

## **Define a 'quale', giving some examples of qualia. What is the philosophical interest of the notion of a quale?**

I awake under soft linen sheets. An ill-defined, geometric patch of sunshine vibrantly fills the back of the room. The comforting aromas of coffee and croissants intermingle in their pathways up the staircase, as do the playful notes of jazz piano. Blue sky promises behold through the skylight and I can't help thinking how good it is to be in the world.

In this subjective description of a summer morning waking, I am expressing how my 'qualia' (the plural of 'quale'), my personal sensory experiences, describe my being. The subjective experience of a sense experience, that: 'what's it likeness?' of being in the world is what we might define as a quale. How I am experiencing living in that moment unique to me. The 'cooked feel' of the experiences I have esoterically described above (like the beginnings of a fumbling first novel by a teenager) should not divert us from the importance of 'raw feelings' of qualia, where we do not attach sentiments. Raw qualia might be the basic experience of the taste of an apple or the experience of seeing red (not necessarily the sweetness or the warmth). The notion of qualia then, gets at the philosophical question of what it is like to be?

Philosopher and cognitive scientist, Daniel Dennett once suggested that *quale* was: "an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: the ways things seem to us".

Frank Jackson in his Epiphenomenal Qualia paper of 1982 proposes a scenario where Mary, the colour scientist, knows everything there is to know about the colour red, while being brought up in a black and white world, so when she is eventually led through a door to see red for the first time, something is added to her world – something mental, something non-physical.

The philosophical importance here concerns a contradiction to physicalism. If everything has a physical character then how do we account for qualia? The account of a philosophical zombie, who is identical to a living entity apart from entirely lacking qualia, as outlined by David Chalmers, if accepted as possible, is some justification for an argument against physicalism. There is nothing physical that can account for 'what it is like to be' in this case.

Thomas Nagel's paper 'What is it like to be a bat?' further demands that we acknowledge the subjective character of consciousness. He states that "an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism." At least we can say that any physical theory of the mind is not able to, or most probably can never be able to, penetrate explaining the understanding of what it is like to be.

Whether it is John Locke's inverted spectrum, where you wake up to find the grass appears red or the sky appears orange thought experiment, or the actual experiment of George M. Stratton where special prism glasses inverted his visual world to appear upside down, until his experience of them adjusted to being righted after a few days, and then the reverse experience took place upon removal, there appears to be a lot to be said for a non-physical phenomenon that we can limit to qualia.

Furthermore, the acceptance that qualia add something to our universe challenges the notion that the universe is deterministic where physical causes have defined mental effects. A determined universe makes qualia consistently experienced, whereas the possibility of individuals experiencing different qualia from the same physical object undermines a consistent, determined explanation.

This substantial body of philosophical thought which can still reject Cartesian dualism but hold on to my unique mental experiences upholds a view of the self that is seemingly impenetrable to science. My subjective experience cannot be touched by materialism. The notion of quale is self-contained; 'a metaphysical uncrackable code'. 'I am always right about myself' is the subjective maxim that philosophy can then use to examine meaning, language, labels, memory and the whole goddam idea that being is not obvious. The 'hard' problem of consciousness is worth examining without necessarily resorting to neuro-science for permission.

That philosophy will go on to ask big questions until it opens up a space for a separate discipline to do the dirty work, allowing philosophy to then go on posing more big questions and examining different ideas, *is* the philosophical interest.

From my own experience, the experience of seeing red really does vary, as does the taste of an apple, as does listening to the same piece of music. I am tempted to accept that subjectivity can be the only thing there is. 'What am I experiencing?' is the only question. Physicalist theory cannot explain how physical properties can explain my subjective feeling of experience. Is there such a thing as nature then? There is an explanatory gap between the mental and physical here. I was struck by this quote from Joseph Levine's paper *Conceivability, Identity, and the Explanatory Gap*:

*'In the end, we are right back where we started. The explanatory gap argument doesn't demonstrate a gap in nature, but a gap in our understanding of nature. Of course a plausible explanation for there being a gap in our understanding of nature is that there is a genuine gap in nature. But so long as we have countervailing reasons for doubting the latter, we have to look elsewhere for an explanation of the former.'*

Nevertheless, it remains possible that qualia do not exist 'really', or that if they do then there is a physical explanation to be discovered. If Mary knows everything about seeing red then that will include the quale of seeing red and she will not be

astonished and have something non-physical added when eventually exposed to red. Or Mary will have to allow red to be gradually processed by the brain, as children do, or as Stratton had to do with his inverted spectacles. I am open to the view that consciousness is not a 'thing'. There is no way of verifying it.

As for me, a quale is something that does not need verifying because it is unverifiable by its very nature. I am accepting of the explanatory gap, to this extent, I will always be able to make a claim that I know something because I know, which is unfair to a logical, reasoned, 'scientific' approach. What I want to say is that it seems to me that we have identified something about our experience with the notion of 'quale', and given it a name, and that it has a right to exist as much as anything else. Whether it is true or not seems to be missing the point somehow.