

A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF THE CONCEPT PHENOMENALISM

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ABSTRACT

The main task of early modern philosophy is the epistemological project of showing how knowledge is possible. Empiricism, as a school of thought in epistemology or theory of knowledge, was destined to alter the course and concerns of modern philosophy. While Bacon was interested, in the “total reconstruction of sciences, arts, and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations”, John Locke, the founder of empiricism in Britain, aimed at the more modest objective of clearing the ground and removing some of the “rubbish” that lies in the way of knowledge (Lawhead: 213). It was at this process of “clearing” that Locke “hit upon a bold and original interpretation of how the mind works and the extent of knowledge we can expect from the human mind” (Stumpf: 251). For Locke, our knowledge is limited to our experience that is “empiricism”. Empiricism is a doctrine in philosophy which holds that the most reliable source of human knowledge is experience, that is, through observation and sometimes experimentation. This is a view contrasted with rationalism, a theory which states that reason is itself a source of knowledge superior to and independent of sense perceptions. However, Refinements of empiricism led to phenomenism, positivism, scientism, logical positivism etc. Phenomenism is a view in epistemology derives from the metaphysical notion “that objects are logical construction out of perceptual properties.” (Dictionary .com) It can also be considered a radical form of empiricism. Employing the method of critical analysis, this paper therefore examines the meaning, basic tenets and history of phenomenism, as well as the phenomenist position, its variants, themes and some objections to the theory of phenomenism.

INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Phenomenon: In Heidegger’s telling, “the Greeks were the first to fundamentally experience being (to on) as phainomenon, that which of itself shows itself, that which appears” (Sheehan: 88). Sheehan citing Finley, Jr., in his informative *Four stages of Greek Thought*, confirms from a classicist’s point of view what Heidegger finds operative in Greek thought from Homer to Aristotle, namely, that the presence of beings in the world is experienced as their appearing, where *phainesthai* means that a being brings itself to radiant self-manifestation (*sichzum scheinen bringen*) and “is” precisely insofar as it shows itself in that self-manifestation. (Sheehan : 88-89) Phenomenon is the singular of phenomena derived from the Greek words ‘*phainein*’ which means to bring to light’ or ‘to make known’ and ‘*phainesthai*’ which means ‘to appear’ or ‘to become visible’. “A phenomenon is any occurrence that may be perceived through a person’s senses or with their mind, and the theory proposes that we cannot experience anything beyond the phenomena of our perception”. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy defines phenomenon as “something that is shown, or revealed, or manifest in experience.” Phenomenon in Platonism is the mere reflections or shadows of the forms of things (Uduma: 252). It is the photocopies which we have in the world of form. In Plato and also in Kant, phenomenon is refers to transient or ephemeral. Kant refers to things-as-they-appear-to-us as the phenomena. The phenomenal kant tells us, is the real world and the notion of such a world corresponding to anything outside of it is unintelligible. (Lawhead: 335) Heidegger took the meaning of the Greek word phenomenon as that which reveals itself. (Stumpf: 454) For Husserl, there is no distinction between consciousness and the phenomenon. He maintains that phenomena are ultimately contained in the very subjective act of experiencing something (Stumpf: 451). In other words, knowing something says Husserl is;

Not like the act of a camera taking pictures of things. By focusing on the phenomena of a thing available to our consciousness, we actually have a more enlarged description of it. For it now includes the real object, our actual perception of it, the object as we mean it, and the act of intentionality. (Stumpf: Ibid)

In Husserl, the phenomenon is the object, event, occurrence that directly gives itself or manifests to consciousness. (Agbo:2) And this is where the phenomenological conception of “Phenomenon” begins to deviate from the traditional conception. Agbo gave the simplest meaning of phenomena as one that regards it as “intuited essences.” He argues that there are features which objects “have” which if they don’t have; they cannot really be said to be those objects. (Agbo: 3) However, phenomenology explicates these features which are necessary features.

