

JOSEF POPPER-LYNKEUS AND THE THEORY OF DREAMS - (1923)

There is much of interest to be said on the subject of apparent scientific originality. When some new idea comes up in science, which is hailed at first as a discovery and is also as a rule disputed as such, objective research soon afterwards reveals that after all it was in fact no novelty. Usually the discovery has already been made repeatedly and has afterwards been forgotten, often at very long intervals of time. Or at least it has had forerunners, had been obscurely surmised or incompletely enunciated. This is too well known to call for further discussion.

But the subjective side of originality also deserves consideration. A scientific worker may sometimes ask himself what was the source of the ideas peculiar to himself which he has applied to his material. As regards some of them he will discover without much reflection the hints from which they were derived, the statements made by other people which he has picked out and modified and whose implications he has elaborated. But as regards others of his ideas he can make no such acknowledgements; he can only suppose that these thoughts and lines of approach were generated - he cannot tell how - in his own mental activity, and it is on them that he bases his claim to originality.

Careful psychological investigation, however, diminishes this claim still further. It reveals hidden and long-forgotten sources which gave the stimulus to the apparently original ideas, and it replaces the ostensible new creation by a revival of something forgotten applied to fresh material. There is nothing to regret in this; we had no right to expect that what was 'original' could be untraceable and undetermined.

In my case, too, the originality of many of the new ideas employed by me in the interpretation of dreams and in psycho-analysis has evaporated in this way. I am ignorant of the source of only one of these ideas. It was no less than the key to my view of dreams and helped me to solve their riddles, so far as it has been possible to solve them hitherto. I started out from the strange, confused and senseless character of so many dreams, and hit upon the notion that dreams were bound to become like that because something was struggling for expression in them which was opposed by a resistance from other mental forces. In dreams hidden impulses were stirring which stood in contradiction to what might be called the dreamer's official ethical and aesthetic creed; the dreamer was thus ashamed of these impulses, turned away from them and refused to acknowledge them in day-time, and if during the night he could not withhold expression of some kind from them, he submitted them to a 'dream-distortion' which made the content of the dream appear confused and senseless. To the mental force in human beings which keeps watch on this internal contradiction and distorts the dream's primitive instinctual impulses in favour of conventional or of higher moral standards, I gave the name of 'dream-censorship'.

Precisely this essential part of my theory of dreams was, however, discovered by Popper-Lynkeus independently. I will ask the reader to compare the following quotation from a story called 'Träumen wie Wachen' in his *Phantasien eines*

Realisten which was certainly written in ignorance of the theory of dreams which I published in 1900, just as I myself was then in ignorance of Lynkeus's Phantasien:

‘About a man who has the remarkable attribute of never dreaming nonsense.

“This splendid gift of yours, for dreaming as though you were waking, is a consequence of your virtues, of your kindness, your sense of justice, and your love of truth; it is the moral serenity of your nature which makes me understand all about you.”

“But when I think the matter over properly”, replied the other, “I almost believe that everyone is made like me, and that no one at all ever dreams nonsense. Any dream which one can remember clearly enough to describe it afterwards - any dream, that is to say, which is not a fever-dream - must always make sense, and it cannot possibly be otherwise. For things that were mutually contradictory could not group themselves into a single whole. The fact that time and space are often thrown into confusion does not affect the true content of the dream, since no doubt neither of them are of significance for its real essence. We often do the same thing in waking life. Only think of fairy tales and of the many daring products of the imagination, which are full of meaning and of which only a man without intelligence could say: ‘This is nonsense, for it is impossible.’”

“If only one always knew how to interpret dreams in the right way, as you have just done with mine!” said his friend.

“That is certainly no easy task; but with a little attention on the part of the dreamer himself it should no doubt always succeed. - You ask why it is that for the most part it does not succeed? In you other people there seems always to be something that lies concealed in your dreams, something unchaste in a special and higher sense, a certain secret quality in your being which it is hard to follow. And that is why your dreams so often seem to be without meaning or even to be nonsense. But in the deepest sense this is not in the least so; indeed, it cannot be so at all - for it is always the same man, whether he is awake or dreaming.”

I believe that what enabled me to discover the cause of dream-distortion was my moral courage. In the case of Popper it was the purity, love of truth and moral serenity of his nature.