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JAMES' "FRINGE" AND "QUALIA OF MEANING": A PROPOSAL

abstract

Many philosophers have made the distinction between two phenomenological aspects of consciousness, namely, the partition between clear and distinct contents/vague and peripheral feeling. Such a distinction is relevant for Husserl, while James (1890) provides the most comprehensive account of nucleus and fringe. A concept close to that of fringe, and in particular to the more recently proposed concept of non-sensory fringe, is that of qualia of meaning which I am here proposing. Qualia of meaning are experiences that relate to the holistic understanding of a certain set of elements of knowledge available to an individual and which as such can guide their thinking processes. These qualia have an intentional cognitive aspect connected to the phenomenal aspect. On the ground of these considerations, my main aim in this paper is to describe what qualia of meaning are and highlights differences and similarities with the non-sensory fringe.

keywords

two aspects of consciousness, non-sensory fringe, holistic understanding, Husserl

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1. A new kind of qualia

Despite being fairly recent, the debate on qualia has quickly become a central theme to the philosophy of mind and to the related contemporary debate on the phenomenology of thought. Regardless of whether qualia exist or not, most philosophers share an intuitive understanding of the notion (even though they may claim they do not experience qualia or that there are not qualia at all): "Qualia are simply those features, whatever they may be, which comprise the phenomenal or subjective aspects of bodily sensations and perceptual experiences" (Tye 1994, p. 160). "Qualia, if there are such, are properties of sensations and perceptual states, namely the properties that give them their qualitative or phenomenal character – those that determine 'what it is like' to have them" (Shoemaker 1991, p. 121).
One has to provisionally speak of shared intuitive external understanding because, according to those who think qualia exist, their very definition as subjective sensations to which we have inner access would make them totally impossible to describe for anyone other than the subject of *that* particular experience. However, even though the *token* is ineffable, intersubjective description and knowledge of the *type* seem possible, at least in the above-mentioned terms of an analogical and intuitive extension of sensations experienced first-hand. Consequently, one can distinguish between a metaphysical dimension of (the notion of) quale and an epistemic one: the first is related to the existence, the second to the ways in which qualia are known (Kind 2001).
One of the most debated issues is whether qualia can be also characterized in cognitive terms and not only in phenomenal ones, as Ned Block put it: "Qualia are experiential properties of sensations, feelings, perceptions and, in my view, thoughts and desires as well (...) Here is what is controversial: whether qualia, so defined, can be characterized in intentional, functional or purely cognitive terms" (1994, p. 514).
In this paper I focus on the proposal that *qualia of meaning* also exist in the furniture of the world. Qualia of meaning are sensations related to the holistic understanding of a certain set of elements of knowledge available to an individual that, as such, can accompany and also guide her thought processes and (consequently) her behaviour. Such feelings seem to be at the origin of linguistic expressions like: "I see", "Now it's all clear", "I know what to do", "I feel like I'm on the right track", "I see your point", *et similia*.
Such a feeling, in some respects, is similar to the *Aha experience* (Mulligan 1988), but broader in its scope, since the Aha experience has mainly been related to the so called "insight" – the essentially cognitive mental process leading to the discovery of a solution to a problem that had appeared unsolvable thus far. This is how Thagard and Stewart describe the Aha experience:

> the AHA! experience requires a triple convolution, binding: (a) two representations into an original one; (b) cognitive appraisal and physiological perception into a combined assessment of significance; and (c) the combined representation and the integrated cognitive / physiological emotional response into a unified representation (pattern of neural activity) of the creative representation and its emotional value (Thagard and Stewart 2001, p. 11).

As emerges from this description, the Aha experience is a brain process with a physiological correlate. However, it lacks phenomenology: the aspect of what it is like to have an insight or an Aha experience. The latter has been recently characterized as having four defining features. First, the Aha moment appears suddenly; second, the solution to a given problem can be processed fluently; third, the Aha experience triggers positive affect; fourth, the subject who experiences the Aha moment tends to think that the found solution is true (Topolinski and Reber 2010).
On the contrary, something that presents an interesting convergence with my proposed notion of qualia of meaning is the fringe as it was described by James and, mainly, as it has developed in the past three decades.