Phenomenology: This is the study or theory of phenomena. It is a philosophical movement that is usually associated with the German-Jew who lived between 1859 and 1938. Edmund Husserl is usually regarded, in the history of western philosophy, as the father or the modern founder of phenomenology, who sought to make philosophy a rigorous science. Phenomenology dates back to the 18th century, especially in the thoughts of John Heinrich Lambert who sees it as that part of epistemology which differentiates truth from illusion and error. Phenomenology as Hegel understands it in his Phenomenology of spirit is the “study of phenomena” or a systematic examination of what appears within experience, in an attempt to understand its necessary structure. (Lawhead: 364) Hegel further describes phenomenology as the “science of the experience of consciousness.” Importantly, when Hegel was talking about “experience”, he was not referring to isolated “pings” of sensation. Rather, “experience” refers to our various ways of being in the world and relating to it. Hegel uses the word in much the same sense as we talk about “the college experience” or “the experience of falling in love.”

By way of definition, phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first person point of view. Phenomenology is primarily a descriptive discipline undertaken in a way that is independent of scientific, involving causal explanations and accounts of the nature of experience. It focuses on the essences of the objects of our experience by making the subject perceive these objects, not as they (the subjects) reconstructs them, but as the objects present, reveal or show themselves. In phenomenology, Agbo writes that the idea is that consciousness is always consciousness of “something” and not of “nothing” and this “something” is what the subject “intends”. And so, the central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed towards something, as it is an experience of or about some objects (Agbo: 2). Agbo citing Jim Unah views the phenomenological attitude in the following words:

The important thing to note about the phenomenologist’s conception of the phenomena is that things and events are capable of being known exactly as they are. Otherwise stated, things and events do not hide themselves or some aspects of themselves when they show themselves. Objects of experience show themselves exactly as they are. But perceiving things as they are is not the right of every subject. Intuiting the objects of experience as they are is the exclusive preserve of a purified and detached Ego. The subject’s inability to grasp the essences of things arises from its preconception or predisposition. (Agbo: 4)

It is very important to note here that phenomenology have more than one meaning. One is straightforward and scientific whereas the other one is subjective and theoretical. In the first sense, it means what we encounter in the world, while in the other sense phenomenology refers to mental construction and insubstantial reality.

The Goals of Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophical method articulates a set of mutually related theses. We shall look at these goals.

1. Phenomenology studies the essences of the objects of immediate experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines the term phenomenology in his paper, *Phenomenology of Perception* as “the study of essences” and also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’. (Ponty: vii) This study is brought about when existence is bracketed. This interest and focus on essences was the main concern of Husserl. And this was to have effect on Heidegger, who had to return to the existential ontology in his phenomenology.
2. Phenomenology **describes** the objects of experience rather than **explaining**. Description involves a focus on what is presented to consciousness within the limits of their presence. But explanation leads to all kinds of metaphysical configuration. Description is more scientific than explanation. When Husserl avers that philosophy should be an “eidetic science”, he was of the view that philosophy should be a science that focuses on the essential aspect of the object of cognition rather than its existential aspect.
3. Phenomenology establishes a “presuppositionless” enquiry. Adopting an attitude of patience is one of the main goals of phenomenology. This allows or helps the objects to reveal themselves as they are. This approach entails that the inquirer should not impose his/her cognitive ideas on the objects of investigation. Husserl refers to this attitude as the “phenomenological reduction or *epoche*”. *Epoche* is the Greek word for bracketing. It means that the world and its objects, as well as our beliefs about them, are put in mental brackets so that we can view this panorama of phenomena with a sense of objectivity and detachment (Laehead: 530). Unah maintains that “any phenomenologist worth the name should cultivate the habit of patiently waiting for and disengaging personal interest in any descriptive analysis or experience.” (Agbo: 5) Husserl himself avers that “the method of phenomenology consists in focusing on my part or all of my experience, and then observing, analyzing, abstracting the experience by removing myself from the immediate and lived engagement in it (Husserl: xx). This temporal suspension

helps to put aside our beliefs and prejudices in order to address the objects of cognition disinterestedly. Husserl tells us that unless this is done, our natural standpoints cannot be transcended to the phenomenological standpoint. Although, many have argued that this method of suspending the natural standpoint be it permanently or temporarily is an utopian idea that can never be achieved.

