The Intersection of Hopes and Dreams

[Aristotle] was asked to define hope, and he replied, "It is a waking dream."
Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Book V

Dreams call out to me, I follow where they lead
Evermore, "Dreams Call out to Me"

0   Introduction

A familiar injunction is to *follow your dreams*. The motivation for such encouragement is presumably a commitment to the principle that people *ought* to follow their dreams. This principle, the *dreams principle*, as I call it, appears to have wide application, for we dream of many things. Some dreams are personal, like those to succeed in a profession or to become a parent. In other instances, however, we dream for grand socio-political ends. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, viewed such dreams as pivotal to the human condition. In his sermon, "Unfulfilled Dreams," he began with an insight from King David's failed dream to build a temple for the Hebrew people:

> At so many points we start, we try, we set out to build our various temples. And I guess one of the great agonies of life is that we are constantly trying to finish that which is unfinishable. We are commanded to do that. And so we, like David, find ourselves in so many instances having to face the fact that our dreams are not fulfilled. (2003, 192)

Famously, King dreamed that the United States would live up to its commitment to equality and justice. This dream was, and is, worth pursuing, despite the low odds of success.[1] Furthermore, a striking feature of dreams is that their normative force seems, in part, to come from within the dream itself. As the second epigraph above illustrates, dreams are often experienced as *calling* us to ways of life.

Despite the importance of (wakeful) dreams, philosophers have largely ignored the topic.[2] The task for this paper, then, is foundational. I aim to answer the following: what are these dreams that we ought to follow?[3] As I understand this question, it has two dimensions. The first is to understand the psychology of dreams (sec. 2). For assuming that dreams are not *sui generis*, there must be some other mental states that comprise dreams. The second dimension emerges when we notice that such dreams also appear to be normatively significant, in both metaphysical and epistemological ways that I describe below. So we need to determine whether the mental states initially hypothesized to comprise dreams are suited to play these roles (sec. 3).[4] For if these mental states cannot ultimately play the relevant roles, then either the account of the psychology of dreams requires revision or else the normative import of dreams should be deflated. Indeed, as we shall see, there is growing resistance in popular culture to the dreams principle (e.g., Kirk 2013; MacAskill 2015; Trespicio 2015). This paper, however, argues that not only is the dreams principle true, but that the very nature of dreams helps us to see why.

According to my proposal, dreams are a species of *hope*. They are hopes that fit within the framework of what Ariel Meirav calls the *standard account*, or what Nancy Snow alternatively calls the "bare bones conception" (Meirav 2009; Snow 2018, 409). The standard account of hope says that hoping that P consists in a desire that P and a belief that P is possible. While I won't be arguing that all hopes fall within the framework of the standard account, I will argue that dreams do. Accordingly, I speak of standard hopes; and I refer to my analysis of dreams as the *s-hope analysis of dreams*.

Perhaps surprisingly, this highly deflationary view of the *psychology* of dreams makes room for a prominent *normative* role for dreams. For those familiar with the growing philosophical literature on hope, affording such prominence to standard hopes may come as a surprise. Such hopes are often quickly set aside in order to focus on hope in the most "substantial" (Pettit 2004) or "fullest" (Martin 2014, 6, 34) sense.[5] This paper doesn't aim to rebut arguments that hope sometimes involves more than a desire plus a sense of possibility. It does, however, illustrate that

the growing debates about more complex theories risk distracting us from a form of hoping that is of tremendous normative significance, namely those hopes which are dreams.[6]

1   Should We Follow Our Dreams?

Before delving into an analysis of dreams, we can begin to see the intuitive force of the dreams principle by thinking about certain kinds of cases. In particular, the principle is often invoked when people are making difficult decisions about which "life-projects" to pursue. Consider, for example, Wanda and Jack. Wanda knows that she should pursue the life of a physicist, while Jack knows that he should pursue that of a pianist. How do they know? They have similar talents, opportunities, and values; and so it isn't anything about how they view the feasibility or importance of the relevant projects which is the basis for their knowledge. However, they are different in a key respect, namely that while Wanda dreams of becoming a physicist, Jack dreams of becoming a pianist. Continuing in the language of metaphor, we might say that their different dreams are their different *callings*, which helps us to account for both the rationality of their pursuing different ends and how they know that they are making the right choices. It remains to be seen, though, whether such a significant role for dreams can be vindicated.

The above example involves stereotypically lofty, career-oriented dreams. But this is not essential. Even if a career is relatively easy for an individual to succeed at, the fact that they dream of that way of life can still make it intuitive that they ought to pursue it.[7] We can also tap into similar intuitions about the power of dreams if we work with dreams that are, to take just one additional example, political. Suppose that a would-be activist learns that there are two political outcomes, A and B, which are equally important and feasible, but they also realize that they must decide which cause to devote the bulk of their grassroots efforts to (e.g., getting people to sign petitions, researching for blog posts, soliciting speakers to come to her university, and so on). As it happens, the activist finds themselves especially moved by a dream for outcome B. This, I believe, makes it intuitive that they should focus their efforts on B.

As noted above, however, there is increasing resistance to the principle that we ought to follow our dreams, especially in the context of careers. For example, one obvious concern is that people often dream for things that have very low chances of success. A moderately talented musician who dreams of stardom should probably not pursue their dream (cf. MacAskill 2015, 149).[8] Such cases illustrate the absurdity of the injunction to *never* give up on our dreams. But the dreams principle must be understood as implicitly qualified by a *ceteris paribus* clause. If the principle is true, then it is true *all else being equal*. This is to be expected. Almost all non-trivial, everyday ethical principles involving "all things considered" normative concepts such as *ought* or *should* are, at least implicitly, qualified in this way. For example, the principles that say that we ought not to lie, cheat, steal, etc. admit of exceptions.