2. Nucleus and fringe

The distinction between the two phenomenological aspects of consciousness was made about 2,500 years ago[1]. In particular, the dualistic structure constituted by clear and distinct contents/vague and peripheral experiences or feeling (Mangan 1991) dates back to Anaximandros, is mentioned by Plato and Plotinus, is accepted by Leibniz and Kant, is significant for Baumgarten, and reverberates in the thought of Husserl, Heidegger and Wittgenstein.
However, in the *Principles of Psychology* James (1890) provides the most comprehensive account of it. In the chapter on the "stream of thought", he claims that consciousness is dynamic; shifting constantly from idea to idea, from thought to thought; James also states that its structure is complex: every explicit thought is related to a fringe or shade of content which is intuited. The fringe plays an important role in controlling the orderly progress of consciousness from one substantive thought to another. This process is expressed by the well-known metaphor: as we take, in fact, a general view of the stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is this different pace of its parts. Like a bird's life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings.
The resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest. Let us call the resting-places the "substantive parts", and the places of flight the "transitive parts" of the stream of thought. It then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part than the one from which we have just been dislodged. And we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another (James 1890, p. 243). James also calls the substantive parts *nucleus*, as synonymous of the focus of attention.
In addition, each substantive thought includes a nucleus of aspects one is clearly aware of, and a fringe that surrounds it (Epstein 2000). The main feature of the nucleus is stability (kinds of sensorial images, which are special insofar as that they can be "held before the

1 I am here partly taking up an argument from Lavazza 2009.

mind for an indefinite time" and can "be contemplated without changing"). The kaleidoscope is the other figure of speech used to illustrate a constantly shifting stream of thought and its most important components: essentially stable substantive thoughts (James 1890, p. 246). The ability to remember is the second crucial feature: one's memory is considerably clearer and precise when referring to the bird's perching rather than its flying. The third distinctive element is multimodality: the nucleus includes a wide range of representational means: "a word, a sentence, a particular picture, a practical attitude or a decision" can be the conclusion of a stream of thought (Husserl himself recognizes that "James was alone, as far as I know, in becoming aware of the phenomenon of horizon – under the title of 'fringes'" [1936/1970, p. 264]).

In any case, James admits that substantive thought includes several images. Mangan (1993a; 1991) believes that the sequentiality of substantive thought should be added to the characterization detailed in *Principles of Psychology*; indeed, substantive thoughts appear one at a time and are replaced in series; as should limited capability: only a small portion of the information processed in each moment can be "contained" in a single substantive thought.

In the system devised by James, the fringe helps solve the contradiction between his conviction that thought is temporally continuous and the idea that experience is constituted by a series of temporally discreet elements – a chain rather than a flow; James' conviction stems from the perceived passage between a thought and the next. Not only are we aware of substantive thoughts, but also of transitive ones, which provide a feeling of context and cement the temporal fractures between substantive thoughts. This feeling of context has three parts: a faded memory of previous thoughts, a "feeling of relation" between the current thought and other potentially relevant ones, and a "feeling of tendency" of the train of thought.

Epstein (2000, pp. 553-554) lists several fringe experiences taken from James in the attempt to pinpoint our shades of thought. They include: 1. the feeling of expectation we get when our attention has been drawn to something and we have some sense of what it might be, but have not yet determined exactly what it is; 2. the feeling of having a word "on the tip of our tongue"; 3. the feeling we have when we know that something is familiar; 4. the sense of connection provided by words that express the logical structure of thought, such as "but" or "nevertheless"; 5. the feeling of meaning to say something, when we have a perspective but not yet an articulate scheme of thought; 6. the sense we have for the overall scheme or form of a book, a work of art or a scientific system; 7. the sense we have that there is more to a thought, even when we do not have the words to complete it; 8. the sense of anticipation which occasionally causes us to mistakenly use an anticipated word instead of the correct one; and 9. the sense of being "on the right track" to a conclusion.

Obviously, this is a rather heterogeneous set of experiences. However, one common feature is that many of them involve feelings that guide consciousness from one substantive thought to another. These features of fringe are consistent with the concept and the role of Husserl's horizon: the process taking place in an original intuition is always already saturated with anticipation; there is always more cointended apperceptively than actually is given by intuition – precisely because every object is not a thing isolated in itself but is always already an object on its horizon of typical familiarity and precognizance. But this horizon is constantly in motion; with every new step of intuitive apprehension, new delineations of the object result (Husserl 1939/1973, section 25).

