awake. But an unwavering and commanding virtue would compel even its most fantastic and faintest dreams to respect its ever wakeful authority; as we are accustomed to say carelessly, we should never have *dreamed* of such a thing. Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake.[3]

[2] Ernest Sosa, in his Presidential Address to the Eastern APA 'Dreams and Philosophy' (Dec. 29, 2004) uses this expression. Sosa argues against the orthodox conception, and though his focus is on dream scepticism he also holds that dream immorality is not possible because there are no mental states such as beliefs present in the dreaming person. As far as I can tell his argument rests on noting that 'I am dreaming' cannot be correctly affirmed, and is 'hence, pragmatically incoherent.' and that one cannot reflectively affirm the contradictory claim that 'I am now dreaming.' This is on analogy with claims like 'I am now unconscious' or 'I am now dead', which also cannot be reflectively affirmed. But it seems that there are relevant differences between death and dreams in that we do have experience of waking from dreams in ordinary life, and experience of the relevant mental states while dreaming, unlike being unconscious. Of course, Sosa, like I said, is primarily concerned with dream scepticism so might not be impressed with this observation. But I am assuming fairly common sense views about dreaming that don't entertain dream scepticism.

[3] *On the Banks of the Concord and the Merrimack* (1849).

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Dreams, then, are taken to reveal our true character—they serve this epistemic function of providing information or evidence of a person's tendencies or dispositions. Perhaps Thoreau thought this because dreams are taken to reveal our natural selves, our true selves, our selves that exist independently of social inhibitions. Whatever the case, though, this intuition has widespread appeal. One might well be nervous to discover that one's neighbour dreams of setting fires—and enjoying it!

In any case, this intuition that dreams have an epistemic function, or rather, more weakly, that they can in some cases have this function, I call *the character intuition*. Note that to say that dreams may sometimes have epistemic significance—that they may *reveal* character, is quite distinct from a metaphysical claim that what occurs in a dream itself has moral significance.

Other writers in the history of philosophy have had somewhat more serious or more awkward worries along the metaphysical line—worries that what occurs in dreams can *constitute* immorality. I believe, for example, that it was St. Augustine who originally asked whether or not someone could do anything wrong or immoral in a dream.[4] Gareth Matthews, in his discussion of Augustine and dream immorality, notes that for Augustine dream immorality is very much a concern precisely because Augustine is committed to this internalist standard.[5]

Augustine was mainly concerned with erotic dreams:

> Am I not myself at that time ...? ... where, then, is the reason which when waking resists such suggestions? And if the things themselves be forced on it, I remain unmoved ... But when, then, comes it to pass, that even in slumber we often resist, and, bearing our purpose in mind, ... yield no assent to such allurements? (*Confessions*, X.30)[6]

The point, of course, carries over to any putative case of immorality. If all that matters is what is in one's heart, or what one wills to be the case, then willing in a dream should be no different

[4] Gareth Matthews 'On Being Immoral in a Dream', *Philosophy* (January 1981), 47–54; also William Mann 'Dreams of Immorality', *Philosophy* (July 1983), pp. 378–85. Mann also points out worries about dream immorality even supposing that dreams don't count as experiences.

[5] Ibid. Matthews holds that Augustine is a strong 'intentionalist' which, I believe, is a form of internalism that takes the agent's intentions to be what is relevant in evaluating agency.

[6] In *The Basic Works of Augustine*, Vol. One, edited and translated by Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 168.

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from willing in reality. Or, to put it another way, when one succumbs to temptation (if all that matters morally is the good or bad internal state one is embodying) then dream immorality just *is* real immorality—as real as the sort of immorality expressed in the waking world.

