

## **In Pursuit of the Goal of Science: Through a Synthesis of Phenomenology and Lucid Dreaming**

**Todd Pressman**  
*Saybrook Institute*

Science evolves when its understanding of "reality" is discovered to be too limiting to account for some newly observed or hypothesized phenomenon. This discovery exposes certain hidden assumptions responsible for the limitation, and thereby suggests a less limited understanding which provides a matrix to include the new phenomenon. The continual shedding of limits in this way is the aim of science, in its endeavor to find an ultimate understanding that gives a completely unified and consistent account of all possible phenomena.

Phenomenology proposes a specific approach to this goal based on the premise of a "consciousness-created (perceived) reality". Its philosophy states that "reality" is not simply an objective fact passively received into consciousness. Rather, it is organized (in our experience of it) according to certain phenomenological "essences", the basic structures of consciousness which assign meaning, relation, value, etc., to what is then taken as "reality". To quote Polkinghorne (1983), phenomenologists do not regard experience as "a matter of a thing called 'consciousness' automatically reacting to 'stimuli' whose ultimate cause is supposed to be a given physical reality, unequivocally present 'out there'. Rather, experience is built up through an activity of constitution along the lines of types...or 'essential structures'" (p. 204). Thus, in the phenomenological account, consciousness is free to choose the reality it calls into (our experience of) existence according to the essences it employs as its cornerstone. Science, in its aim to understand this reality, must ultimately refer to some "idea" of consciousness.

With this, the scientific endeavor shifts its emphasis from an understanding of the phenomena we perceive toward an exploration of the *way* we perceive them. Its first task lies in understanding the nature of the essences, to then gain an understanding of the nature of the phenomena for which they provide the structure. This is precisely the process described above where scientific assumptions are exposed and refined, when challenged by new and discrepant information. Here, we propose that the terms "essences" and "assumptions" are interchangeable. It is important to note that in this view the essences, as the assumptions, are arbitrarily chosen constructs of consciousness, in that they have no prior (causal) referent to give a non-arbitrary reason for their choice. They are but a choice of consciousness's "whim", rather than a studied response to observed, "objective" phenomena independent of consciousness.

An understanding of the nature of dreams can serve as a tool for helping in our phenomenological pursuit of this goal: From a waking perspective, we can see dreams as precisely this consciousness-created reality taken as "objectively real". From a waking perspective, we clearly see their arbitrariness. The following closely parallels our discussion on the phenomenological construction of waking reality: "The apparent separation between ourselves and our dream environments is an illusion.... Within

dreams we choose...among alternative ways of structuring the dream and responding to dream events" (Malamud, 1986, pp. 592-593). An additional benefit of such a study of dreams is that as we awaken, we can look back on an already accomplished "lifting of the veil" of assumptions, rather than groping for direction, as when we perform our phenomenological investigation of the waking state and do not know where the assumptions lay.

Let us explore the parallel between dreams as seen from the waking perspective, and waking consciousness as seen from the phenomenological perspective, considering them as two results of one process, the creation of (perceptual) reality by consciousness. According to Malamud (1986), we can apply the concept of dreaming to waking life, the sleep-state qualifiers can be omitted, and dreaming can be defined more generally as the *act of creating a subjective world of experience and simultaneously misperceiving this personal world as objectively real*. Reflection may lead to the conclusion that ordinary experience in the waking state, such as that which you and I are now having, is also in some sense a Dream. That is, when we Dream in waking life, we misperceive our sensory, perceptual, and cognitive/affective construction of reality as if it were reality itself. (p. 593)

To take advantage of this parallel, we ask if it is not somehow possible to bring the waking (phenomenological) awareness of the arbitrariness of the dream assumptions into the dream. That is, we seek a way to get the same contrast between waking and dream assumptions while still dreaming, so that we may directly witness the creation of the seemingly non-arbitrary assumptions, at the same time that we see through their arbitrariness by the contrast. This would combine the effects of the "phenomenological" awarenesses of the arbitrariness of both the dream and waking realities.

Such a state of consciousness is found in lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming may be broadly defined as awareness, during the dream, that one is dreaming. One has "woken up" in dream, and therefore sees the assumption that the dream is a non-arbitrary reality, as arbitrary. Thus, with lucid dreaming, one knows "that one is creating a subjective world of experience and simultaneously misperceiving it as objectively real" (Malamud, 1986, p. 593). (Note that this is the same quote used before to describe the phenomenological awareness of waking reality, pointing out the parallel).