A case in point is provided by the TOT (tip-of-the tongue) state. This happens when we attempt to remember a word or a name and we are unable to deliver it, even though we experience the feeling that it is "on the tip of our tongue". In James' words, we have an intensely active void, a sort of ghost-name which compels us to move in a certain direction. Notwithstanding the

temporal impossibility of recalling it, we have an idea of the sound of the word, of the rhythm of its syllables as well as an intuition of its meaning. If we are trying to recall the name of a person, we picture his face and remember events about him. Occasionally we "get stuck" on a word or name which is similar even though we know it is not the right one, that it does not "fit the mould" as James said. Indeed, we know everything except the word itself. Yet we have the vivid feeling of being just about to grasp it. And this feeling confirms that we are pointing in the right direction although we have not reached our goal yet.
The fringe also lets us know when the mnemonic structures are activated. At the very time we are trying to remember the name of an actor, we might recall the roles he played in a film and the other actors he worked with, i.e. the network of memories linked to the name in question. As a rule, this context immediately leads us to the sought-after word and, by doing so, makes the relating information unnecessary, sweeping it out of our consciousness. A word on the tip of our tongue provides a strong feeling of a guiding context, partially made up of associated memories. Their role is always important but we are only aware of them in the case of TOT. Epstein believes that thought progresses by creating diverse instances (in the shape of images or sentences) in the mnemonic network nodes which are active at that moment in the nucleus. The fringe guides the process towards the goal.
This also occurs when a train of thought has no specific destination: in such cases it is exclusively governed by the associative network[2]. From this standpoint, the associative network can be viewed as relating to two distinct components which are functional to information processing: on the one hand, the mnemonic network determines the potential relations between thoughts that have possible instances in the nucleus; on the other, there is a mechanism able to monitor and guide the activation state of the network according to its current objectives.

3. Non-sensory fringe

This model of the fringe conceptualized by James has been taken up in the last 30 years. Mangan (1991) highlighted the implications of this intuition with regards to psychology and aesthetics. Later on, Mangan (1993a; 1993b; 2000; 2001) developed the idea of the "non-sensory fringe" of consciousness, which stems from the original concept and divides it in two parts. Galin (1994) continued along the same path and Epstein (2000) and Chafe (1994; 2000) also moved along similar lines.
The "classical" fringe, described by James, has a sensory content, albeit vague, blurred and indistinct. The non-sensory fringe is literally experience without a sensory content. Phenomenologically and functionally, the sensory and the non-sensory aspects are closely related: both channel context information to our consciousness and, by virtue of such capacity, contribute to the voluntary recovery of new information within our consciousness. The "non-sensory fringe" is not peripheral; on the contrary, it pervades the entire realm of our consciousness.
In terms of Gestalt, Mangan (1991) states that, given the picture/background distinction, the central sensory content (the nucleus) is located in the picture while the peripheral sensory content is located in the background. Non-sensory content is located both in the picture and in the background. Even the context of the two fringes differs (here, by context it is meant a specific domain)[3]. Peripheral sensory experience concerns the surrounding environment,

2 The comprehensive description of the tip-of-the-tongue state occurs on a phenomenal/subjective level: it is what we feel when we have a word on the tip of our tongue; the feeling has been analyzed thanks to introspection and knowledge of psychology. However, it does not descend to the level of the physiologic aetiology of "disruption" or to that linked to neurobiological causes.
3 As fringes are contextual rather than substantial, it seems that there can be overlapping levels in a phenomenological space.

while non-sensory experience concerns just about everything that is cognitively significant for our consciousness.

> Non-sensory experiences constitute, among other things, those aspects of consciousness that turn a naked focal-sensory content into an interpreted, meaningful perception. In the ground, among many other things, non-sensory experiences constitute the feeling of imminence – i.e., the feeling that much more detailed information is available on the periphery for retrieval if needed (Mangan 2001, p. 2).