To many this seems odd, because in a dream, presumably, one's willings have no actual consequences. The lie told in a dream has no actual bad effects since in the dream no actual persons are led astray, nor is there any serious prospect that they will be. This may not be necessarily or universally true about dreams, though it does seem to typically be the case that our dreams don't match up with the waking world, and when they do have consequences, they aren't ones that exhibit any match between the dream experience and the waking world. It is important at this point to highlight yet another putative absurdity. If I dream that I act rightly—for example, I dream that I write out a check to Oxfam, or I dream that I was nice and helped my neighbour clean her garage, do I get any credit for that? It seems not! Indeed, if I just dream that I do good deeds and don't follow through, that seems worse than simply not doing the good deed. For example, if we believe that we have imperfect duties of beneficence, this suggests that one has a quota of beneficence to fulfil. It seems outrageous to suggest that I could fulfil my quota of good willings through dreams. We can certainly imagine someone who, when dreaming is an altruist, when awake, however, is the paradigm of a miserly misanthrope. The moral quality of this person's life is not redeemed through her dreams.

We need to clarify a bit here. Of course one's dream actions are not real actions. They consist in willings to act and a belief that one is in fact acting in a certain way. One could point out, trivially, that one cannot perform immoral actions in a dream because one cannot perform *any* action in a dream. Norman Malcolm noted that 'If a man had certain thoughts and feelings in a dream it no more follows that he had those thoughts and feelings while asleep, than it follows from his having climbed a mountain in a dream that he climbed a mountain when asleep.'[7] On Malcolm's view my dreaming that I want an ice cream cone does not entail that I wanted an ice cream cone while I was asleep. There are several points here—one can agree with this denial of entailment while maintaining that it is still possible that some dreams do involve the agent actually having desires, formulating intentions, and otherwise embodying actual

[7] Norman Malcolm, *Dreaming* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 51–2.

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mental states. Malcolm wants to draw some very far reaching conclusions from this observation that don't seem warranted. Consider the following claim 'I am dreaming that I am thinking.' According to Malcolm this is not verifiable so is meaningless. If this is meaningless but 'I am thinking' is not, then what goes on in the dream cannot be the thinking that we are familiar with while awake. This certainly goes against the received view of mental phenomena in dreams that I depend upon in my article. On that view—which is that assumed by Augustine, and adopted by Descartes at a later date—persons do have mental states while dreaming. Descartes notes that one could be dreaming when one believes that one is sitting in front of a warm fire. He famously claims that some dreams are so vivid and realistic that this seems plausible (even though he later claims God would not allow such deception).

Malcolm, however, disagrees. His argument relies on placing enormous emphasis on verifiability claims for statements of dream states. It is true that when one dreams one is walking one is not walking. But this doesn't hold up when one uses other examples—when I dream that I think, I think. But what of action—it is true that when I dream that I move my limb a certain way I am not actually doing it (under normal dreaming conditions). But I still may be expressing agency in much the same way as a person who, though paralyzed and mistaken about the efficaciousness of his intentions, is an agent though not actually moving limbs he believes to be moving. The intention is there, and, indeed, whatever we view as important to agency. The person can exhibit, for example, a responsiveness to perceived reasons in his mental states, altering them in line with the perceived reasons. So Malcolm's point that dream states are not actual misses the point of the problem. The fundamental problem has to do with agency and the moral significance of agency to being morally evaluated. Again, if performing actions were all there was to it, then a person who was paralyzed could do no wrong. There would be no holding such a person responsible, morally, for their intentions—either good or bad. Surely, however, a paralyzed person is still an agent. Bodily movement should not be a requirement of agency. Likewise, those in a dream who believe they are acting are agents, even though they are not in fact moving their bodies in the way they imagine in the dream. Thus, the issue of whether or not these dream actions can be morally evaluated has bite. It should be noted that the problem arises for the internalist even if, *typically*, our dream experiences do not allow for us to exercise choice, or make intentions, or exhibit

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various motivational structures. All that is needed is the observation that such is quite possible, and does happen (at least once).[8]

Further, though the problem has historically been raised in terms of dreams, we can imagine other sorts of scenarios that raise the same sort of issue for the internalist. Science fiction stories are littered with imaginary cases of people becoming immersed, for example, in cyber worlds, or taking vacations on holo-decks, and so forth. What is important to framing the relevant scenario is that the persons believe that they are acting in reality when in fact the world they inhabit phenomenally is not the real one, and does not contain any sentient entities which are subject to harm or benefit. I believe that one can motivate the issue for dreams, but even if one cannot do so, the internalist will have a problem with these alternative scenarios.

