

Book Review

In her groundbreaking book entitled *Consciousness and Dreaming Mind: Mapping the Uncharted Territory of Thinking in Dreams*, Dr. Miloslava Kozmová shows that, contrary to the standard neuroscientific theories of dreaming, in our dreams we are not irrational, delirious or simply crazy or out of our minds, but instead we retain a coherent sense of ourselves and we use our minds rationally to solve the problems we encounter in the Dream World.

The previously dominating neuroscientific paradigm of dream theories holds the “deficiency view” of our dreaming self: That during ordinary dreaming, we lose all control of our higher mental capacities and our free will; we become helpless puppets of the dreaming brain that conjures random and bizarre scenarios where our mindless dreaming self is doomed to wander around helplessly like a psychotic patient suffering from incurable hallucinations and incorrigible delusions. But as Dr. Kozmovas theoretical arguments and evidence from dream reports show, this deficiency paradigm of the dreaming self has been based on faulty arguments and indirect inferences from brain activities observed during sleep, not on direct evidence from the actual phenomenology of dream experiences.

Dr. Kozmová thus proposes a new paradigm for dream research, firmly based on detailed phenomenological analysis of dream contents instead of brain activities. The phenomenological approach shows that, during dreaming, our dreaming selves in fact engage in a multitude of complex cognitive operations, such as thinking, problem solving, reflection, reasoning, decision-making, volition, and metacognition. These quite normal cognitive processes are used when the dreamer tries to rise to the often surprising and threatening challenges that the dream throws on the dreamer’s path in the Dream World.

This new paradigm cannot be ignored by any serious dream research, because if we ever wish to understand the fundamental nature of dreaming and explain how the brain creates the Dream World and the Dream Self immersed in that world, we must first have an accurate understanding of the phenomenology of dreaming: What kind of a state of consciousness dreaming really is? In what ways exactly is it similar to or different from our waking state of mind?

Dr. Kozmová’s work shows that, when it comes to thinking and cognition, previous approaches have provided us with inaccurate and misleading ideas about what dreaming really is like. Kozmová’s new paradigm is more closely related to the recent theoretical developments in the philosophy and theory of dreaming that define dreaming as a mostly credible and realistic simulation of the waking world, where the dream self undergoes adventures and encounters dangers and problems. The novel and unique contribution of Kozmová’s work is the focus on the internal mental processes and capacities of the Dream Self, showing that our minds still work almost normally even when we are in the Dream World: we are not crazy, demented, delirious, or psychotic there. Instead, we have goals and desires that we pursue as active rational agents in the Dream World while we experience largely the same sense of self as during wakefulness. The new paradigm not only gives a novel understanding of who we are in our dreams, but it will also help future dream science explain what the fundamental nature and functions of dreaming are.

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