A typical non-sensory experience relates to the feeling of familiarity[4].
However, it is difficult to give a precise definition of it in phenomenological terms (we know we are experiencing something but do not know how); it is a lot easier to describe its cognitive function. The feeling of familiarity, of knowing something, is a special type of contextual information signalling we have already met an element in our consciousness and redirecting us to the same cognitive relation. The process is most probably extremely complex and performed almost entirely on a non-conscious level. Mangan thinks that one of the most important non-sensory experiences is rightness, which is often confused with familiarity. Rightness shows how the content of consciousness adapts to its context. The detailed information that makes up the complete representation and assessment of a context is almost entirely unconscious. Accordingly, the purpose of rightness is to show to what extent the conscious and non-conscious cognitive domains are invariably integrated. Setting habit aside, a change in the feeling of rightness indicates the reciprocal adjustment of the contents flowing in our consciousness. The best example is provided by the discovery of a new solution in which, functionally speaking, an answer adapts to a previously created context in order to denote what would constitute a solution[5].
So, what underpins this functional mechanism we are also able to intuit phenomenologically? Mangan believes that consciousness must come to terms with a kind of conservation principle on account of a physical limitation with regards to processing information (using an analogy based on computers, one might say that the working memory has been reduced). Also on account of the aforementioned attributes of thought, this means that when some aspects of experience become more detailed, others will become less so; or that focus will shift from one figure to the next, relegating the previous to the background[6]. Non-sensory experience has little "impact" on our consciousness; peripheral sensory experiences weigh slightly more, while nucleus experiences are the most relevant. The resulting balance we come into contact with is the result of a lengthy cognitive-biological evolution. As the ability to switch between multiple tasks is central to flexible behaviour and is readily accomplished, a well-established consequence of task switching is behavioural slowing (Badre and Wagner 2006).
The fringe is the equivalent of condensed information, i.e. not fully conscious sensorial

4 The concept of familiarity also emerges in James: this seems to indicate that his idea of fringe includes the two meanings identified by Mangan, albeit superimposed and indistinct.
5 The definition evidently runs the risk of being circular. One should say that nothing is really "new" if not as a recombination of known elements; also note the assonance with James' "fitting the mould" in the tip-of-the-tongue, case, i.e. the mere recovery of a thought or a memory. A more detailed discussion follows.
6 The relatively reduced dimensions of conscious space, with the ensuing "shifting" of attention, are highlighted by other cognitive psychologists, such as and Baars (1988). "Without our perceptual constraints (to use a few examples that come to mind), movies would look like a series of still photographs, television screens and computer monitors would exhibit scannings and refreshings, not moving pictures, and the music on compact disks would suffer 44,000 audible interruptions per second between the digital samplings. Or as Alexander Pope put it, we'd die of a rose in aromatic pain" (Fromm 2003, p. 92).

and conceptual contents: it implies (by way of "imminence" phenomenology or potential access) the presence of a large quantity of information that does not encumber the focal working space. Its intrinsic "fleetingness" is explained by the role it plays: when recalled, the information goes to the nucleus and is altered, becoming clear-cut and distinct. Accordingly, phenomenology follows the function (in adaptive terms, i.e. what we feel is an effect of our basic mind/brain activity) and the contents of consciousness are much more far-reaching than what lies in the focus of attention.
Mangan argues that the non-sensory fringe is transparent (sensations are allowed through without leaving any trace), has low resolution (compared to the fine grain of the nucleus, its consistency is that of a cloud), is elusive (it escapes direct introspection but can be grasped indirectly), is more evident in the periphery of consciousness and varies in intensity. Above all, it is fully conscious in so far as it is an experience representing the currently non-conscious states of consciousness. If the resolution (like the pixels in an image) of the conscious field is both given and limited, a sensory experience – albeit vague and indistinct – can be extremely intense: the very case of art.
Rightness (or its exact opposite – wrongness) is the most important non-sensory experience, constantly monitoring every cognitive domain. Rightness

> works as a feedback device, guiding the local and specific activity of focal attention towards increasing conformity with antecedent and unconsciously encoded contextual demands. This process leads to a reciprocal interaction between conscious and unconscious processing: the process of detailed conscious analysis will usually change the context, and this, in turn, will change the evaluative signal that rightness manifests, and so on (Mangan 2001, p. 26).

Rightness (or meaningfulness)/wrongness signals penetrate the emotive aspects of experience and their distortion might cause losses or disorders. Generally speaking, emotions occur in an evaluative context so that the emotional tone of the fringe is phenomenologically blended with the feeling of rightness or wrongness. For instance, hate may be accompanied by an unpleasant feeling of wrongness, so we perceive it as an intrusion into our consciousness linked to guilt and shame, or by a feeling of rightness which sustains and fuels it.

