

Sleep

“I have often imagined the monster of sleep as a heavy, giant head with a tapering body held up by the crutches of reality. When the crutches break we have the sensation of falling” – Salvador Dali

This pulpy head looks very ugly and restless... It depicts sleep as rather an uneasy, unquiet state.

The body is useless and almost dead (hanging on just one crutch), the head is loaded and functioning, though not fully capable of feeding awareness (eyes and ears are closed). It has indeed no control on reality, thus desperately depends upon thin and short crutches which hardly manage to keep the head from totally collapsing.

Moreover, it seems there is a tremendous struggle going on. The loaded, heavy head pushes downwards, uncomfortable with the interference of the crutches...yearning to fall into the dark (might be interpreted as night or maybe forgetfulness and death).

To write about Sleep, and to explore this recurring condition of suspended consciousness of body and mind, has always tempted me. For a long time, I have been fascinated by the riddle of this amazing occurrence which is so close to our existence and yet so mysterious, and is in many ways still unexplored. In this article I will try to present ideas that I have been gathering for many years and some reflections which cannot commonly be found in the existing literature on this intimate, individual phenomenon, and wonder of our life, which we call “sleep”.

Most people consider sleep to be a pleasure, a physiological function and take it for granted as a natural right. As a matter of fact, the praise of sleep is part of its collective imagery, and the most common vision of it. In my research on sleep, however, I observed that too frequently our need for sleep is an escape from the so called “reality”. Men turn their life impotence and sadness into sleep, and entrust themselves to its wings when life becomes too painful, and suffocating or when they do not know how to deal with life, and how to transform it.

Ordinary men wake up and the first thing they meet with is their inner song of unceasing sorrow. They do not want to listen to it, nor to face the pain that they carry deep inside. They drown their sorrows in a coffee, or in food, and plunge into their daily worries and worn-out routines; they let themselves be caught up by their laborious existence, because they do not want to know how sorrowful, when nor boring, is their existence.

Their flight into sleep, however, reveals itself to be an ephemeral escape, and that neglected pain becomes more and more acute. One day we will discover that that dark corner of our being that we never lit is the very source of all the difficulties and failures that we then meet in our lives.

Nevertheless, there is a dimension of sleep which opens the doors to timelessness. There is intentional day dreaming, and meditative states which are somehow induced by sleep, but do not imply a loss of control of oneself. They do just the opposite. And yet, they are intimately connected to sleep and carried by it.

I mused on this timeless condition of sleep whilst observing the imposing statue of a sleeping Buddha that had been carved from one huge, inestimably block of white Jade, which I admired during a visit to Hufo Temple in Shanghai. It is the representation of eyes of a timeless, and alert being.

A very relevant observation on sleep is that a person who is sleeping has a very limited control, if any at all, over his body, or in his life. The common belief is that this unguarded condition of limited awareness is very different from what happens in men’s (so called) waking state.

In reality, if man could observe himself, he would verify the astonishing truth that he is also asleep when he thinks himself to be awake. This is because an ordinary man is a fragmented being; his

condition is far from inner unity, or integrity. Therefore, he has no permanent self that he can call 'I'. He is not one, but a legion, and a multitude; his moods, his impulses, his very sense of his own existence are no more than a constant flux.

Hypnotic Sleep

The hypothesis of a planet populated by 7 billion people sealed in a hypnotic sleep – “sleepwalkers”, who work, teach, pollute, reproduce, and above all, get in each other’s way and fight, in a state of drowsiness, if not of hypnotism, and without a real will, driven by invisible strings like puppets, is dreadful, but explains why the earth is plagued by millenary evils that we have never been able to overcome.

This hypothesis has the very fascination of those powerful heresies that later in time have been recognised as cornerstones of the history of ideas and of scientific thought.

“Men meet each other in a somnambulistic state, troubled by worries, clouded by doubts and fears, and lost in daily discord. They meet so as to pursue insignificant objectives and external, vain advantages.” – The School for Gods.

The discovery that we do not only sleep at night but that, with the exception of a few fleeting moments of lucidity – of real waking, we spend our entire life in a state of unconsciousness, could change our vision forever, and with it our destiny.

The Art of Dreaming

No political, religious or philosophical system can change society from the outside. Only an individual revolution, a psychological rebirth, and a healing of the being – man-by-man, and cell-by-cell, will free us from a hypnotic vision of the world and from a self-created prison. It will lead us towards a more intelligent civilization which is truer, richer, and happier.

Together with the great entrepreneur and philanthropist, George Koukis, I have nourished a “Dream for the World” – a School of awakening, where future leaders – the cells of a new humanity – will learn the art of dreaming. Dreaming means to be awake, alert, and to keep out of any hypnotism. It means stopping self-sabotage, and any self-destructive activity. It means stopping fear, doubts, indulging in any negative mood or downbeat, or damaging emotion. The Art of Dreaming is to realize how to be the creator of your reality, and that life is as you dream it. It means to stop being a victim of the world, and a victim of your own creation.

Hypnos

If you visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art do not miss the opportunity to admire a rare 1st century Roman bronze statue of Hypnos. Classical mythology represents him, the personification of sleep, as a gorgeous, naked young man with wings attached to his head. Son of the goddess Nyx (Night), his power was such that not only men, but even gods could not resist him. According to one story, Hypnos lived in a cave underneath a Greek island; through this cave flowed Lethe, the river of forgetfulness.

The most interesting part of Hypnos’ myth, however, which has its roots in the ancient Greek-Roman mythology, carries the disquieting vision of “somnus imago mortis” – sleep as the representation of death. In fact, Hypnos has not just a brother, but a tween brother: Thanatos, personification of death and mortality.

Why are we awake?

Antropologists, sociologists, experts of customs and usages, scientists above all, have tried to discover the mechanism which oversees and regulates sleep, thereby scattering the mist around the enigmatic cause of sleep. Up until now, however, there is no concrete answer to this question: why do we sleep?

It is my belief that following a less travelled scientific path, the understanding of sleep can become deeper and can reveal unsuspected secrets if we move the focus of our inquiry from the sleep to the

waking state and we ask: why are we awake? Or more simply: what is the real difference between being asleep and being awake?

The final thesis I am offering is that a hypnotic sleep tyrannically rules man's existence. The ordinary man, plunged into a hypnotic sleep, and lulled by a song of pain, will continue to lie to himself. No matter how terrible his life may be, he will continue to indulge in it, and will never, ever find the will and energy to escape from it.

Now we can understand the deep meaning of the Greek myth of Hypnos twin brother of Thanatos.

Hypnotic sleep is moral, and psychological death. The opposite of a sleeping state is not to be sleepwalkers, or a sort of zombies, but to be really alive, alert, and aware. Being awake means to lead and not to be led; it means to have a will.

Ulysses orders his crew to tie him to the mainmast, so as not to obey the sirens' song and abandon his ship, and to prevent himself from falling into the large sea of planetary drowsiness. The ropes bind him to his principles. His decision is the act of a real hero. He emblematically shows the way to a new humanity to pursue lucidity and freedom. Their motto was coined long ago for the warrior-monks of Lupelius: sleep less, die less, dream more.