For example, a dreamer who suddenly becomes lucid during a dream of falling can re-create the experience so that he or she starts to fly. Here, the idea that the dream experience is fixed and unchangeable is exposed as an arbitrary assumption. The dreamer is thereby free to re-choose the perception and meaning of "falling", first understood according to the phenomenological structure of "moving through air", to be changed to a perception and meaning of "flying".

Lucid dreaming works as a phenomenological tool precisely because it relies on the confrontation of discrepant sets of assumptions and their subsequent perceived realities, pointing out the arbitrariness by contrast. LaBerge and Gackenbach (1986) have said, "one of the ways in which [lucid dreaming] typically happens involves the perception of inconsistencies in dream content as anomalous (p. 161). Malamud (1986) concurs: "The two most often mentioned triggers [for spontaneous lucidity in dreams] are

incongruous events and anxiety. This is not surprising since incongruities and anxieties both can provoke a need to consider alternative realities" (p. 598). These incongruities and anxieties can be seen to overwhelm the otherwise strong resistance to changing our operational definition of "reality". As Malamud says elsewhere, "one probable reason why most dreams are non-lucid becomes obvious: We have an investment in what we've created. Awareness of dreaming, then, depends on willingness to suspend belief in the personal world one is creating" (Ibid.). This suspension of belief highlights, by the contrast created, the hidden assumptions at work in our perception. As such, it represents a fundamental key to lucidity in waking life as well as dreams.

Malamud (1986) extends this line of thinking: "The spontaneous occurrence of lucidity in waking life may be similarly associated with incongruous events and anxiety. Incongruous events in waking life may catch our attention and surprise us because they conflict with our expectations. We feel anxiety when reality as we perceive it seems to threaten us. Both kinds of experience challenge us to question the assumptions by which we dream our lives. On the societal level, unexpected results in science and threatening situations in world affairs (e.g. ecological crises) may lead to revolutions in our consensual Dream by provoking us to question accepted knowledge and to adopt new working models of reality." (p. 598).

All of the above show that the awareness of the arbitrariness of assumptions achieved, in both a phenomenological study of waking reality and lucid dreaming, is one awareness, one process of "lucidity" manifesting in two states of consciousness. This leads us to "a non-state-specific definition of lucidity: ... knowledge that one is creating a subjective world of experience and simultaneously misperceiving it as objectively real" (Malamud, 1986, p. 593). By this definition, phenomenological awareness and the awareness given by lucidity are the same.

Let us retrace the steps which led to this development. First, we discussed a (waking) phenomenological investigation of waking reality, which would observe the difference between the set of assumptions used in ordinary waking reality and the phenomenologically aware waking reality. Then we discussed a (waking) "phenomenological" investigation (the simple observation of assumptions already exposed) of the dream reality, which would observe the contrast between the dream and waking reality assumptions. Now we are discussing a (sleeping) "phenomenological" investigation of the dream reality, where we would observe the contrast between the assumptions of the ordinary dream reality and the lucid dream "waking" reality.

We have a pattern here: We first expose the assumptions of the reality we are experiencing and then expose the assumptions of the reality we experience when we expose the first assumptions. Then we expose the assumptions of this most recent reality, and so on. The next step in our advance toward the exposing and refining of limiting assumptions suggests itself. By doing phenomenological research of the lucid dream in the lucid dream, we may ask, "What assumptions are being used in the reality wherein we are having this lucid awareness of the contrast between the lucid and ordinary dream realities?" Here, we are discovering the possibility of a "phenomenologically aware lucid dreaming", wherein we become (phenomenologically) aware of how the

(phenomenological) awareness of the ordinary dream's arbitrariness was achieved.

Using this "meta-phenomenological" awareness channels the lucid understanding of the assumptions " - making progress in a way that "ordinary" lucid dreaming does not, in the service of our search for a unified and consistent "truth". In the phenomenologically aware lucid dream we can ask not only, "How is lucidity, the awareness of hidden assumptions at work and the ability to see their arbitrariness, accomplished?", or "What changes between the ordinary dream and the lucid dream awareness?", but we can do all this in context, in the midst of the process, by asking "How is the lifting of the veil of assumptions happening right now?" We need but simply step back to watch the answer unfold.