Another strategy is to deny dream immorality on the grounds that dreams, and thus what happens in them, are not voluntary. One may 'will' in a dream, or form an intention to act a certain way, but under circumstances which render that non-voluntary. When Alice decides to lift her hand (in a dream) and to steal something (in a dream), the claim is that she is not doing anything voluntarily at all—she finds herself in a situation not of her choosing. Indeed, a number of writers have drawn analogies between dream experiences and the experience of watching a movie; one has the same 'spectator' experience, without any control over what happens. However, while some dreams may conform to this spectator description, other ones are ones in which the agent is acting—is doing things in the dream, and making real choices in the dream. Certainly, the phenomenology of the dream choice or action and the choice or action in the actual world can be identical. And, while the dreamer may find herself in a particular dream situation due to factors beyond her control, this is no different than real life, where an agent is confronted with a situation not of her own choosing. Her subsequent choices may still have moral significance nevertheless.

[8] I realize that there is a difference between 'possibly happen' and 'does happen' but I don't think that for my purposes here I need to go into this. It seems quite plausible to me that we do have intentions in dreams, and motives, and so forth, even if rare. So I don't need to argue that to generate the problem all we need is that it is possible (though I think it is true that this is all we need to generate the problem for the internalist).

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One natural line of thought, however, is to hold fast to the intuition that one cannot make immoral choices in a dream simply because these choices have no actual consequences, nor the likelihood of actual consequences of the relevant sort. This is the line I'd like to pursue. *However*, this is really overstating the case. Dreams can and do have consequences. For example, Coleridge wrote *Kubla Kahn*, one of his most famous poems, as the result of a vivid dream. It is true that the consequences *typically* don't match up with the occurrences in the dream. But one can imagine having a dream that does match what happens in the actual world. It is *possible* for me to dream that I am walking up the steps as I am actually walking up the steps with the consequence that I reach the second floor. However, the consequences of the dream even if they match what happens in the dream don't have any systematic connection to what happens in the actual world. If they did, then I believe our attitude towards dreams would be quite different. Thus, it at least seems that the production of consequences is certainly relevant to the moral quality of actions.

With this explanation one gets support for an 'evaluational externalist' account of moral evaluation, or, at the very least, a mixed account. The evaluational externalist holds that the moral quality of an action is determined by factors external to agency. The mixed view holds that things like consequences are crucially relevant, but that other factors internal to agency are relevant as well. Dream immorality does not pose a problem for a mixed view of evaluation since this view still holds that what happens in the world affects evaluation. The externalist account I favour is one that holds that actions are right if they produce good *in a systematic way*.[9] Dream actions don't do this.

Both externalism and the mixed approach to moral evaluation (which has an external component), however, would be hotly contested by the evaluational *internalist* who holds that the only thing that matters, morally, are the agent's internal psychological states expressed in the behavior or action. It is important to note that evaluational internalism is a view about how moral evaluation works. One can be an internalist about the moral quality of actions based on the agent's motives, or based on the agent's intentions, or beliefs, and so forth. What is common to this view is that it is some mental state—some feature of the agent's psychology that is

[9] I don't have the space here to argue for this independently. For this view with respect to virtue evaluation see my *Uneasy Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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internal to agency—which provides the basis for the moral evaluation of the action. A very simple example of this approach would be something like the following: the right action is the action caused by a good motive. The problem that I am raising is not simply for specific formulations of the view, but for the entire internalist approach, however it is specifically formulated.