For any normative principle, the question of when exactly all else is equal is complex and situational. Nevertheless, several factors systematically make a difference to the dreams principle. Here are two obvious ones, both of which have been gestured at above: (i) the likelihood of success, and (ii) the value of the end that is dreamed for. These two considerations regularly interact. For example, if a person's dream is oriented toward something of tremendous value, then a low chance of success might not rule it out. But if a dream is oriented toward something of lower value, then even if the chance of success were much higher, it may not be worth it. In the background here is a third consideration: (iii) whether, if one is unsuccessful, one's efforts are likely to lead to some alternative that is good enough. To illustrate, suppose that Wanda dreams of doing cutting-edge work in chemistry at a major research university. The likelihood of success is low, despite Wanda's brilliance, but because she can see that she would also be happy working in a less glamorous lab, or teaching high-school chemistry, it makes sense for her to pursue a PhD in chemistry and her dream of working at a major research university. This is because her academic training will also prepare her for some of these alternative paths that she would find nearly as fulfilling. But matters may well be different if Wanda could not imagine being happy if she pursues her lofty dreams of academic stardom and falls short. In that case, it would probably be best for her not to pursue that dream.

Dreamers should also take heed that it will often be difficult to imagine what it would be like for a dream to come to fruition.[9] For example, consider a high-school student who dreams of a career in law. As often happens, their conception of such a career is based more on television crime dramas than any awareness of what actual careers in law tend to be like. The student imagines making brilliant arguments before judges, but has no idea about the long hours lawyers put in, or the painstaking attention to detail such a career demands. Thus in deciding whether a dream is guiding us well, we should ensure that it is rooted in imaginative representations that are at least roughly accurate. Furthermore, dreams based in accurate representations are more likely to be *stable* over time. Some dreams, especially those of adolescents, are incredibly fleeting; and fleeting dreams shouldn't normally be allowed to structure one's life.[10]

The observations in the previous two paragraphs bring to light key factors relevant to the question of whether to follow a dream. To reiterate, these include (i) the likelihood of success, (ii) the value of the dreamed for end, (iii) the risk of pursuing the dream, (iv) the accuracy of the dreamer's representations, and (v) the stability of the dream over time. But surely other factors matter and the weights we assign to different considerations must be decided case-by-case. Some of the other relevant factors will emerge over the course of the paper, although it isn't my aim to identify an elaborate, indefeasible version of the principle to follow your dreams.

Having made these preliminary observations about the principle that we ought to follow our dreams, I turn now to the nature of dreams, which has two interwoven dimensions. First, I aim to elucidate the *psychology* of dreams, which is the project of saying which mental states comprise dreams. I then turn to the special *normative powers* that dreams seem to possess. First, and as I argue below, dreams ground many of our weightiest practical reasons, which is a function of the tight link between dreams and our identity. More mysteriously, however, are metaphors according to which dreams *call* us to certain ways of life, or *reveal* to us projects that we ought to pursue. Many people cash out these metaphors in terms of God telling them what to do. Here is what Tami Shaikh (2015) says in her article "Look Into Your Heart, Believe in Your Dream and Follow Your Calling," written for the *Huffington Post*:

> I tried to turn to my inner voice which I do truly believe is the voice of God telling me to follow my destiny of writing. When I realized my destiny I wasn't stuck anymore.

I take it as a desideratum of an account of the nature of dreams that it should unpack these metaphors of *calling* and *telling* (assuming that dreams are not actually the voice of God, or at least not only). In a slogan, we want to explain the *guidingness* of dreams. These two dimensions of the normative significance of dreams together clarify more deeply why the dreams principle is true; it's not merely because dreams happen to covary with what (in many cases) we ought to do.

In the discussion to come, it is important to keep in mind that my initial and primary target is *not* (wakeful) dreams as such, which would include everything from Martin Luther King's dream for racial justice to a teenager's mundane daydreams. I remark briefly on dreams in general only once I have described (in the next section) the psychology of the dreams that we defeasibly ought to follow. This keeps the focus on the more interesting questions. In particular, it means that we never really abandon the question of when, and if, we should follow our dreams. Specifically, the next section on the psychology of dreams further illuminates when we should follow a dream, and the ensuing discussion of the normativity of dreams provides additional support for the principle that we ought to follow our dreams.

2   The Psychology of Dreams

This section analyzes the psychology of those dreams denoted by the dreams principle. The central idea is that dreams are a species of hope, and that dream-constituting hopes are a form of desire plus a belief that the object of one's desire is possible. Since such hopes/dreams fall within the framework of the standard account of hope, I call this the *s-hope analysis* of dreams. The position that dreams are analyzable as a form of hope may seem peculiar. One might think that hopes and dreams are often spoken of in the same breath in a way that indicates they are related, but not identical, phenomena. For example, in his sermon, "Shattered Dreams," Martin Luther King Jr. asks, "Who has not had to face the agony of blasted hopes and shattered dreams?"

(2007, 514). He later remarks, "Shattered dreams! Blasted hopes! This is life" (517). According to the present analysis, however, we should not understand such remarks as referring to separate mental phenomena. They are rather ways of referring to different dimensions of a special belief-desire complex, one which is rich with thought (including imagination) and motivation. The language of dreams emphasizes the richness of thought while the language of hope emphasizes motivation, both of which are ultimately the same belief-desire complex, or so I will argue. The methodology will be to carefully identify the distinctive features of dreams, arguing in each case that those features do not involve going beyond the resources of the standard account.