More specifically, we can ask in the lucid dream, "What is the phenomenological essence behind a certain symbol in the dream metaphor?", seeking to reveal any compounded meanings which may underlie the symbol, such meanings being constituted along the line of a single phenomenological essence, a specifically chosen assumption. This approach offers an alternative to the other approaches to dream interpretation which are performed from the waking perspective and therefore perceived in accordance with the hidden assumptions of the interpreter's waking reality. The phenomenologically-aware-lucid-dream approach is comparatively free of this problem, as it addresses itself specifically to the discovery of how these hidden assumptions might distort our interpretation.

In "ordinary" dream interpretation, we often confront a defending barrier, keeping us from the insight we seek. With our new method, we can ask in the dream, "What is it that is keeping me from having this answer?" or even more basically, "Is the answer to this question too threatening for me to accept in my present state, and if so, what must I do to accept it?"

Further, we can start our entire investigation (in the lucid dream) from a heuristic approach to generate appropriate phenomenological research questions, and "live" the answers in our lucid dreams. This would help avoid the pitfall where our pre-determined questions, devised in the ordinary or partially-phenomenologically aware waking consciousness, may be limited by hidden assumptions.

We are exploring a methodology which brings us closer to a unified and consistent understanding of phenomena. We must now ask the culminating question of science: Can this approach achieve a perfectly unified and consistent, limitless understanding of phenomena; is there such a thing as "complete lucidity" which accounts for every possible situation flawlessly?

We may argue philosophically that there must be some ultimate referent which allows us to know one state as more lucid than another; again, we have defined this referent as being that which provides a most consistent and unifying description of observed phenomena. This referent implies a conceivable state of complete lucidity by which we compare incremental approaches for measuring our progress. Each such approach may be considered the achievement of a "piece" of this complete lucidity, testifying to the existence of the whole which makes its existence possible.

Malamud (1986) has said, "Maximum [dream] lucidity [exists, and is the state of]

knowledge that one is dreaming and full awareness of the implications of that fact" (p. 592). Malamud has researched the literature to find "experienced lucid dreamers have reported that despite achieving a high degree of conscious control over dream content, they never achieve total control" (p. 607). But let us not stop here; taking full advantage of the potential offered by lucidity, we may use our phenomenological awareness to direct the lucid dream asking, "What assumptions are limiting my ability to gain further control over my dreams?" And if, as LaBerge and Gackenbach (1968) have said, "the assumptions...that dreamers hold about what lucid dreams are like or could be like determine to a remarkable extent the precise form of their lucid dreams" (p. 168), we may similarly challenge the assumption that we are inevitably limited by these waking assumptions in our ability to create the lucid dream.

Our final argument on behalf of the existence of a complete lucidity considers that as we expose the assumptions of our experienced reality and recognize their arbitrariness, we are not only free to re-choose assumptions but also to ask if it is necessary to choose assumptions at all. Perhaps the ultimate assumption, that from which all others arise, is that we must make assumptions in the first place. One may protest that a certain arbitrariness is pre-requisite for giving the referent which will organize "reality" in a way we can understand and with which we can work. But the inevitable question must follow: "What is the experience of consciousness 'before' this organization takes place?" Perhaps we have too hastily assumed that the functioning of consciousness necessarily and exclusively depends on an assumptions-based, organizing referent, and the pictures, thoughts and concepts which spring forth from it. As in certain of the Eastern philosophic traditions, let us consider the existence of a non-subjective "world" of understanding, one which is necessarily "perfect" and limitless by virtue of its denial of all limiting assumptions. Just as the lucid dream shows the assumption of the dream's authenticity to be arbitrary, so this philosophy takes the assumption of the authenticity of assumptions to be arbitrary. As such, it transcends the limits of assumptions by uprooting their source.

These discussions, then, represent two approaches to the goal of transcending assumptions, the limits upon our understanding of "truth", in the pursuit of a complete lucidity. One would uproot all assumptions at once, by addressing their source, the assumption of the absoluteness of assumptions. The other, as we have carefully laid out in this paper, involves a step-by-step process of exposing the assumptions of the reality we are presently experiencing, then exposing the assumptions of the reality from which we exposed the first assumptions, and so on. This, too, approaches the state which is science's ideal: the adopting of "assumptions" which need no further refinement, for they account for all possible phenomena with perfect consistency and unification.

## References

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