

Srivastava, Ayush

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MELANIE G. ROSEN
*THE DREAMING MIND: UNDERSTANDING
CONSCIOUSNESS DURING SLEEP*

Routledge, 2024, 300 p.

AYUSH SRIVASTAVA

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay,
Powai, Mumbai, ayushsrivastava739@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEW

Melanie G. Rosen's *The Dreaming Mind: Understanding Consciousness During Sleep* is a profound exploration of the complexities of dreaming and its implications for our understanding of consciousness. Rosen, a respected philosopher and cognitive scientist, offers a comprehensive examination of dreams, blending insights from neurobiology, psychology, and phenomenology to create a nuanced portrait of the dreaming mind.

Rosen begins by challenging traditional views that regard dreams as mere by-products of neural activity.¹ Instead, she posits that dreams are integral to our conscious experience, bridging the conscious and unconscious realms. As Rosen articulates, Dreams are not just passive reflections of our waking lives; they are dynamic, creative processes that reveal the depth and complexity of our minds (7). This perspective aligns with phenomenological approaches that view consciousness as a continuous spectrum rather than a dichotomy of wakefulness and sleep.

One of the book's key strengths is Rosen's ability to synthesize a wide range of theories and research findings. She adeptly integrates insights from the activation-synthesis hypothesis, which suggests that dreams are the brain's attempt to make sense of random neural activity during REM sleep, with phenomenological insights emphasizing the subjective nature of dreaming. Rosen argues that the subjective experience of dreaming cannot be fully explained by neurobiological mechanisms alone; it requires an understanding of the lived experience of the dreamer (89). Rosen's exploration of the neurological underpinnings of dreams is both thorough and accessible. She explains how different brain structures, such as the brainstem, limbic system, and prefrontal cortex, interact during various stages of sleep to produce dreams. This neurological perspective is complemented by her discussion of the psychological functions of dreaming. Rosen examines how dreams contribute to emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and problem-solving, drawing on both classical theories and contemporary research.

¹ Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley (1977) proposed a neurophysiological model of dreaming known as the Activation-Synthesis hypothesis. According to their hypothesis, dreaming arises from the cortex's interpretation of signals related to eye movements and the activation of brain stem motor pattern generators.

Philosophically, Rosen engages deeply with the works of Descartes, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty.² Descartes' skepticism about the reality of the external world is revisited in the context of dreaming, with Rosen noting that dreams challenge our assumptions about perception and reality, forcing us to confront the uncertainties of our perceptual experience (1). Husserl's concept of intentionality is used to describe how dreams are directed towards objects and events within the dream world, highlighting the intentional structure of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's insights into embodiment are also explored, with Rosen suggesting that even in the absence of physical sensations, our dreams are imbued with a sense of corporeality that reflects the fundamental unity of our being (62).

Rosen's discussion of the social and cultural dimensions of dreaming is particularly illuminating. She explores how dreams have been interpreted and valued in different cultures, from ancient civilizations to modern societies. By highlighting the universal nature of dreaming and its role in shaping human experience across time and space, Rosen provides a rich context for appreciating the significance of dreams. As she eloquently puts it, dreams are a mirror to the soul, reflecting the hopes, fears, and aspirations of individuals and communities alike (Chapter 3).

The historical perspective Rosen offers is invaluable, tracing the evolution of dream interpretation from ancient times to the present day. She examines the role of dreams in various religious and spiritual traditions, such as the prophetic dreams of ancient Egypt, the dream incubation practices of the Greeks, and the visionary dreams of indigenous cultures. This historical context enriches our understanding of the diverse ways in which dreams have been understood and valued throughout human history.³

While Rosen's interdisciplinary approach is commendable, it also presents certain challenges. Some readers may find the sheer volume of information overwhelming. The book delves into technical details that may be inaccessible to those without a background in the relevant fields. For example, Rosen's detailed discussions of neural pathways and brain regions involved in dreaming might be difficult for readers unfamiliar with neuroanatomy. Similarly, her engagement with complex philosophical concepts may require a degree of familiarity with phenomenological terminology. Despite these potential challenges, Rosen's clear and engaging writing style helps to make the material accessible to a broad audience. She skillfully balances technical detail with lucid explanations, ensuring that readers can grasp the key points without getting lost in the intricacies. Moreover, Rosen's use of vivid examples and personal anecdotes brings the subject matter to life (147). Her descriptions of her own dreams and those of her research participants add a human touch to the scientific and philosophical discussions, making the book both informative and relatable (196).

Another notable aspect of *The Dreaming Mind* is Rosen's consideration of the practical implications of dream research. She explores how insights from dream studies can inform various aspects of life, from clinical practice to personal development (30–32).⁴ For instance, she discusses the therapeutic potential of dream analysis in psychotherapy, highlighting how dreams

² However, there is no direct reference to these philosophers, but she used their views to build up arguments.

³ Aristotle emphasizes that 'dreaming' involves more than mere cognitive activity but does not equate to the straightforward perception of waking life. If it were the latter, individuals would hear and see in the literal sense while asleep.

⁴ Lucid Dreaming (when an individual is aware that they are dreaming) can be further studied in this context. For more please see Stephen LaBerge's description and analysis of lucid dreams in *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* (1991).

can provide valuable insights into unconscious conflicts and emotional issues. By engaging with our dreams, Rosen suggests, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and work through psychological challenges (204). This practical dimension adds a layer of relevance to the theoretical discussions, demonstrating the real-world significance of dream research.

Rosen also addresses the ethical considerations⁵ related to dream research and manipulation. As technologies for monitoring and influencing dreams continue to advance, questions about the ethical boundaries of such practices become increasingly pertinent. Rosen discusses the potential benefits and risks of dream manipulation, such as using lucid dreaming techniques for therapeutic purposes or enhancing creativity (30). She cautions against the commodification of dreams and emphasizes the importance of respecting the privacy and autonomy of individuals' dream experiences. As we venture further into the realm of dream technology, she writes, we must remain vigilant about the ethical implications and strive to protect the sanctity of the dreaming mind (140).

In conclusion, Melanie G. Rosen's *The Dreaming Mind: Understanding Consciousness During Sleep* is a thought-provoking and insightful exploration of dreams and their implications for our understanding of consciousness. By bridging the gap between diverse disciplines and perspectives, Rosen offers a holistic view of dreaming that is both intellectually rigorous and deeply humanistic. Her work invites readers to reconsider their own experiences of dreaming and to appreciate the profound ways in which dreams shape our waking lives. Despite the occasional complexity of the material, Rosen's clear writing and engaging style make this book accessible to a wide audience. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the mysteries of the dreaming mind and its role in shaping our conscious experience.⁶

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⁵ The question ‘Are we Morally Responsible for our Dreams?’ is gaining popularity these days. Robert Cowan has extensively discussed this issue in Moral Responsibility while Dreaming; however, Rosen does not engage particularly with this aspect of dream experiences.

⁶ Along with this book, Jenifer Windt's work *Dreaming: A Conceptual Framework for Philosophy of Mind and Empirical Research* (2015) is an excellent work for understanding and comprehending the realm of dreams.