To begin, dreams involve certain thoughts (often in the form of vivid imaginings) and exert distinctive patterns of influence on the dreamer's psyche. To illustrate, consider a person who dreams of becoming a professional football (soccer) player. Such a person will find herself fantasizing about playing football well, e.g., thoughts of dribbling between defenders, drilling the ball into the net, the thrill of high-level competition, and so on. Her attention is frequently (or at least intermittently) pulled to these fantasies. Much of the focus will be on the end – what it is like to be a great football player – but deeply ingrained dreams move beyond this. In fantasizing about football success, she also pays attention to the *means* to achieving such success, whether that involves trying out for the high-school team, practicing dribbling, or running to build endurance. In general, the key ideas here are the following:

(1) *End-directed thoughts*: Intermittent thoughts about what it would be like for the dream to come to fruition arising from a strong disposition to have such thoughts
(2) *Means-directed thoughts*: Intermittent thoughts about how to bring about the dreamed for outcome arising from a strong disposition to have such thoughts

The s-hope analysis of dreams easily squares with the dispositional aspect of (1) and (2). Hope-constituting desires, like all desires, involve tendencies to think both about the object of the desire and the means to that object. And one dimension along which some desires are stronger than others is in having greater power over our attentional focus (see McInerney 2004).

But if the s-hope analysis is to work, then desires must be able to contain fantasies as a part. One may worry that this is implausible. Indeed, readers familiar with Luc Bovens's seminal work on hope may recall that it is precisely on this point that Bovens (1999) argued against the standard account of hope. According to him, if a friend were to ask, say, whether I were hoping that they would come to the party, it would only be accurate to assent if I had devoted conscious thoughts to the person's coming. According to this argument, then, the standard account needs to be supplemented with a third element: conscious thought, or as Bovens puts it, "mental imaging" (1999, 673-4).

Now, the aim of this paper is not to deliver a verdict on the standard account. Perhaps, as Adrienne Martin argues, some hopes are latent, and Bovens's counterexample can be explained away by other considerations (Martin 2014, 17-18). But however the standard account ultimately fairs with respect to Bovens's objection, one might think that his proposal illustrates that *dreams* cannot be a species of hope *in the standard sense.* For dreams, as we have seen, cannot be entirely latent. So if the conscious thoughts Bovens invokes as essential to hope are distinct from the desire element, then presumably the conscious thoughts involved in dreams will be, too. And in that case, the s-hope analysis would fail: dreams would not be a species of standard hope (i.e., would not be a form of desire plus a belief that the object of the desire is possible).

In my view, Bovens's hope-constituting thoughts are best construed as part of the desire. To see why, notice that desires are always about something; they are *intentional*. Take a complex desire of the sort that might constitute a dream: a desire to find a loving, supportive partner with whom to live out their days in their dream house (with such-and-such features). A desire can only have this object if one has thoughts, or mental images, that supply such content (cf. Goldie 2009, 233-34). A similar point is familiar from the philosophy of emotions (see Deonna and Teroni 2012, 5). I can only fear a snarling dog, for example, if I have mental states (e.g., perceptions) that represent a snarling dog. But if a desire/emotion is treated as a *mere* response to representational states such as perceptions, beliefs, etc., rather than understood to contain them as parts, it is difficult to see how the desire/emotion is itself intentional. But desires/emotions are

8

intentional. Thus the lesson one may take from Bovens is that only *certain* belief-desire pairs can be hopes, namely those which sometimes manifest in conscious experience. When desires manifest in consciousness, they contain conscious representations as parts. These conscious representations will sometimes be those fantasies implicated in dreams. Given this picture about the metaphysics of desire, the s-hope analysis is suited to capture the whole of (1) and (2).

Moving forward, dreams exert influence not only on thought and attention, but also on motivation and feeling. The person who dreams of football success, to stick with the previous example, has some motivation to pursue that end, even if she does not ultimately choose to do so. Of course, in telling a person to pursue a dream, we assume that she is not *fully* committed to the dream. But at the same time, we shouldn't encourage people to pursue dreams that they have *zero* antecedent motivation to pursue. In general, the following principle holds of the dreams denoted by the dream principle:

(3) *Motivation*: Some motivation to pursue the dreamed for outcome, even if one does not ultimately decide to pursue it

Moreover, such dreams involve a robust phenomenology whereby a person *feels* drawn to achieve her dream. We might say that she experiences the object of her dream as *needing-to-be-pursued*. To be sure, some dreams lack this dimension, e.g., a mid-career academic who dreams of playing violin in the New York Symphony, but these musings are not the sorts of dreams with which the dreams principle is concerned. Indeed, we might prefer to call such musings *idle fantasies* rather than *dreams*. Here, then, is the fourth criterion of dreams:

(4) *Feeling*: A felt need to pursue the dreamed for outcome

Both (3) and (4) are explained by the s-hope analysis of dreams. Most obviously, regarding (3), desires are paradigmatically motivational states. Desires can also be comparatively weaker or stronger in terms of their tendency to motivate. Those with a strong tendency to motivate may

9

be part of a dream, even if they are not actually leading to action at a relevant time. For instance, an ambitious, dream-constituting desire may have its motivational force countered by a desire not to risk failure. Furthermore, regarding (4), many of our desires have a felt or experiential dimension. Felt desires have a phenomenology; there is *something it is like* to desire to become a professional football player. Graham Oddie describes the phenomenology of felt desires in the following way: "When I desire that P, P has a certain magnetic appeal for me. It presents itself to me as something needing to be pursued, or promoted, or embraced" (2005, 41). Oddie's description seems especially apt for hope-constituting desires. In particular, a key feature of such desires is an orientation to what is believed to be possible but not certain. That hope-constituting desires are rooted in such a belief helps to explain why they take on the phenomenology characterizable as *needing* rather than, say, that of *awaiting*. And some desires can come with greater felt-urgency in this regard than others, and those with greater urgency tend to be the ones denoted by the dreams principle.[11] I will have more to say about this feature of dreams, for it is ultimately key to demystifying the normative significance of dreams. For now, though, the key is that desires share the motivational and phenomenological marks of dreams.

