Comments on Pete Mandik's "Color-Consciousness Conceptualism" Online Consciousness Conference

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The argument from the fineness of grain of experience against conceptualism (AFG):

(1) ***fineness of grain*:** visual experiences represent specific/determinate colours and the differences between them so that it's possible for perceivers to discriminate such colours on the basis of their experiences.
(2) ***conceptual limitation:*** perceivers lack fine-grained colour concepts, differences between which could match all the fine-grained differences between perceptual representations of distinct specific/determinate shades.
(3) ***conclusion:*** there are representational differences between contents of experiences unmatched by conceptual differences between concepts possessed by perceiver, so perceptual content is not entirely determined/constituted by perceiver's concepts.

Typically, conceptualists (as those of us non-conceptualists who aren't all that optimistic about AFG) have granted (1) and focused their resistance on (2): either (2) misses availability of some (demonstrative) concepts, or relies on overly linguistic conception of concepts, or unmotivated, or relies on irrealistically stringent constraint on concept-possession.

Pete introduces ***new response*** by denying (1):
• grants that experience is ***synchronically fine-grained***: fine-grained differences in representational content between perceptual representations of distinct specific/determinate colours at a time t.
• argues that experience is ***not diachronically fine-grained***: no fine-grained differences in representational content between perceptual representations of distinct specific/determinate colours presented at different times t and t*.

What motivates the discrepancy? Chromatic context effects:
• ***same colour in different contexts***: "failure to serially discriminate simultaneously discriminable chips as due to different conscious perceptions arising from the same chips presented in different contexts." (p.8)
• ***conceptualist explanation:*** "serially presented paint chips are experienced/conceptualised simply as e.g., *blue* regardless of whether they differ in reality with respect to shade. Simultaneously presented paint chips are experienced/conceptualised as one being e.g., *darker shade of blue* than the other." (p.8)

2 worries:
(should say that I think AFG is bad, though not for reasons Pete advances).
(+NB: no need to worry about what conceptual content amounts to here)

worry #1: Not sure I understand role of context effects

Something strange about Pete's explanation of the difference between synchronic & diachronic fineness of grain: same colour diachronically represented differently due to different contexts over time. But how is this relevant? Seems to introduce even more fineness of grain, no less.

Assumption behind fineness of grain:
A1: differences between different colours can be represented diachronically in experience.
A2: over time, differences between different colours also represented by different experiences.
(i.e., visual system is highly sensitive to colour differences over spatial expense, so why not over time?)

Pete's claim is that A1 doesn't entail A2. But cases where same shade is represented differently don't matter, what is at issue is whether different colours can be visually represented in same way over time! That's what he needs (different colours represented with same concept).

5 (+ 1) problems:
i) natural assumption that, if same colour can be represented differently, then different colours can be represented the same way.

- but doesn't follow: colour c1 may be represented by 2 ways w1 and w2, colour c2 by w3 and w4, c3 by w5 and w6, and so on, ….. yet no overlap between different ways.

ii) 2 different colours could be represented in exactly same perceptual context (same lighting, same background, etc.) and so no difference in context to explain why two colours are represented in the same way.

iii) even if there are differences in context over time, and they influence the way in which colours are perceived, such context effects may not be sufficient for two distinct yet similar shades to be represented in exactly the same way.

iv) evidence for diachronic fineness of grain:
Evidence that experience can be diachronically fine-grained: not as fine-grained as synchronically, but still more than Pete allows.

example: present 5 shades of green with fine-grained differences, then quickly present another five shades of green with fine-grained differences.

- all 5 shades represented differently at a time.
- but also clear that second presentation not the same shades as in first presentation.
- so there must be fine-grained differences between two presentations, *contra* Pete's claim.
- how to explain those differences in terms of determinable concepts and comparative brightness concepts? Can introduce more presentations of another five completely (and noticeably so) different green shades.
- assumption that memory represents perceived colours the way they were perceived, that it's reliable enough (even if diminished), at least in some cases (sufficient to raise trouble).
- proposal comes at a cost: must either deny visual imagery or memory of relatively fine-grained shades, or must deny any reliability, not even occasionally, of such memory, and must explain why.

v) contrary to what Pete says on pp. 4-5, no need to assume that diachronic & synchronic fineness of grain requires that (a) any chromatic different must be represented differently in experience or (b) same colour always represented same way. Only sometimes, in some contexts, will suffice for argument to go through (if argument works, that is): enough to get evidence for lack of concept due to inability to re-identify fine-grained shade.

In fact, argument doesn't even need diachronic fineness of grain: if experiences aren't diachronically fine-grained, that might explain inability to re-identify same shades. But AFG still goes through. Suggests the action will surround premise (2) on concept-possession, not premise (1).

vi) possible to control for context effects: same background, same lighting conditions, no shift in attention, etc..

Pete only considers case where there is in fact no difference in colour between t and t*, it's just that figure has been spatially re-oriented so as to preserve all spatia relations (and hence all background + lighting effects).

His response (p.12): diachronic discrimination possible if subject wonders whether lighter of the two has changed spatial location.

- But not about fine-grained colours: of course, subject can do that, even if lighter colours are quite distinct, and their distinctness can be seen. I could answer that question even if the colours are of radically different hues.
- question is not whether lighter colour has changed location, but whether lighter colour is exactly the same colour. Subject probably can't tell.
- and real question ought to be whether subject can tell difference when lighter colours are different.

worry #2: synchronic fineness of grain is problem enough for Pete

Pete allows his conceptual scant resources: determinable colour concepts + comparative brightness concepts. But conceptualism still not out of trouble:

i) consider 6 or 12 different shades of green, all discriminable from one another, all foveated. Possible to experience all differences at once. But how is it conceptualised?

- would be nice to hear exactly how these differences can be captured with these sorts of concepts exactly!

ii) due to comparative concepts, I assume you have to start somewhere, and work your way through (nothing said about non-adjacent patches and their perceived differences, or about hue and saturation differences):

- but then, possible to start in a at least 2 different ways (darker than, brighter than), and yet presumably, only one experience.
- reverse problem: same experience twice (i.e., same shades, and no context effect), but different conceptual judgements. Here, sameness isn't captured (different judgements too fine-grained).

iii) *issue about consciousness:* Pete grants that there can be fine-grained sub-personal perceptual representations, but no non-conceptual conscious perceptual representation (pp. 5, 8). Yet something odd about this:

No introspection problem:

(1) typically, when I have a non-perceptual thought about some colour, it's possible to introspect which colour concepts I use and how I combine them (most of the time).
(2) The very same concepts can be deployed in colour experience.
(3) Yet, when perceiving 6 or 12 fine-grained shades simultaneously, no introspection of any particular concept being used.

Extra layer problem:

(1) suppose it were possible to introspect concepts used in experience just as it is in thought.
(2) thought about colour with eyes closed very different (phenomenologically/introspectively) from experience of blue.
(3) simple concepts used in pure thought can be used in experience (according to Pete).
(4) Yet if all conscious content was only conceptual, and I can introspect it, introspectible difference between pure thought and experience suggests there's something else in case of experience, and that it isn't just conceptual, since concepts (and my introspection of them) can be the same.

Conceptualists like Pete clearly have more to do to explain this!