4. Phenomenology clarifies the meanings of terms and basic concepts. Phenomenology aims at explaining and clarifying the meanings of all these concepts we come across in our everyday relationship with the world. In the words of Agbo, while Husserl sees philosophy as an “eidetic science”, Heidegger sees philosophy as the “universal phenomenological ontology.” (Agbo: 7)
5. Phenomenology articulates a radical theory of consciousness. Phenomenology is the “intentional operation of consciousness”. It is this consciousness that characterizes things in the world. This means that consciousness (the subject or *noesis*) has an object of thought (*noema*).

Phenomenology as a discipline is distinct from but related to other key disciplines in philosophy, such as Ontology, Epistemology, Logic, and Ethics. However, some topics discussed within the phenomenological tradition include the nature of internality, time-consciousness, perception, self-consciousness, consciousness of others and awareness of the body. Meanwhile, we must note that phenomenology is distinguished from phenomenalism, a view in epistemology which holds that all statements about physical objects are synonymous with statements about persons having certain sensations. Meanwhile our major focus and interest here is on phenomenalism and not on phenomenology.

PHENOMENALISM

Phenomenalism is an extreme or radical form of empiricism, a theory that limits knowledge to phenomena. To get a shaper definition of phenomenalism, Pelczar puts, that we can start by defining the “mental features of our world as those that are completely describable in phenomenal terms or a combination of phenomenal and topic-neutral terms.” (Pelczar: 2)

Phenomenal terms according to Pelczar are terms for phenomenal properties (of the sort we ascribe to conscious minds and experiences); topic-neutral terms include anything that is fair game for use both in a materialist analysis of the mental and in a phenomenalist (or idealist) analysis of the physical: logical and mathematical terms, terms for various relations of dependence (e.g. causal, counterfactual, and probabilistic), and terms for various modalities (powers, potentials, possibilities, etc.). (Pelczar: Ibid)

The above definition of phenomenalism by Pelczar has conjunction of three claims. First, consciousness antireductionism that is, experience is irreducible. Second, the empirical supervenience, that is, the physical features of our world supervene on its mental features, in the sense that any possible world indistinguishable from ours in its mental features has all the physical features that our world has. And last, Mill’s thesis which is one of the things that distinguishes phenomenalism from traditional idealist theories, which locate potentials for experience in the computational architecture or causal powers of some further underlying feature of the world (such as Leibnizian monads, a Berkeleyan God, or Kantian noumena). Agbo collaborating Ezeani has it that “human knowledge is never of the real and/or hidden nature of things, that the only real things are phenomena or observable things”. In the words of Ozumba, this position holds that our perception does not really give us the objects per se but ideas or sense data, of the objects and this is only what we can know. The existence of the substantial element of a thing but it cannot be penetrated by or through sense experience. (Ozumba: 2001) According to Pelzar, analogously, phenomenologists see physical states as undetached parts of larger mental wholes. Phenomenologists don’t identify physical things with isolated potentials for experience: they are fully aware that a potential for dreaming of gold brick is insufficient for the existence of a gold brick. (Pelzar: 5)

THE ESSENTIAL TENETS OF PHENOMENALISM

These phenomenologists due to some difficulties faced by realist theories of perception proposed a completely different way of analyzing the relationship between independently existing physical objects and mind independent sense-data. The phenomenologist claims that;

“either the very notion of independent existence is nonsense-because human beings have no evidence for it-or what is meant by independent existence must be understood in such a way as not to go beyond the sort of perceptual evidence human beings do or could have for the existence of such things. In effect, phenomenologists challenged the cogency of the intuitive ideas that the ordinary person supposedly has about independent existence.”
(www.britannica.com)

It is important to note that all variants of phenomenalism are verificationist in strong sense. They strongly wish to maintain the claims about the purported external world must be verifiable. This commitment signifies that “no

such claim can assert the existences of, or otherwise make reference to, anything that is beyond the realm of possible perceptual experience.” However, phenomenologists have tried so much to analyze what it means to say for example in wholly perceptual terms that a “tomato exists”. The phenomenologists argue that any such analysis must start by deciding what sort of an object a tomato is. According to them;

“A tomato is first of all something that has certain size, weight, colour, and shape. If one were to abstract the set of all such properties from the object, however, nothing would be left over—there would be no presumed Lockean “substratum” that supports those properties and that itself is unperceived. Thus, there is no evidence in favour of such an unperceivable feature, and no reference to it is needed in explaining what a tomato or any other so-called physical object is.” (www.britannica.com)