A fifth feature of dreams concerns the extent to which it is possible to control our dreams. To some extent, we can control them. As we have seen, a dream requires thoughts or fantasies that give the dream its content. In some cases, such thoughts may arise in us unbidden, or even despite the fact that we are trying to resist them (cf. Bovens 1999, 679). But in other cases, we can choose to suppress certain thoughts while actively conjuring others. Nevertheless, even if we can sometimes choose the contents that appear before our mind's eye, we cannot fully choose to dream. This is because we cannot choose the positive light in which that object must appear for it to be a dream. For example, if a person aims to give up their dream of a football career in favor of a career as an elementary school teacher, the best that they can do is *to try to bring it about* that imaginings regarding the life of an elementary school teacher appear in a positive light (e.g., by thinking about the importance of early education and the good that they can do). Here is the fifth thesis:

(5) *Partial Passivity*: An ability to sometimes control the content of a dream but not the positive light in which it appears

One might think that the s-hope analysis fails to capture (5). This is because one might think that people can no more control the content of their desires than they can the content of their perceptions. But we already have the resources to see why this isn't true. As we have seen, desires are responses to other mental states, including thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and imaginings, which then become part of the desire. Dream-constituting desires, in particular, will be responses to *conscious* thoughts and imaginings. Consider a person aiming to consciously desire to be an elementary school teacher. They can voluntarily imagine the life of an elementary school teacher, which is part of the desire, but they cannot voluntarily desire. This is because desire presents its object in a "positive light," much as with dreams, and we cannot voluntarily control this dimension of desire. This dimension of desires/dreams is ultimately central to the normative significance of dreams, and so I will have more to say about it in section 3.3 below (see the discussion of the "guise of reasons").

The penultimate feature of dreams (that I mention here) is that they concern something seen by the dreamer as important to the *dreamer's* life. So, for example, while a person might "dream" of peace in a distant nation to which they have no connection, it is not typically dreams of this sort that we are concerned with when we say, "follow your dreams!" By contrast, if a person dreams of joining the Red Cross to help those in need, then the content of the dream is now inclusive of an important part of the dreamer's life. Reflection on the dreams principle, then, indicates that the possessive in "follow *your* dreams" denotes more than simply a state of the dreamer. A college student who pursues a career in medicine simply because this is what their parents expect is not pursuing *their* dream. Dreams are also unlike a powerful addiction that is viewed as a roadblock to happiness. In general, the following seems to hold:

(6) *Gravity*: A view of the dream as a route to happiness or greater meaning

11

In most cases, I suspect dreams are oriented to what the dreamer sees as a happy – in the sense of flourishing – life. But in cases where a person's dreams are especially other-regarding or self-sacrificial, it is arguably more natural to characterize them as oriented to a meaningful life.[12] The s-hope analysis of dreams captures this by appealing to an underlying desire for happiness, or meaning, which is something that all dreamers appear to have.[13]

The final feature of dreams that I will mention is *uncertainty*. After all, success in major life-projects we see as sources of happiness (e.g., a certain political endeavor, parenthood, marriage, etc.) is not guaranteed. Even when the fulfillment of a dream is ultimately up to the dreamer – a dream to develop certain moral virtues, say – their own future decision-making and psychology are still a source of uncertainty. Here, then, is the seventh thesis about dreams:

(7) *Uncertainty*: A lack of certainty about whether the dream will/would be fulfilled

The s-hope analysis explains this by appeal to a belief in the possibility (but not certainty) of the object of one's dream-constituting (hope-constituting) desire.

One may note that there are special cases in which Uncertainty seems to fail. As a case in point, imagine an Olympic runner whose dream is to win the 400-meter gold, and in the moments just before the start of the race, they just don't have any doubt whatsoever that they'll win.[14] Their dream is, at least arguably, still of the sort that we ought to follow. But the case is peculiar, and I do not believe that we should expunge Uncertainty. After all, much of our everyday discourse about dreams is driven by the fact that there is generally significant doubt about whether we can achieve our dreams; uncertainty is part of the paradigm. Furthermore, there is an additional reason not to get mired in a game of counterexamples. We already know what these non-paradigmatic dreams are, namely desires.

In sum, then, the dreams principle nearly always denotes dreams with these seven features; and these features are naturally explained as instances of hoping, whereby hoping is understood in accordance with the standard account. This account can be naturally extended to cover wakeful dreams in general. For wakeful dreams in general appear to be desires that are

comparatively weaker in terms of their influence on an agent's thoughts, motivation, and feeling (recall (1), (2), (3), and (4)). Weaker such dreams often fall into the category we call "daydreams," and may also be viewed by the dreamer in a less substantial light rather than as a potential source of a flourishing life. In the next section, I turn to the ways in which dreams – understood here as those denoted by the dreams principle – have normative significance. As we shall see, it is partly because of their psychological profile that dreams have the significance that they do.

3 The Normative Power(s) of Dreams

3.1 Two Dimensions of Normativity

As I proposed above (sec. 1), dreams appear to be normatively significant in two ways. First, we often take our dreams to ground weighty practical reasons, as indicated, for example, by the dissatisfaction that people often experience when they fail to pursue their dreams and the satisfaction that many experience in living their dreams. Here I offer more detail about the nature of these reasons. The second normative dimension of dreams is perhaps more mysterious. We often speak of dreams as *calling* us to certain ways of life, or as *revealing* to us the projects we ought to pursue. I refer to this phenomenon as the *guidingness* of dreams. In what follows, I use the preceding model of dreams to explain both of these normative dimensions.

