

INTRODUCTION TO J. VARENDONCK'S THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DAY-DREAMS - (1921)

This present volume of Dr. Varendonck's contains a significant novelty, and will justly arouse the interest of all philosophers, psychologists and psycho-analysts. After an effort lasting for some years the author has succeeded in getting hold of the mode of thought-activity to which one abandons oneself during the state of distraction into which we readily pass before sleep or upon incomplete awakening. He has brought to the consciousness the chains of thought originating in these conditions without the interference of the will; he has written them down, studied their peculiarities and differences with directed conscious thinking, and has made thereby a series of important discoveries which lead to still vaster problems and give rise to the formulation of still more far-reaching questions. Many a point in the psychology of the dream and the defective act finds, thanks to the observations of Dr. Varendonck, a trustworthy settlement.

It is not my intention to give a review of the author's results. I will content myself with pointing to the significance of his work and will permit myself only a remark concerning the terminology which he has adopted. He includes the sort of thought-activity which he has observed in Bleuler's autistic thinking, but calls it, as a rule, fore-conscious thinking, according to the custom prevailing in psycho-analysis. However, the autistic thinking of Bleuler does not by any means correspond with the extension and the contents of the fore-conscious, neither can I admit that the name used by Bleuler has been happily chosen. The designation 'fore-conscious' thinking itself as a characteristic appears to me misleading and unsatisfactory. The point in question is that the sort of thought-activity of which the well-known day-dream is an example - complete by itself, developing a situation or an act that is being brought to a close - constitutes the best and until now the only studied example. This day-dreaming does not owe its peculiarities to the circumstances that it proceeds mostly fore-consciously, nor are the forms changed when it is accomplished consciously. From another point of view we know also that even strictly directed reflection may be achieved without the co-operation of consciousness, that is to say, fore-consciously. For that reason I think it is advisable, when establishing a distinction between the different modes of thought-activity, not to utilize the relation to consciousness in the first instance, and to designate the day-dream, as well as the chains of thought studied by Varendonck, as freely wandering or phantastic thinking, in opposition to intentionally directed reflection. At the same time it should be taken into consideration that even phantastic thinking is not invariably in want of an aim and end-representations.³