In the view of the phenomenologist, to talk about any existent object is thus to talk about a collection of observable characteristics localized in a particular portion of space-time. In other words, to say that a tomato exists is to describe either a collection of properties that an observer is quite perceiving or a collection that such an observer would perceive under certain specified conditions. Also to say that “a tomato exists in the next room is to say that if one went into that room, one would see a familiar reddish shape, one would obtain a certain taste if one bit into it, and one would feel something soft and smooth if one touched it.” Thus, to talk about the tomato’s existing unobserved in the next room doesn’t connote that it is unobserved. In the view of the phenomenologist, everything that exists is observable or perceivable in principle.

Again, in the phenomenologist notion, perceptual error is explained in terms of coherence and predictability. In other words to affirm that someone is perceiving a tomato connotes that “some one’s present set of perceptual experiences and unspecified set of future experiences will cohere in certain ways.” In all, this theory is basically generalized to involve what others would touch, hear, see and as well feel, so that what the realists call “public will also be defined in terms of the coherence of perceptions.”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHENOMENALISM

As a doctrine in philosophy, phenomenism grows out of the skeptical arguments against the representative theory of perception. The representative theory holds that material objects cannot be perceived (unobserved and unintelligible). The phenomenologist finds this submission as “counter-intuitive” maintains that there are “sense-data, and that any adequate philosophical theory of perception must make essential reference to them.” Phenomenism is an extreme form of empiricism. Its roots as an ontological view of the nature of existence can be traced to George Berkeley and his subjective idealism which was elaborated further by David Hume. Although, J.S. Mill had a theory of perception which is popularly known as classical phenomenism which states that physical things are ‘permanent possibilities of sensation’ (Mill: 187). His view differs from George Berkeley’s idealism in its notion of how objects continue to exist even when we don’t perceive them and how they achieve their order. Thus, elaborating his thesis “Esse est aut percipi aut percipere” or “To be is to be perceived or to perceive”, Berkeley states;

When I deny sensible things an existence out of the mind, I do not mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now it is plain they have an existence exterior to my mind, since I find them by experience to be independent of it. There is therefore some other mind wherein they exist, during the intervals between the time of my perceiving them. And because all human minds are intermittently diverted from things, there is an omnipresent eternal Mind, which knows and comprehends all things, and exhibits them to our view in such a manner and according to such rules as he himself has ordained, and are by us termed the Law of Nature (Stumpf: 265).

Berkeley was of the view that existence was anchored to experience, that objects exist only as perception and not as matter separate from perception. He gave an example that if he or someone saw a book that existed; if no one saw the book, then, it could only continue to exist if it was in the mind of God who made us to experience physical objects. Whereas J.S. Mill claims that permanent possibilities of experience were sufficient for an object’s existence. He calls the experiential possibilities that form the basis of his metaphysics ‘permanent possibilities of sensation’, ‘certified possibilities of sensation’, and ‘guaranteed possibilities of sensation’. As an epistemological theory about the possibility of knowledge of objects in the external world, phenomenism is also found in the transcendental aesthetics of Immanuel Kant. Kant distinguished between phenomenal reality, or the world as we experienced it, and the noumena reality, which is purely intelligible. According to Kant, when we perceived a thing, we inevitably perceive it through the lenses of our a priori categories of thought. But what is a thing-in-itself? In answering this Kant says;

All objects we know are sensed objects. Still, we know that the existence of our world of experience is not produced by the mind. The mind, rather, imposes its ideas upon the manifold of experience, which is derived from the world of things-in-themselves. This means that there is a reality external to us that exists independently of us but that we can know only as it appears to us and is organized by us (Stumpf: 291)

Kant insists that knowledge is limited to phenomena, but do not excludes the existence of things that were not knowable by experience (noumena), for him, the noumena is unknowable. This is quite different from Berkeley's view. In the words of Berkeley, "objects do not cease to exist when they are no longer perceived or observed by some merely human subject or mind." In the late nineteenth century, another extreme form of phenomenalism was formulated by Ernst Mach and later developed by Bertrand Russell, A.J. Ayer, and the Logical positivists. According to Mach, sensory phenomena are "pure data whose existence is to be considered anterior to any arbitrary distinction between mental and physical categories of phenomena". So it was Mach that separates phenomena from bundle theories of object. According to bundle theory, "objects are made up of sets, or bundles, of ideas or perceptions".