3.2 Desires and Reasons

Dream-constituting desires often appear to explain the presence of important practical reasons. To begin, recall that these desires are potent along several dimensions, exerting influence on our thoughts, motivations, and feelings. When desires are strong in these ways, a failure to satisfy them, or even attempt to satisfy them, can lead to significant frustration and disappointment. But these dream-constituting desires aren't just any powerful desires, for they are oriented to *happiness*, or *meaning*. This orientation is present even in other-regarding dreams (e.g., a dream to make a difference in the world by joining the Red Cross). As such, they are intimately related to the desirer's sense of *self* or identity. Failures to even pursue our dreams can

13

lead to a deep sense of loss and internal dissonance; by contrast, pursuing our dreams often generates a sense that, at least in one key respect, our life is on the right track. Tami Shaikh's (2015) article "Look Into Your Heart, Believe in Your Dream and Follow Your Calling" illustrates the dissonance that dreamers experience in not pursuing their dreams:

> About six years ago I made a discovery. It profoundly changed the way I viewed myself and the world around me. It was a time in my life where I was going through a dark period, I was unhappy with everything around me. But what I didn't realize was the root of the unhappiness lived and grew inside of me it wasn't because someone treated me badly but because I was angry and unforgiving towards myself.

Yet once she decides to pursue her dream she experiences internal harmony; she becomes "unstuck":

> I tried to turn to my inner voice which I do truly believe is the voice of God telling me to follow my destiny of writing. When I realized my destiny I wasn't stuck anymore. Today when I sit to write I feel the closest to God.

She later remarks that living her dream "fills my heart with love and peace."

The role that I am ascribing here to dreams is related to what Claudia Blöser and Titus Stahl call *fundamental hopes*. According to Blöser and Stahl, fundamental hopes are those which partly constitute an agent's *practical identity*. A practical identity is "a set of commitments that an agent has that single out a certain conception of that agent's life as worth living (from the perspective of the agent) and certain considerations as reason-giving in virtue of that fact" (2017b, 359). For example, being a political activist may count as part of one's identity insofar as one has a set of political commitments, the pursuing of which "is seen to bestow value in one's life" (359). These commitments are partly constituted, according to Blöser and Stahl, by entrenched hopes, and the reasons that the hoper has to maintain these hopes are non-instrumental. Their preservation is part of the preservation of one's personal integrity (355).

Blöser and Stahl focus on the justification of fundamental hopes. Yet the point I am emphasizing here is one step removed: the non-instrumental reasons to maintain fundamental

14

hopes (which on my proposal are also dreams) likewise explain why those hopes supply us with powerful reasons for *action*, namely reasons to act so as to promote the hopes to the extent that we can. To illustrate, consider a person whose practical identity includes the hopes/dreams of an environmental activist. They hope to play their part in bringing about swift changes in environmental policies and law. Further suppose that this is a *justified hope*, one that is bound up with their practical identity in the way that Blöser and Stahl describe. But now imagine that this person remains ever on the sidelines. They do so even when opportunities to act arise. Perhaps they fear writing a progressive editorial because of how they suspect their family would react, or they fear being mocked if they participate in public protest. Such a person is at odds *with themselves*. While their potent environmental hope is *ex hypothesi* justified, and while this hope favors action (in thought, motivation, and feeling), they do not act. They deny their fundamental hope its natural expression.[15] On my proposal, then, the place of dreams (fundamental hopes) in constituting practical identities, coupled with the role that promoting such dreams plays in upholding our practical identity, explains why those dreams supply reasons for action.

The present proposal can be further unpacked by considering an alternative explanation of this normative dimension of dreams. One might contend that the non-instrumental justification for a fundamental hope gives the hoper a reason to *endorse* their hope (or hope-constituting desire).[16] On the surface, this is consistent with my own proposal: a hope can supply one with reasons for action even while one also has reasons to endorse that hope. Endorsement here might simply refer to a judgment that the hope is justified, or, alternatively, an intention to incorporate the hope into one's agency (cf. Martin 2014). Both disambiguations capture a truth, I believe. But, according to a possible objection, one might think that the reason to endorse comes *simply* from the value of the object of the hope and not the reason-giving force of the hope itself. And so any corresponding reasons to act come from that valuable object rather than the hope itself.

The trouble is that this alternative misses the significance of identities. When it comes to the deeply entrenched hopes that Blöser and Stahl focus on, we should remember that there are *many* valuable things for which one might hope. This is a point Blöser and Stahl make, and it is key for

my point as well (2017b, 358). The fact that a person has certain fundamental hopes, but not others, is significant *for them*. Thus the idea that the fundamental hope itself (given its place in constituting one's practical identity), in addition to the value of what is hoped for, is a source of reasons for action, is not something we can easily substitute for by appealing to reasons to endorse in the way described above.

Consider now a final clarification. The present proposal is meant to allow for deeply entrenched, dream-constituting hopes to be reason-giving even when the hope falls short of being part of one's "practical identity," in the somewhat technical way that Blöser and Stahl define that notion. In these kinds of case, such "would-be" fundamental hopes do not count as part of one's practical identity by virtue of the fact that the agent lacks the requisite commitments to act according to the projects that their deeply entrenched hopes point them toward. And such commitments are part of Blöser and Stahl's official definition of practical identities (2017b, 359). For example, consider a person committed to the pursuit of a law degree but who deeply hopes to be an elementary school teacher. Further suppose that this hope satisfies the criteria (1) – (7) presented in section 2 of the paper. But they aren't committed to becoming an elementary school teacher, and so the hope falls just short of a fundamental hope.