The internalist move, in my opinion, is often made to avoid moral luck problems. The desire to avoid moral luck problems is understandable. Some will read Kant as articulating another form of pure evaluational internalism when he seems to dismisses the effects of actions, rather than the will behind them, as relevant in determinations of moral quality. Abelard, even earlier than Kant, tried to develop another form.[10] For Abelard the evil desire itself is not sinful—rather, it is the consent to the evil the desire, the intention to thereby perform the evil deed, which is sinful and blameworthy and what we hold people responsible for. This consent can be '... without external effects ...whether you actually give alms to a needy person, or charity makes you ready to give, makes no difference to the merit of the deed. The will may be there when the opportunity is not.'[11] Wronging is different from doing something wrong; but what makes x doing something wrong on the internalist account is that it is an expression of the bad internal state. That is it, that is sufficient. Thus, any expression of that state will be as much a wronging as the external bodily action of wronging another. It is still just as blameworthy as if the person had performed the deed. The deed adds nothing to the blameworthiness of the agent.

It is difficult to completely rule out moral luck. Thomas Nagel notes that there is a kind of luck—constitutive moral luck—which is luck in the character that one has.[12] One's character if influenced by many factors beyond one's control—for example, the educational theories of one's parents might well have an influence, and that is not within one's control. Character, in turn, can influence the sorts of motives of one's actions, as well as the intentions one forms. So of course these will be influenced by luck. But the internalist manages to reduce the scope of luck in evaluation in

[10] For a nice discussion of Abelard's views on ethics see William Mann's 'Abelard's Ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard* Jeffrey E. Brower and Kevin Guilfoy (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[11] See *Abelard's Ethics*, trans. R. McCallum (Oxford: Blackwell).

[12] Thomas Nagel, 'Moral Luck', in *Moral Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Michael Zimmerman, 'Taking Luck Seriously', *The Journal of Philosophy* (2002), pp. 553–576.

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such a way as to avoid its most troubling forms—if actions just happen to turn out badly, how can that be the agent's fault? Theorists who adopt the mixed approach to moral evaluation also like this feature of requiring some internal success condition—like good intentions. That way, if the agent's action just happens to turn out *well*, though his motives are very poor ones, he gets no moral credit.

Developments in virtue ethics have made this internalist approach, which is a radical departure from one popular form of consequentialism, even more popular. A contemporary philosopher who adopts an internalist approach is Michael Slote. Slote argues that the correct moral theory is *agent-based*, "... one that treats the moral or ethical status of actions as entirely *derivative* from independent and *fundamental* ethical/aretaic facts (or claims) about the motives, dispositions, or inner life of moral individuals."[13] I have noted elsewhere that the advantage of this type of approach—pure evaluational internalism—is that it goes about as far as one can go in avoiding moral luck problems. If an agent's actions don't work out, and, indeed, even lead to catastrophe—on this view the agent has done nothing wrong as long as his internal states (e.g. motives, intentions, choices) are good, and as long as the action in question is an expression of the good internal states.

The action needs to be an *expression of* good motivational structure, and not merely caused by it. Slote needs to argue this to rule out two sorts of problematic cases.[14] The first is a problem that he recognizes—a benevolent agent, one who has a benevolent motivational structure—may still act badly. But that is not a counterexample to his account, since that bad action will not be an expression of benevolence, even if caused by a benevolent person. Another, related, problem is that they may cause neutral behaviours. Perhaps it is just an empirical fact that persons with benevolent motives prefer garlic bagels. Again, Slote would hold this is not a problem since choosing garlic bagels is not an expression of benevolence even if it is somehow caused by the benevolent motivational set.

It turns out that giving a non-circular account of 'expression' will be tricky. Nevertheless, however one ends up spelling out 'expression', it is clear that this approach takes the good motive to

[13] Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[14] I discuss the problem with 'expression' in more detail in my review of *Morals from Motives* in *The Journal of Ethics* vol. 7 (2003), 233–37.

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be what completely determines the moral quality of all else that it expresses; one's thoughts, intentions, actions, and so forth.