Logical positivism was another movement that grew in Vienna under the leadership of Moritz Schlick who influenced many philosophers in the English-speaking world from the 1930s through the 1950s. These positivists' position was to formulate the doctrine of phenomenalism in linguistic terms, in order to define references to entities as physical objects in the external world out of existence. In other words "sentences that contained terms like "table" were to be translated into sentences that referred exclusively to either actual or possible sensory experiences". This version of phenomenalism was refuted by Roderick Chisholm in 1948. He developed his argument showing that the statement "There is a doorknob..." does not entail the counterfactual statement. If it were to do so, then it must do so without regard to the truth or falsity of any other statement.

PHENOMENALISM AS DISTINCT FROM BUNDLE THEORY OF PERCEPTION

Phenomenalism is always confused with the bundle theory of perception and vice-versa. This theory was originated in the 18th century by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. It holds that an object consists of its properties and nothing more. It claims that thinking of a guava for example also compels one to think of its colour, its shape, its cell, its taste and also the fact that guava is a kind of fruit. The theory asserts that the guava is no more than the collection of its properties. When all these features this object (guava) has are no longer perceived by any one, then it does not exist any longer. Whereas, phenomenalism is the view which holds that objects are logical constructions out of perceptual properties. In this view for instance, to say that there is a chair in the other room when there is no one perceiving the chair in that room, is to say that if there were someone in that room, then the person would perceive the chair. It is therefore not the actual perception that counts but rather the conditional possibility of perceiving.

IDEALISM AND PHENOMENALISM

Phenomenalism is an extreme form of idealism. These theories, idealism and phenomenalism are views which hold that ordinary objects are really constructs out of actual or possible mental states, basically perceptual experiences. One of the motivations of holding this view is to solve the skeptical problem of the external world. Idealism theorists hold that the world and reality exist as consciousness and spirits within human minds. In this theory, it is obvious that laws and abstractions are important in reality than in human sensory objects. Importantly the view also maintains that anything that exists is known by its dimensions, which are the basic constructs of mental ability as human ideas. On the other hand, phenomenalism holds the view that physical or material objects exist as "perceptual, sensory stimuli, or a perceptual phenomenon located within the limits of time and space." (www.studyorgi.com) Phenomenalism debunks the notion that physical or material objects are justified to be considered to exist in themselves. Phenomenalism gears towards debunking the claim of the existence of physical objects and replaces it with an "idea of bundles of sense-data as to how things exist. This makes phenomenalism to be considered as a radical empiricist theory rooted within ontological ideologies. Phenomenalism accepts the claim by idealism that human knowledge comes through their senses but however tends to deviate or shift from the idea of knowledge as "object by itself" to a new standard that emphasizes the human experience of knowledge. Basically, phenomenalism is centered on the idea of the truth rather than an account of human perception.

VARIANTS OF PHENOMENALISM

There are two variants of phenomenalism, and they are factual and linguistic phenomenalism. To introduce these variants, it is very important to point out one central problem that faces any attempt to reduce material objects to sensa, namely, "the fragmentariness of perception". According to Encyclopedia.com;

Any material object is believed to exist for long periods when it is not observed-for example, the furniture in an empty room, the beam in the roof, and so on- and some objects, such as rocks in Antarctica or under the ocean, may never have been observed. Yet when they are not observed, material objects cause no sense, have no sense belonging to them or constituting them. Hence, if material objects are reduced to actual sense and consist only of them, they must cease to exist when unobserved, and those never observed must never have existed. Worse still, the material objects in a room must apparently come into and go out of existence as one looks at or away from them. (www.encllopedia.com)

However, the above expression seems such an intolerable paradox that Berkeley, though tempted to aver that material objects are collections of ideas, he equally introduced God as their continuing cause.

