

京大過去問 2001年 第2問

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There are various ways of accounting for dreams. Some claim that they are mysterious experiences in which the soul travels out of the body. Others assert that they are the reflections of hidden desires or socially unacceptable urges. Still others are inclined to think that they do not conceal any deep significance.

Some dreams are little more than traces of recent experiences. If, for instance, we spend the day driving across the country, it would not be unusual to dream about driving down a highway. While such dreams are reasonably straightforward, many others appear disconnected and nonsensical. The fact that most dreams have a surrealistic quality — a quality that causes them to be highly resistant to interpretation — has influenced many people to dismiss dreams as altogether meaningless.

According to one scientific theory, here roughly sketched, dreams are the result of the forebrain's attempts to understand the random electrical signals that are generated by the hindbrain during sleep. (1)In normal waking consciousness, the forebrain sorts through various kinds of internal and external sensory data to construct a meaningful view of the world. Faced with a flood of disconnected, random inputs generated by more primitive areas of the brain during sleep, the higher mental centers attempt to impose order on the incoming signals, creating whatever narrative structure dreams have. Many dreams that are just clusters of incoherent images represent incoming groups of signals that the forebrain was simply not able to synthesize.

Not all dreams are, however, utterly senseless. Take, for example, those we have all seen at one time or another in which we are falling, flying, or appearing naked in public. Dreams of this kind most likely have their bases in experiences and anxieties shared by all human beings.

Falling is a good example of a shared dream motif. Psychologists speculate that falling dreams are rooted in our early experiences as toddlers taking our first steps. (2)If this hypothesis is correct, then childhood experiences must have left deep imprints in the brain that are somehow activated in adult life during periods of high anxiety. Some sociobiologists have further speculated that the fear of falling ultimately derives from an inherited instinct or reflex handed down by our prehistoric ancestors, who could fall out of trees during their sleep.

Where all dreams come from is still uncertain, but one can hope for the day when an explanation of their origins is no longer a dream.