Comments on Matt Conduct's paper for the On-line Consciousness Conference

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1. Matt sets out to defend a version of Naïve Realism (NR) that avoids disjunctivism. He endorses Mark Johnston's version of NR without disjunctivism in "The Obscure Object of Hallucination". Presumably Matt thinks this version of NR isn't a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, because what's important in Naïve Realist disjunctivism is the Naïve Realism, not the disjunctivism. But why think that? What's important about Naïve Realism? Without an account of this on the table, it will be hard to assess whether Naïve Realism without disjunctivism would be missing anything that matters.

   Presumably Matt's NR opponents – the NR disjunctivists – believe that experiences divide into fundamentally different kinds, as different from each other jadeite and nephrite. That's what makes them disjunctivists. For them, NR about certain 'good' experiences is not only true, but also has the status of delineating a special kind of experience that is fundamentally different from other kinds. So for them, what's important about Naïve Realism is in part the fact that it has this status. For Matt to oppose them, some argument is needed that (a) NR does not have this status, and that (b) there is nonetheless some other reason to believe it. So what are the other reasons to believe NR, and why are the NR disjunctivists wrong to think NR delineates a kind of experience that's fundamentally different from 'bad' cases?

2. According to Johnston, when you drink Calvados and taste its astringency, your perception is a case of optimal perceptual contact if you are sensing a property-instance or trope of astringency. You're not (or not just?) in contact with the universal: astringency. You're in contact with the specific instance of astringency that belongs to the very quantity of Calvados that you're drinking. Likewise, when you see a red cube, you're in perceptual contact with that cube's instance of redness – not the universal: redness, but the instance of redness that belongs to the cube. In contrast, when you're hallucinating drinking Calvados, or when you're hallucinating a red cube, you may indeed be aware of the universals: astringency, or: redness. Tropes aren't universals, but they supposed to be similar enough that each of them can create sensory profiles that are shared by drinkings of Calvados and mere hallucinated drinkings of Calvados.

   Johnston motivates idea that in the good cases, you're in contact with tropes by considering a kind of case known as veridical illusion. For instance suppose you see a red cube. Left to your own devices, it would look orange. But thanks to a lucky intervention in your brain,

it looks red. In this case, your perception is correct, but only luckily so. It is more like a lucky guess than a case of knowledge. (If you believed your eyes – i.e., if you believed on the basis of your veridical illusion that there is a red cube before you, perhaps your true belief would be justified, yet arguably still not a case of knowledge). Johnston's theory is motivated by the idea that there is some sort of perceptual contact that you are missing out on in this case. What kind of perceptual contact is this? Johnston's answer is that you are missing out on contact with the trope of redness had by the cube. So here we have a potential motivation for NR, or at least NR in Johnston's form: it shows us what goes wrong in cases of veridical illusion.

Let's grant for the sake of argument that your perceptual situation in the case of veridical illusion is suboptimal – that it is not as good a case of contact with external things as perception can provide. Why think that Naïve Realism in Johnston's form is needed to identify what's suboptimal here? If there are other ways to identify what's suboptimal, then we won't have a very strong motivation for Johnston's or Matt's NR after all. Or at least supplementary arguments will have to be given to show that this is the best, or perhaps the only way to identify what's suboptimal about the veridical illusion case.

And it seems that the same idea can be respected without appealing to tropes. Perhaps what goes wrong in this kind of veridical illusion is that the fact that the cube is red is not appropriately related to your phenomenal state. Your phenomenal state could have an internalist construal (where it could be shared by a hallucination and a good case), or it could be a relation to a fact (either where a fact is either a true proposition, or where it is an object having a property). On an internalist construal, we don't end up with Naïve Realism, at least if not if Naïve Realism is a thesis about phenomenal states. So to the extent that Matt is endorsing not only Johnston's theory but also this motivation for it, it seems under-motivated. If the motivation for Naïve Realism is to identify what goes wrong in cases of veridical illusion, then apparently one doesn't need contact with tropes to do that. Prima facie, it can be done in other ways.

Now, Matt (or Johnston) may want to reject all of these conceptions of phenomenal state involved in this alternative. But if the rejection of the alternative relies on rejecting one or another construal of phenomenal state, then it seems that that is where the action is in motivating Naïve Realism. Are there supposed to be grounds for rejecting the internalist construal of phenomenal state that are independent of NR? If so, it looks like something other than the veridical illusion example is needed.