Though the internalist view tends to be associated with varieties of virtue ethics, or some deontological approaches that seek to dismiss the moral import of effects, it is worth noting that this view is not restricted to non-consequentialists. Some varieties of consequentialism—specifically, some varieties of subjective consequentialism or expectabilism—are also examples of pure evaluational internalist approaches to moral evaluation. For example, the consequentialist who holds that the right action is that action which maximizes expected utility (where 'expected' is understood subjectively) is also a pure evaluational internalist, since the moral quality of the action is completely determined by the agent's psychological states internal to his agency. However, precisely because this approach does cut the agent off from the world, and the caprices of 'stepmotherly nature', we get the dream immorality problem. It seems absurd to say that a person acts immorally or expresses immoral agency in a dream. We cannot be held responsible for what we think we do in a dream, though the same does not seem to be the case when we are awake.

II. The Internalist Response

Since the internalist holds that the moral quality of an action or character trait is determined by factors internal to agency (intentions, motives, willings), she needs to either argue that dream immorality just isn't possible because none of these states actually occur in dreams, or, if they occur in dreams they aren't the dreaming agent's and thus the immorality isn't hers, or bite the bullet and hold that dream immorality really is possible. I don't think any of these responses is satisfactory, but it is interesting and instructive to look at them to figure out why.

One response is to deny that any real choice or willing takes place in a dream. Instead, the internalist will claim that we need to distinguish between willing and choice in the actual, non-dream, world, and dream-choice and dream willing. We've already discussed how Norman Malcolm would approach this question. This involves challenging the received, or 'orthodox', opinion in philosophy—at least 'received' at the time of Descartes—that willings and dream-willings can at least be the same sort of thing in vivid or lucid dreams. Malcolm's approach fails because his argument seems committed to holding that for all mental states

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those that occur in dreams are not real since they cannot be reported at the time of occurrence without oddity; and when I dream of, for example, walking up a mountain I am not actually walking up a mountain—so it is with other activities, even mental ones. If I dream that I am thinking, *I am thinking*, even if it is odd for me to report that I am thinking *in a dream*. If I am not communicating, *I am not communicating*, even if it would be odd for me to report that I am not communicating. The oddness of the reporting criterion seems a hold over from verificationism.

But Malcolm presents only one strategy. Another way to flesh out the distinction between willings and dream-willings is to maintain that dream willings are like fictional willings. It is something that is described, not real on its own, not actually performed. Describing a willing and performing it are two totally different things—granted. And it may be that dreams often are like stories and narrations where the thought processes involved are descriptive in nature. However, this isn't always the case—sometimes—at least phenomenologically, one is doing in a dream, not just watching, or spectating, or creating a narrative.[15]

The internalist could then grant that in a dream one experiences states which are *phenomenologically* identical to beliefs, intentions, feelings, making choices, and so forth. Yet in dreams these are not genuine beliefs, intentions, and so forth because these states are distinguished by their *functional role*. Let's just look at intentions for a minute. The claim we are considering would then be that dream intentions have a different functional role than non-dream intentions.

This doesn't seem true to me for the following reason. Consider a fairly appealing view of what intentions do, one developed by Michael Bratman.[16] Intentions play an important organizing role in practical deliberation. If I intend to visit my mother over the holidays then I don't make plans or formulate other intentions, knowingly, in conflict with the intention. A wide range of options for acting will be ruled out by the intention, no longer options for me to consider. So when I formulate the intention to visit my

[15] See William Mann's 'Dreams of Immorality', for a discussion of why viewing the dream as a composition or narrative does not get the dreamer completely free of the problem of dream immorality. Mann points out that the dreamer must still take some responsibility for the composition itself.

[16] *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1987).

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mother, and that becomes a plan to visit my mother, I no longer pour over the brochures for a European vacation, and weigh its merits against the alternative of staying home and getting more work done.

But this seems to mirror what can happen in a lucid dream. If, in the dream, I form the intention of visiting my mother, in the dream I rule out other options and only consider compatible alternatives—at least, this is how it *seems*.

