



# **Dream Life: An Experimental Memoir (MIT Press)**

*J. Allan Hobson*

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J. Allan Hobson's scientific experimentation began in childhood, with a soot-filled investigation into the capacity of a chimney to admit Santa Claus. (He discovered that even with the damper open the chimney was far too narrow.) Hobson's life as an experimentalist has continued through a pioneering career devoted to aligning psychology and biology and to investigating the relationship of dreaming and consciousness. In *Dream Life*, Hobson conducts an experimental investigation into his life and work. Hobson charts his developing consciousness through a vividly imagined conception (in October of 1932), birth, and babyhood, offering a theory about "protoconsciousness" in fetuses and infants. He recounts his youthful zeal for scientific discovery, his early sexual experimentation, and his education. He describes taking on the entrenched Freudians at Harvard Medical School in the 1950s, as a maverick psychiatrist who wanted to replace psychoanalysis with biological science. He describes his further studies, his marriages and love affairs, his travels, and what he learned about the brain from his whiplash-induced amnesia after a 1963 automobile accident and from his "brain death" after a stroke in 2001. Through it all, Hobson uses his life as the ultimate case study for his theory that REM sleep provides a test pattern that allows the brain to develop "offline." Dreams -- most intense in REM sleep, when the brain is active -- need no Freudian-style decoding, he says. Dreaming is a glorious mental state, to be enjoyed and studied for what it tells us about consciousness.

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