In my view, this lack of commitment does not altogether sever the connection to the person's identity, in a broader sense, and thus does not undermine the reason-giving force of the hope. To unpack this thought, consider some intuitive connections linking such would-be hopes to pretheoretical ideas about a person's identity. For one, such hopes comprise part of a person's character, much as any of our emotional tendencies reflect aspects of our character, whether or not we endorse those responses. We also hold people responsible for feelings and desires that they may not endorse or act on. In general, feelings and desires say something about who we are, even if they are far from the full story. Given this link, a person whose deeply entrenched hopes are at odds with their life-commitments can be expected to experience internal dissonance, or lack of harmony. This is what Tami Shakh appears to be pointing to in the quote above. On my analysis, her "would-be" fundamental hopes supply reasons for action (even if not overriding

reasons). Indeed, hopes of this sort will typically be the ones that we refer to with the dreams principle, for the principle has its central point when we aren't following our dreams.

3.3   Desires and Evidence

But what of the *guidingness* of dreams? This epistemological dimension of the normativity of dreams is often described in metaphorical and/or religious language. The song lyrics from the band Evermore (quoted in the second epigraph) say, "Dreams call out to me, I follow where they lead" (2004). And as we just saw, Shaikh refers to this aspect of dreams as an "inner voice," which she takes to have a divine source. But how should we understand the guidingness of dreams in secular, non-metaphorical terms? I answer that an attractive view about desire is well-positioned to do the explanatory work. The view is that a desire involves a non-doxastic experience of reasons for action and thus provides e*vidence* of our reasons for action (Scanlon 1998, 39-46; Schroeder 2007, 146-178).[17] Although this is a view that I cannot hope to defend from the ground up, I argue that it does better than many alternative explanations, including one inspired by Martin (2011).

The view that desires provide evidence of practical reasons is often rooted in a certain picture about the phenomenology of desire. T.M. Scanlon (1998), for instance, emphasizes the way in which desires make certain facts *salient* in our experience. As a simple illustration, imagine someone who desires a cold lemonade on a hot summer afternoon. A person who has such a desire typically finds the sweet lemony flavor and icy temperature of lemonade to be especially salient. In other words, these features of lemonade "strike" her in a certain way; and these strikings are part of what it is to experience the desire for lemonade. According to Scanlon, these salience-strikings are properly understood as non-doxastic experiences of reasons, and they are, therefore, poised to defeasibly justify beliefs about the desirer's reasons (see Schroeder (2007) for a similar view). For example, in the lemonade case, the desiderative experience provides defeasible evidence that the relevant considerations (e.g., that the lemonade is icy) count as reasons for her to drink the lemonade. Given this picture, the *guidingness* of dreams is unpacked

in terms of the idea that desires are non-doxastic, normative experiences capable of (defeasibly) justifying corresponding normative beliefs. The idea is that (occurrent) desires involved in dreams justify normative beliefs in a way analogous to how ordinary perceptions justify corresponding empirical beliefs. Importantly, this explanation of the guidingness of dreams works within the constraints of the s-hope analysis. Call this the *guise of reasons* explanation.

The present proposal about desire and dreams should be contrasted with a recent view developed by Alex Gregory (see Gregory 2013; 2018). Similar to the present proposal, Gregory maintains that desires involve a representation of the desirer's reasons for action. But instead of taking these representations to be non-doxastic experiences, he takes them to be *beliefs*. The central problem with this proposal is, in my view, directly related to its inability to explain the guidingness of dreams.

To begin, consider that just as people often do not endorse their dreams, they also do not endorse their desires. This is part of why taking desires to explain the guidingness of dreams is attractive: we often entirely dismiss our dreams as misguided. But if Gregory's theory of desire is right, then desire already is a form of endorsement, namely a belief. As Stuart Hampshire once remarked, in forming a belief, "I make up my mind, and decide, when I formulate my beliefs. I do not observe them" (1965, 97). But the phenomenology of desire, like the phenomenology of dreams, does have an "observational" quality. This quality is especially evident when we find ourselves strongly desiring what we believe we have no reason to pursue. A recovering racist, for example, may continue to have racist desires even when they no longer believe they have any reason to act in the way that the desires invite them to act. Or, to take a very different kind of case, Huck Finn had intense desires to help Jim escape slavery even while believing (wrongly) that he should not help (see Arpaly 2003).[18] And while there may be a kind of irrationality here, it is not akin to believing that P and believing that not-P. In other words, when someone reports strongly desiring that P but also that they believe that they have no reason to pursue P, this is far more intelligible than someone who reports believing that they have excellent reason to pursue P while also believing that it is not true that those supposed reasons are not excellent reasons to

pursue P. The trouble with Gregory's proposal, then, is that it fails to capture the phenomenology of desire – the way in which we often seem beset by our desires – and, relatedly, the way in which desires often conflict with beliefs (cf. Naar 2018). By contrast, the non-doxastic guise of reasons view allows agents to disavow desires that may come to them (similar to how one may disavow a perceptual illusion). And it allows for a conflict between desire and belief that falls short of believing that P and believing that not-P. Thus some of the main difficulties faced by Gregory's belief view of desire point to the attractiveness of the non-doxastic guise of reasons explanation of the guidingness of dreams.[19]