An internalist might further argue, however, that we have additional evidence that what seems to be an 'intention' in a dream, for example, really isn't one. For example, suppose that Mary dream-intends to go to the doctor because she isn't feeling well. She wakes up, realizes that her illness was dreamed. She realizes that there is no need to go to the doctor after all. Has she 'changed her mind'? This doesn't seem quite right. If it doesn't seem quite right, then perhaps there was no 'mind' in the dream to change, and no genuine intention after all.

The externalist, however, will not be overly impressed with this maneuver. For example, intentions can last into dreams and emerge from dreams. Mary's intention to punish John can last as she sleeps and dreams. As she sleeps and dreams she may form an intention to clean out her closet, one that carries over into her waking life. There is no experience of reformulating the intention when or after she wakes up, at least not necessarily. If the internalist tries to say that dream intentions aren't real because they have no impact on the waking world, this firstly doesn't seem to necessarily be the case; and secondly, if the claim is weakened to point out that they typically don't have an impact on the waking world it just boils down to the externalist view that what is morally relevant is a systematic connection between willing an what *actually* happens. It would seem that the internalist who tried this would be a closet externalist. The internalist, however, would respond the following way: there are two kinds of thing we are talking about here, and different criteria are relevant for each. Committing oneself to the view that using consequences in the waking world as relevant to determining whether or not a state is a genuine mental state is different from committing oneself to this as a criterion of goodness or rightness. And this is entirely true. However, we would need to dig deeper here to find out from the internalist why consequences are a criterion for individuating mental states from other things that go on in one's head, other 'seemings', let's say, and yet be completely irrelevant in the case of moral evaluation. Otherwise,

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the problem for the internalist is then why not evaluate these 'seemings' that have no impact, at least not in the right way, on the world?

The same case can be made with respect to motives. Motives such as benevolence (a warm good motive, to use Slote's terminology) can certainly survive into a dream and emerge from a dream. Further, a person can experience benevolence in a dream that survives into the waking world—Samantha has seen a television special on famine relief, goes to bed and dreams of all the people that need help, and this in turn stirs benevolent feelings which in turn provide a motive for her to do something benevolent in the future. A similar story could be told for any internal state that was identified as the relevant one. There doesn't seem to be any reason to deny they are formed or occur in dreams, *as a matter of principle*. Expressions of warm benevolence can occur in dreams; or, to take a negative case, expressions of nastiness and sadism can also occur in dreams.

But again the critic may respond that the problem is much more basic. One can't even have genuine beliefs in dreams. But this certainly flies in the face of our ordinary attributions of belief. Consider the following passage at the close of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*:

> But Wendy ...had a better plan. 'Let us all slip into our beds, and be there when she comes in, just as if we had never been away.'
>
> And so when Mrs. Darling went back to the night-nursery to see if her husband was asleep, all the beds were occupied. The children waited for her cry of joy, but it did not come. She saw them, but she did not believe they were there. You see, she saw them in their beds so often in her dreams that she thought this was just the dream hanging around her still.[17]

The person who argues that we don't actually believe anything in dreams will have to hold something like the following: Mrs. Darling may believe that when she dreamed she believed her children were safe in bed—but she didn't really believe, she only believed (when awake) that she believed in her dream.

The attractiveness of this view may have to do with a conflation between dream experience and spectator experience, or the experience one has watching a story unfold. Normally when one reads a story or sees a movie one knows the experience of what is

[17] *Peter Pan* (New York: Henry Holt & Company 2003).

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occurring in the movie or story isn't real. When Lemony Snicket tells me that Count Olaf hung Sunny in a birdcage out of his tower window I believe, but only in the story, that Sunny is in a birdcage. I am aware that there is no real Sunny.[18] I don't actually believe that Sunny is in a birdcage because I don't think any of it is real. And some think of dreams as like stories. They aren't real.

I agree that they aren't real in this sense. But lucid dreams aren't just like stories either. They are more like hallucinations or systematic deceptions. And surely when in the desert I believe I see an oasis I really do believe, even though there is no oasis there. The difference between reading the story and experiencing the hallucination is that when I read the story I know that I am apart from it and that it isn't real—I don't have this belief either when the subject of an hallucination that tricks me, nor do I have this belief in the sort of dream that poses the dream immorality challenge to internalism.