4. The Qualia of Meaning

The distinction between nucleus and fringe and the following partition between sensory and non-sensory fringe paves the way to identifying a specific kind of qualia: the qualia of meaning. As I have already mentioned, they are sensations related to the holistic understanding of a certain set of elements of knowledge available to an individual that, as such, can accompany and also guide her thought processes and (consequently) her behaviour. Holistic understanding must be provisionally taken as the ability to master a series of elements of knowledge in a unitary way with respect to a specific goal, without yet having a precise analysis of each of them or of their role in the line of reasoning they belong to. In fact, as we shall see, part of those elements of knowledge might not yet have come to consciousness (or to the global workspace, to put it with Baars 1988; 1997). In more strictly phenomenological terms, "holistic" refers to "world": that is, the fact that a meaning can phenomenize itself (mean something) only within a chain of references that, for Husserl, are associations. As Husserl asserts:

> For consciousness the individual thing is not alone; the perception of a thing is perception of it within a *perceptual field*. And just as the individual thing in perception has meaning only through an open horizon of "possible perceptions," insofar as what

> is actually perceived "points" to a systematic multiplicity of all possible perceptual exhibitings belonging to it harmoniously, so the thing has yet another horizon: besides this "internal horizon" it has a "external horizon" precisely a thing within a *field of things*; and this points finally to the whole "world as perceptual world" (Husserl 1970, p. 162).

Qualia of meaning have an intentional cognitive aspect that starts from the phenomenal aspect and, as we will see, they allow explaining part of our mental phenomenology and the related behaviours.
A first objection that could be made against this is that some mental states do not have a special phenomenal character:

> A itch feels different from ache. A stabbing pain feels different from a burning one. But the belief that two is the smallest prime does not feel different from the belief that the Earth is oblate. Beliefs don't have 'feels'(...)we distinguish those psychological states for which there is something it is like to be in them from those for which the notion seems to make no sense (Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 2007, p. 129).

However, in my proposal, qualia of meaning are indeed the feelings that sometimes go together with beliefs, when the latter are related in new or significant ways for us. The point is that the importance of feeling is related to the subjective degree of novelty or relevance to the subject. It is therefore not possible to establish a preventive criterion that can predict the onset of qualia of meaning. Therefore, qualia of meaning are connected – unavoidably, being qualia – to an existential sense, to something that is relevant to us, here and now. So it is true that "the belief that two is the smallest prime does not feel different from the belief that the Earth is oblate". However, Copernicus might have experienced a decisive quale of meaning when he first conceived the idea that the Ptolemaic system was wrong and he could propose a new view of astronomy.
Qualia of meaning are not necessarily the same as Archimedes' legendary "eureka", but they are certainly similar in many ways. However, the point is not just the relevance of the object of holistic understanding in an intersubjective way. In fact, the subjective relevance of the understanding, manifested in the strong subjective feeling, is fundamental. In other words, it does not take a great scientific discovery to experience qualia of meaning: a little advancement in knowledge is enough (think of a student who finally learns calculus). In other words, the relevance of the object can be very significant for most people but not for a specific individual, while the subjective relevance of a given understanding can have high significance for that individual in the light of her personal history and her world horizon, to use Husserlian terms. What makes the relevance of the understanding wholly peculiar is the existential situation in which the "discovery" is valuable. Everyone has a different life and is immersed in a different situation, so every single holistic understanding will be different, even if it seems that we are unable to discriminate subjectively all the nuances of qualia of meaning or to judge to what extent qualia of meaning of other individuals are motivationally relevant.
Another key element of qualia of meaning as I am conceiving of them here is the abovementioned element of "unification" of mental contents, which seems too often have an evident phenomenal correlate. And, in this sense, an important role is surely played by the part/whole relations. Part/whole relations are not ordinary, objective features of things, but they are made relevant in the subject/object relation. Although it is not possible to rule out that neuroscience may address the problem in terms of brain functions, part/whole relations rely essentially on phenomenological analysis. Following Husserl, it can be said that "all real

unities are 'unities of sense'. Unities of sense presuppose (...) a sense-bestowing consciousness which, for its part, exists absolutely and not by virtue of another sense-bestowal" and "that interpretation stems from a philosophical absolutizing of the world completely alien to the natural way of considering the world" (Husserl 1913/1983, pp. 128-129).