While Gregory's view of desire is more suited to undermining the guidingness of dreams, there are other alternatives to the non-doxastic guise of reasons that might be thought to explain this normative dimension of dreams. The first such account says that while the guidingness of dreams is ultimately rooted in dream-constituting desires, the *phenomenology* of desire – the way desires make certain considerations salient – isn't what matters. Instead, on this proposal, desires provide evidence of reasons insofar as they are *reliable indicators* of our reasons (cf. Cuneo 2006, 69-70). In other words, they provide normative guidance because they co-vary with our reasons, perhaps due to considerations noted in section 3.2. But, in my view, while such covariation is important, at least if we hope to vindicate the principle that we ought to follow our dreams, it is not enough. The trouble is that, in principle, *anything* can be a reliable indicator of anything else. The way in which dreams guide us does not seem to be captured merely by the fact that dreams *co-occur* with weighty reasons. There seems to be *something it is like* to have a dream that explains how dreams guide us to certain projects; and this is plausibly what makes it tempting for some to characterize dreams as the voice of God. The epistemological significance of dreams, then, is better captured within the internalist framework of the guise of reasons. Furthermore, the guise of reasons nicely explains what is going on with *sinister* dreams, which we might think *do not* provide the dreamer with reasons yet still *seem* (to the dreamer) to do so. For example, one might think that an evil tyrant's dream of carrying out genocide fails to provide evidence of reasons, even if it *seems to the tyrant* that they are called to that project. Because any

dream still involves appearances of reasons, there is no puzzle about what is going on in these cases.

Now consider a final alternative to the guise of reasons explanation of the guidingness of dreams, one inspired by Adrienne Martin's essay, "Hopes and Dreams." According to Martin, the epistemological significance of dreams, or, as she often says, *fantasies*, is different from desire. To illustrate, she asks her readers to imagine an author who is dreaming of having a child. One of the author's fantasies involves writing a novel while her baby slowly rocks in a swing beside her. Within her fantasy, it suddenly strikes her that having a child is likely to lead her to new feelings bound up with motherhood and that, in turn, such feelings would be a source of insight for developing characters in her novels. According to Martin, these appearances of reasons in fantasy are different in kind from appearances of reasons in desire. Here is how she puts it, with reference to her author/mother example:

> the "appearance" of reasons in the world due to desire is importantly different from the appearance of reasons in fantasy. In relation to desire, the desirable features of motherhood appear to the writer as facts about the world. There is no distance between her view of the world and the reasons she sees to pursue motherhood...Fantasies instead propose a world that contains certain reasons for action, and it is up to the fantasizer to decide whether that proposal is a good representation of the real world. (2011, 163-64)

There are a couple of ways to unpack Martin's idea of fantastical, as opposed to desiderative, appearances of reasons. One possibility is that the appearance of some consideration as a reason in fantasy arises only *after* we judge that it is a reason. I doubt this is ultimately what Martin wants to say, for appearances that arise only on account of judgments with the same content are not only peculiar relative to other sorts of appearances, they also seem to be of limited epistemic value (i.e., aren't a useful *guide* to anything).[20] A more promising alternative has it that although we do (non-doxastically) represent considerations as reasons prior to judgment in fantasy, we do not see the reasons as *ours* until we connect via judgment the fantasy to reality. As Martin puts it, "Fantasies, by contrast, appear to some degree distant from the actual world, and it takes a judgment on the part of the fantasizer to bring them together" (2011, 164).

The trouble for the s-hope analysis, then, is that if appearances of reasons in fantasies, or dreams, is distinct from the appearance of reasons in desire, then there is something missing from the s-hope analysis offered in section 2. But I am skeptical about the way in which Martin separates desiderative and fantastical appearances. Crucially, notice that desires *regularly* respond to representations of how the world *could be* as opposed to how it *is*. In desiring, say, to drink a soda, I respond to a thought of my drinking a soda, which is of course not a way that I am now but a way that I might be in the future. This leads me to see myself *here and now* as having reasons to go to the fridge, grab a soda, etc. Furthermore, in experiencing reasons via desire, an agent may decide that the desiderative appearances of reasons are incorrect and thus commit to a view of the world contrary to what their desire suggests. In other words, the guise of reasons explanation of the epistemological power of dreams allows for a kind of gap between appearances of reasons in dreams and what an agent ultimately believes their reasons to be. Martin, of course, wants something stronger than this. According to her, the reasons that appear in fantasies/dreams do not even appear to the dreamer to be *theirs* until they link them to their present condition via judgment. But the phenomenological aspect of the guidingness of dreams (the way in which dreams seem to call us) is such that dreams are experienced as speaking to the dreamer *as they are*. A person who dreams of, say, making a difference in an important political movement (e.g., the Civil Rights movement) experiences themselves as so called. The guise of reasons, then, remains a more attractive, straightforward explanation.[1]

In sum, given what we know about the nature of dreams, the guise of reasons it is an ideal view for explaining the guidingness phenomenon. Indeed, it is the only plausible such view of which I am aware. Thus according to my picture of the normative power of dreams, dream-constituting desires play an impressive dual role: they often ground weighty practical reasons (rooted in our very identities) and also help us to learn about those very reasons.

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[1] I don't want to overstate the disagreement here. I believe that Martin's model works for what I referred to above as *idle* fantasies, or daydreams (see section 2 above). Here the fantasizer would need to make a connection to the current situation by way of a judgment.

4   Conclusion

The central aim of this paper has been to investigate the nature of the dreams that we *ceteris paribus* ought to follow. This requires an understanding of interwoven questions about the psychological and normative dimensions of dreams. In unpacking their psychology, I argued that dreams appear to be a species of hope, falling within the framework of what is often called the standard account of hope (the s-hope analysis of dreams). I then argued that this analysis is suited to explain the two key normative dimensions of dreams, namely that they are a source of weighty practical reasons and a source of practical guidance. These two normative dimensions of dreams help us to understand the deeper significance of the dreams principle. It's not just that the dreams principle, properly understood, happens to be true, despite what many have recently argued (e.g., Kirk 2013; MacAskill 2015; Trespicio 2015); it's also that dreams themselves carry metaphysical and normative weight (see sections 3.2 and 3.3 respectively).