III. Delusion and Isolation

The forgoing discussion suggests a fruitful comparison for us. Might dream experience be like the experience of one who is deluded, or living in hallucinatory circumstances—though not irrational? Looking at this issue will, I think, help uncover what I believe to be an inconsistency or tension in the sorts of evaluative commitments evaluational internalists make.

I've argued already that the internalist seems committed to the possibility of dream immorality since we seem to have expressions of bad character in dreams. This seems an absurdity. But now let's look at another case which I think poses a hard choice for the internalist, that of the deluded sadist. This case was presented by J.J.C. Smart and is a refinement of a thought experiment presented earlier by G.E. Moore in *Principia Ethica*. Smart writes:

> ... let us imagine a universe consisting of one sentient being only, who falsely believes that there are other sentient beings and that they are undergoing exquisite torment. So far from feeling distressed by the thought, he takes a great delight in these imagined sufferings. Is this better or worse than a universe containing no sentient beings at all? Is it worse, again, than a

[18] See *An Unfortunate Series of Events*, Book 1, *A Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket (New York: Harper Collins 1999).

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> universe containing only one sentient being with the same beliefs as before, but who sorrows at the imagined tortures of his fellow creatures?[19]

Smart comes down firmly on the side of the Benthamite answer, against Moore, in claiming that the universe with the deluded sadist who is happy is the preferable one. In the rhetorical battles over hedonism, and to some extent consequentialism, this thought experiment has often been taken as a knock down case against the classical consequentialist.[20] For this paper, however, my interest in the case is limited to what it reveals about the evaluational internalist and his internalist commitment. He would be likely to reject Smart's diagnosis; to him the universe of the deluded sadist is worse because it contains something intrinsically bad—expressions of the bad character of the sadist exhibited by the pleasure he gets from his illusory wrongs. The deluded sadist is intrinsically terrible, his imagined behavior evil, whether or not the bad things he imagines, and believes, ever in fact occur. This is precisely because on that view *production* of bad doesn't matter. It is important to note that the point I am making her differs from the point that Moore intended to make, and Smart's rejection of that. Moore simply intended to show that pleasure could not be the only intrinsic good. But my view is that internalist must have another response to this case—since the sadist is expressing bad character, he is acting wrongly, even if there is no actual production of pain.

It seems to me that the internalist must hold that the sadist is acting badly or wrongly; if the internalist denies this, then what is the alternative—at least, for an internalist like Slote? One could argue that the deluded sadist is not acting badly, but still displays a bad character. Similarly, someone in a dream who believes he is torturing others and delights in their torture isn't doing anything wrong, but does reveal a bad character (as Thoreau's quote supports). Slote argues that the right action is the expression of a good motive, of the agent's good character. If he accepts that the deluded sadist has a bad character, then it must follow on Slote's view that he is acting badly since the imaginings are an expression of that character. The acceptance of one plausible claim, given his theoretical commitments, leads to the denial of another.

[19] *Utilitarianism: For and Against* by J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press 1973), 25.

[20] For example, Geoffrey Scarre seems to hold in *Utilitarianism* (London: Routledge 1996) that Smart's view is completely absurd.

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Another strategy for the internalist, a kind of deflationary strategy, is to note that the intuitions that we have about dream immorality are puzzling, but no more puzzling than any of the other moral luck cases we are familiar with. Instead of being put into a real world situation the agent is put into a dream situation where there are no actual consequences. If Alice decides to slap Bob in her dream, not realizing this is 'dream-Bob' then lucky her, no bad effects and no negative evaluation. In this way the dream scenario resembles the scenario in which Alice is not dreaming, but has been tricked by her friends. So, the deflationary view would hold that, our intuitions to the contrary, dream immorality is possible. If Alice thinks she is slapping Bob when she is really slapping a doll that looks like Bob, she has still done something wrong. Similarly, if she slaps Bob in her dream, she has done something wrong.