In the recent philosophical landscape, something similar has been proposed by Galen Strawson with his idea of non-sensory or cognitive experiential qualitative (EQ) character: "It is the meaning of the sentences (...) that is playing the dominant part in determining the overall EQ character of this particular stretch of the course of your experience" (2005, p. 262). It is an understanding-experience, a cognitive-experience, entirely independent from its causes. It is involved in the mere comprehending of words – read, thought, or heard right now – where the comprehending is considered quite independently of any imaginistic or emotional accompaniments. "Cognitive experience, we may say, is a matter of whatever EQ content is involved in such episodes after one has subtracted any non-cognitive EQ content trappings or accompaniments that such episodes may have" (Strawson 2005, p. 264).

Qualia of meaning, though, are not generically associated to any experience of comprehending, but rather to special occurrences of experience that are *relevant* to the subject given her condition in a specific moment. This does not mean that qualia of meaning are posited *ad hoc*, as we shall see later. Rather, they are a component of the subject's mental states that may be important in brief particular periods of time. In such moments, the qualia of meaning have a relevant role related to their cognitive-phenomenic character which can connect – perhaps also causally – to intentional mental states oriented to action.

As Strawson (2008) underlines in a similar context, the difference between qualia of meaning and cognitive content lies in the fact that the latter is a thought-episode (since it is included in a mental state) that can be evaluated semantically, judged as true or false, accurate or inaccurate. But the experiential qualitative experience is still fully part of the mental episode/state. According to Strawson, in fact, "there are no truly mentally contentful phenomena to be found when there is no experience. Nor, therefore, are there any truly intentional phenomena" (2005, p. 274). Ultimately, for Strawson, it is the conceptual content of the sentence that plays the main role in determining the overall character of the qualitative part of our experience. And the experiential qualitative character is always present – claims Strawson – since the qualitative part is always present. It is a cognitive phenomenology: understanding-experience, or meaning-experience (Strawson 1994, pp. 5-13).

If Strawson's position, albeit with the notable differences I have underlined, is the closest philosophical view to the idea of qualia of meaning, there is a strand of psychological and phenomenological investigation related to the hypothesized cognitive-qualitative experience oriented towards a holistic understanding. Before looking at it, though, I wish to restate what the idea of holistic comprehending entails for qualia of meaning. As mentioned, it is something similar to what we may call intuition of a complex description or explanation, without grasping the single elements that make it up.

What gives rise to qualia of meaning is the unity of the content, with respect to which there may be a concomitant feeling of "rightness", of "right direction". Such a feeling is linked to the cognitive element and pertains to one's existential condition and the related choices. "Rightness" and "the right direction", as is clear, can have no objective value, both because qualia of meaning are by definition subjective feelings, experienced in a privileged way by the individual, and because they refer to the overall mental condition of the bearer of those states. "Rightness" can therefore even be a misleading element that makes the subject objectively mistaken and leads them in the wrong direction. At the anecdotal level, however, "positive" outcomes are the best known: that is, those where qualia of meaning have actually gone along with an intellectual achievement.

An example may help here: think of a scientist who has long faced two complex experimental protocols to deal with a difficult problem and already has some evidence in favor of both. One day he reads some new papers and gathers further evidence; at that point, not so much for the new content, but for the whole of the cognitive data now present in his mind, he experiences a stronger, persistent feeling that is different from the past. He has the feeling that protocol B is more promising than A – that B is the right direction to follow. Protocol B is not necessarily the best, and the scientist might turn out to be wrong. But this will not happen because of his feeling, but because he did not have all the evidence necessary to choose well, or because he has not fully evaluated it. If the scientist chooses B and is successful, he will be more likely to attribute his success to his "sixth sense" and therefore he will have a more vivid memory of it compared to that of his failures.

In this sense, the qualia of meaning are the qualitative, experiential component of the content processing at the edge of consciousness that occurs in James' fringe. Intellectual intuitions that suddenly emerge to full consciousness are accompanied by a specific phenomenology, but may also be partly guided by it. In fact, qualia of meaning are precisely defined as feelings related to a holistic apprehension that is neither unconscious nor clear and distinct. As said, the qualitative experience that accompanies cognition can very well be misleading, but there can also be a feeling of "going in the wrong direction" that helps one change one's choices. This feeling is characterized as positive because it allows one to correct one's mistakes; however, as with the feeling of being on the right track, there is no guarantee of it being an objectively correct feeling. This consideration is totally speculative, but one could argue that single individuals can refine their sensitivity to feelings of this kind both by improving their cognitive style and by increasing their cognitive contents with regard to the topic considered. In this way, the processing at the edge of consciousness would be more precise and rich, and the feeling of being on the right track would be stronger.