An additional takeaway – noted in the introduction but worth reemphasizing – concerns the recent debates about the nature of hope. As noted above, the belief-desire theory of hope is widely regarded as inadequate for capturing our most "substantial" (see Pettit 2004, 157) or "fullest" hopes (Martin 2014, 62). Thus much of the recent philosophy of hope has focused on what more is required for hope than desire and belief (Blöser and Stahl, 2017a). These efforts are of substantial interest, as the growing literature testifies. But if what I have argued here about dreams is correct, then we should not simply assume that more complex forms of hoping – if indeed there are hopes that go beyond desire and belief – are in all cases the most important forms of hoping. For some metaphysically simpler hopes may be among the most normatively momentous, namely dreams.

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[1] But it is worth keeping in mind that Solomon, David's son, *did* build the temple.

[2] Martin (2011) is one important exception. See section 3.3 for discussion. In contrast with Martin, this paper is less concerned with questions about how hopes and dreams motivate action.

[3] I will also say what I take wakeful dreams in general to be, but for reasons that will become clear, it is easier to begin with the more significant dreams and then to widen the scope.

[4] The methodology of this paper mirrors a common methodology from the literature on emotions, namely that we cannot isolate the question of what emotions are from questions about their function (see Brady 2018, 1-2).

[5] For the origins of the belief-desire theory of hope, see Hobbes 1668/1994: paragraph 14; Downie 1963; Day 1969. For the claim that the standard account misses what is significant about hope, see citations in Blöser and Stahl (2017a). Meirav (2009) argues that "hoping" in the standard sense isn't really hoping at all (see also Martin 2014, 15-17).

[6] See Milona (2019) for a defense of the belief-desire account of hope.

[7] Some people assume that a dream can only be for something difficult (see Kirk 2013). I disagree. Imagine a person who dreams of becoming a neighborhood barber, just as their father and grandfather. This isn't as difficult as becoming, say, a movie star, but their dream still points to what may be an excellent life-project for them.

[8] Authors writing for popular publications (e.g., Melissa Kirk (2013) in *Psychology Today*) often deride the dreams principle because they assume its advocates take it to be indefeasible. See also William MacAskill (2015, 149) for a similar assumption about the principle to follow your passion.

[9] This is one of MacAskill's main reasons for rejecting the related principle to follow one's passion. He describes this principle in a way that suggests it is a terminological variant of the dreams principle (see 2015, 153).

[10] MacAskill (2015, 150) also emphasizes the way in which our interests change over time as a reason not to follow our passion. But, again, this consideration is mainly about career-oriented projects. And it is likewise unclear that fluctuation in interests means that one should ignore dreams altogether, as if one wouldn't expect future dreams to bear a relation to present ones.

[11] Conditions (1)-(4) refer to the three primary dimensions along which desires can differ in strength, namely attentional influence (see (1) and (2)), motivation, and feeling. See McInerney (2004). This helps to explain, along with the point about the metaphysics of desire made in response to Bovens, that the present analysis of dreams is working only with the resources of the standard account of hope.

[12] Thanks to a referee for pushing me to consider such dreams.

[13] The s-hope analysis of dreams can develop this proposal in two directions. First, one may say that dreams involve *two* desires, one for happiness/meaning and a more specific desire, arising from the first, for what is seen as a means to happiness/meaning. Another option is to posit a single desire with complex content.

[14] Thanks to Andrew Chignell for this example.

[15] The discussion of the "guise of reasons" below (sec. 3.3) further illustrates why hopes favors certain actions.

[16] Thanks to a referee for pushing me to address this worry.

[17] A subtly different view says that desires are experiences of the *good* and that they provide evidence about what is good. This view can also explain the guidingness of dreams. I won't attempt to settle here which of these views about

desire is more plausible. See Oddie (2005) and Tenenbaum (2007) for defenses of this alternative view of desire. For an argument that it is more plausible that desires represent reasons than goodness, see Gregory (2013) and Milona and Schroeder (2019). Gregory disagrees with Milona and Schroeder about the nature of these representations. This *is* an issue that bears on the s-hope analysis of dreams and will be addressed below.

[18] Huck fortunately acted on his desires rather than his beliefs. Action/intention is another form of endorsement.

[19] Gregory (2018) defends his belief view as more plausible than my favored non-doxastic approach. His main reason for rejecting the view that desires involve non-doxastic experiences of reasons is that it allegedly fails to explain why desires rationalize action (see 2018, 1070). He argues, in particular, that this view leads to the result that desires rationalize action in cases in which desires conflict with normative beliefs about reasons. But desires, *so understood*, would not rationalize action in such cases. But it seems to me that while advocates of the non-doxastic view can largely accept that "what it is rational for you to do depends at least partly on what you want" (2018, 1062), they need not accept that desires always rationalize action. And, in particular, they should say that cases in which an agent reflectively disavows the reasons that their desire presents, the desire's ability to rationalize acting in accordance with its presentation is disabled.

[20] Martin does, however, say the following: "In the fantasy, the writer's initial judgment must be that the possible change to her writing would be a reason to pursue motherhood. And then she must believe her fantasy has, at least in this respect, represented the world accurately. Only then does the possibility of this change ''appear as a reason'' to pursue motherhood" (2011, 164). Despite this passage, I'm hesitant to interpret her view as saying that the fantastical appearances of reasons (always) follow a judgment with the same content.

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