But—to return to my original suggestion in this paper—there *is* one way to mark a distinction between these sorts of cases. When Alice slaps doll-Bob (believing it to be the real Bob) in the real world, it is the sort of action that has actual bad effects. When Alice dream-slaps Bob, believing that Bob to be actual, this is not the sort of behaviour that has actual bad effects, since there are no actual bad effects *in* dreams. While it is possible for there to be a match up, that would be extremely rare if it occurred at all. What is lacking is a *systematic* connection. Alice's dream that she slapped Bob is an extremely poor predictor of her actually having slapped Bob (at the time she was dreaming and in the same way, etc.). Alice's having a non-dreaming perceptual experience of slapping Bob, on the other hand, is quite a good indicator that she has slapped Bob. This is one way to spell out the 'systematic' connection, which is crucial. The externalist could adopt this approach. Given that what one dreams reveals one's tendencies to act/feel badly, then we have an explanation of the epistemic significance. But there's no actual immorality. With dreams we have no systematic connection to what occurs in the world.

IV. Problems for the Externalist

This doesn't mean that either the externalist or the mixed theorist is free of problems. 'Systematic' is quite slippery. Suppose that Ralph is deluded, and thinks that he is killing Alice, but he is paralyzed and actually unable to move his arms to shoot. It seems as though he is still blameworthy even though what he thinks he is

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doing is not something he can actually do. If we describe what is going on as 'Ralph intends to kill Alice and he believes that he is pointing a gun at her and shooting' then the account works; but if we build in to the description that he is paralyzed, then there's a problem, since that kind of behaviour will not systematically result in a bad outcome.

This is really why I think that the view that there is dream immorality is not completely absurd. Indeed, there is no conceptual absurdity to the view at all. I believe that it is subject to a kind of empirical absurdity. On the view I sketch here, if the world somehow changed, and if dreams began to track reality, our opinion of dream immorality would change as well.

I think that the internalist needs to accept dream immorality or reject the view that dreams reveal good or bad character to avoid an actual inconsistency. It may be that is the best way to go. Indeed, one line the internalist could pursue is familiar to the externalist. The internalist could argue that dream immorality is certainly possible and probably does occur. However, our intuitions of the absurdity of dream immorality are simply due to its rarity. It normally does not occur because the right conditions are often not present in a dream.

However, this diagnosis doesn't seem compatible with some of our common sense responses. Suppose I thought with good reason that Bob would dream of harming his boss tonight. Should I keep him from going to sleep to prevent him from doing something immoral? No. This seems quite silly.

In the end, my view is that the dream should be viewed as another and very different context. Without systematic positive or negative effects they have no actual moral significance. As Thoreau's intuition suggests, dream immorality may have epistemic significance, as a sign of something wrong with a person. But there is no dream immorality *per se*. And the same carries over to the other non-veridical contexts.

The case of the paralyzed agent poses a problem for the internalist and the externalist both. Would we punish the paralyzed person who tried to press the button he thinks will kill his enemy, who believes he has done so, and who revels in it? No. And delusion is only morally significant, on the internalist view, if it points to irrationality. But it certainly needn't. He's not irrational, just in the grip of an illusion that would affect the very best reasoner.

Consider someone who also wants to harm his enemy and in order to do so buys a voodoo doll in the shape of his enemy. He proceeds to stick pins into the doll, believing that this will cause

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harm to his enemy. He is wrong about this. But imagine also that he is living in a culture in which voodoo is routinely considered effective in inflicting harm on one's enemies. He may be wrong about the power of voodoo, but he's not unreasonable.

It may be that my disagreement with the internalist will just boil down to a disagreement about what the 'brass ring' of ethical evaluation is. In epistemic evaluation many hold that it is truth, and without meeting this success condition even reasonable belief fails to capture the ring. I want to say something like this about moral evaluation. Success just isn't being morally reasonable; the good must be accomplished. Without this we end up with a kind of moral solipsism—okay, the world out there may exist and things may happen, but that doesn't really matter after all.

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