5. Qualia of meaning and non-sensory fringe

As one can see, the non-sensory fringe cannot be properly assimilated to qualia of meaning, but it may be a converging description of a phenomenological space that encompasses important cognitive aspects. The features that Mangan associates with the non-sensory fringe are: transparency, low resolution, elusiveness, variation in intensity and the fact that it is more evident in the periphery of consciousness. Thus it is possible to compare the phenomenal features of the non-sensory fringe and those of qualia of meaning.

First of all, transparency. As to the non-sensory fringe, sensations are allowed through without leaving any trace. Qualia of meaning are properly the feeling of having some holistic comprehending and, given that they associate the phenomenal character to a mental content and can help guide the approval of a mental content in the form of a judgment, or the transition from one mental content to another, one cannot say that they do not leave traces. Indeed, they are feelings of particular importance for the subject, as I have tried to explain earlier.

The low resolution of the non-sensory fringe emerges compared to the fine grain of the nucleus of consciousness. In general, qualia are characterized by having blurred edges and by being hard to classify, but they may be of extreme power and significance for the person who experiences them; in particular, qualia of meaning are here assumed to be a class of qualia of significant existential relevance. Regarding their elusiveness, this is the biggest difference between non-sensory fringe and qualia of meaning. While non-sensory fringe "escapes direct introspection but can be grasped indirectly", qualia of meaning are the core of direct introspection – what the subject has privileged access to.

The variation in intensity seems a common feature of both non-sensory fringe and qualia of meaning, since they can show different degrees of subjective power and relevance. Finally, the fact of being more evident in the periphery of consciousness is partially also shared by

qualia of meaning, if one clarifies what is meant by periphery of consciousness. On the one hand, as many philosophers (but not all of them) maintain qualia *are*, constitute, phenomenal consciousness or, at least, so one can state by stipulation. And so they are also a central part of a broader conception of consciousness that includes the cognitive aspects. On the other hand, however, qualia of meaning, as I have proposed to conceptualize them, are connected to a holistic understanding which refers to the idea of fringe: the cognitive aspects that the holistic understanding accompanies are indeed placed at the periphery of consciousness, that is, they are not yet fully embedded in conscious thought processes. This last feature thus constitutes an important, even functional, connection between James' fringe and its contemporary developments and the idea proposed here of qualia of meaning.

In conclusion, an interpretation of qualia of meaning more in line with the phenomenological tradition implies a non-sensist and non-introspective conception of them. As has often been done, it can be said that James adopted a sensist conception of consciousness in which there is a risk of confusing the feeling subject (the sentient being) with what is felt (what consciousness is directed to and which is found in the world "outside" consciousness, where "world" can be the cultural, mathematical, logical world etc.).

In this sense, qualia of meaning can be a hub on which to work to integrate the cognitive aspect that accompanies the phenomenal datum, in a perspective that re-actualizes the intentional distinction between understanding and the understood content, as this gives rise to different laws of unification: on the one hand, immanent laws to mental acts, on the other, laws of unification relating to the content manifested in mental acts. The problem of intentionality for phenomenology consists precisely in how the objective and structural laws of the content determine the laws of unification of the acts of consciousness, so that the laws of the mental change according to the type of world that a person comes to live in.

In fact, one could argue that for Husserl the adaptation relationship is not (as will be for Searle, for example) between mind and world, but between references in the world: the fact that with an 18 key one cannot tighten a 35 bolt is an inherent structure of the contents that appear, of the intentioned datum, and it is in this sense that one must understand the horizon structure and the holism I have referred to. These are qualia, but with a structure that does not depend on the subject who is targeting them. It would therefore be the mind that is structured by adapting to these phenomenal references (qualia).

Regarding non-sensory fringe and qualia of meaning, this is a reflection that certainly needs further study, but it seems to fruitfully intercept a long tradition as well as recent insights, for a better and more detailed understanding of mental phenomena understood in their broadest articulation[7].

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