Factual Phenomenalism

This view is an attempt to fill the gap between actual sense with possible ones by defining material objects as groups of actual and possible sense. J.S. Mill originates this view, According to him, “matter consists of groups of permanent possibilities of sensation.” But unfortunately, Factual phenomenalism leaves what possible sense could be, adding further implausibility that the gap-filling entities are purely possibilities and not even actualities. Meanwhile, if this is taken strictly, it therefore connotes that nothing actually fills the gaps. According to Encyclopedia.com, “to say that something, for instance , an accident, is possible means that it is not actual, though it might be claimed that a possible x is an actual y; for instance, the possible winner of a race is an actual horse, in which case once again matter will consist largely of unknown and unobservable entities. However, fascinating as this view may sound, it is open to many objections.

Linguistic Phenomenalism

Basically, the main objective of linguistic phenomenalism was actually to give a fully equivalent translation of a material-object statement into sets of sensum statements. Phenomenalism was updated in the first half of the twentieth century by A.J. Ayer. His book on *Language, Truth and Logic* published in 1936 contains a classical statement of the phenomenalist standpoint. The thesis of this view is that material objects are logical constructions out of sense-data. The view holds that when we are talk about physical objects that we are basically talking about sense-data. However, to talk about material things and talk about sense-data are said to be like two different languages, and statements of the former languages are supposed to be translatable into, or in some other way reducible to statements of the latter, sense-datum language, without loss of meaning. It therefore means that “everything we can say in the physical-object language, it is claimed, we can say in sense-datum language”. Ayer insists that linguistic phenomenalism is not like Mill’s notion that is, a thesis about the relationship between two classes of objects namely material objects and sense-data. He also insists that linguistic phenomenalism is not the view that material things are nothing but collections of actual and possible sense-data. According to Ayer, “a material thing is not supposed to consist of sense-data, as a patchwork quilt consists of different coloured pieces of silk”.

THEMES IN PHENOMENALISM

Perception

Perception involves understanding those aspects of observations of the “world of things and people that depend on the nature of the observer”. This understanding is basically so important to the physicians, psychologists and also the philosopher whose major concern is on question of how one can be assured about the truth of our ideas. Encyclopedia.com has it that;

Research in perception requires the most sophisticated controls of the motivational, judgmental, and learning processes, i.e., the use of the techniques of experimental psychology. More important, the touchstone of perceptual research is perceptual experience: the fact that the prism bends light energy of different wave lengths by different amounts is; the fact that white-appearing light thus spreads out into the myriad colours of the spectrum is a matter of perception. (www.encyclopedia.com)

Meanwhile, there are other types of perceptions such as; structuralism, colour sensation and visual perception, perception of shape, Perception of people and social events and Perception of distance.

Sensa

In philosophy, a distinction is normally drawn between two types of objects of awareness in perception. The first are, physical objects (such as books, stones, tables and sands) and living organisms (like birds, animals, plants, and human beings in so far as they are observable or perceivable). A common name for all these is material objects.

The second are the data of immediate awareness, which we shall refer to as “sensa” that is sensum in singular, examples are colour patches or shapes, sounds, smells etc. Importantly, this distinction is usually fourfold namely; status, extent, directness and certainty.

-Status; material objects are external, located in physical space and also public (perceivable by different people simultaneously), while sense are private, usually held to have no external physical existence.

-Extent; here material objects may at one time correspond to several sense and normally persist throughout the occurrence of many sense.

-Directness; here the perception of material objects is indirect, that is, it has to do with “inference from or interpretation of sense that are given directly to consciousness”.

-Certainty; here one is always certainly aware of sense but not necessarily so of material objects.

Importantly, there is no generally acceptable word for ‘sense’; sensations and sense data are commonest but further indicates a subdivision. Sensation is the customarily used by scientists or psychologists and carries with it the suggestion that “sense are immediate mental effects of brain activity resulting from the excitation of a sense organ by external stimuli”. Sensation and sense impression can be used interchangeably for the whole experience of awareness of sound, colour or for any sensum (such as a sound or a colour patch) distinguished within it.

The term sense datum is the plural of sense data which originates with G.E. Moore but was introduced in print 1992 by Bertrand Russell. Importantly, sense data are not meant to carry any implications of causal theory, and awareness of them known as sensing. We should note that the term sense datum is used for the “sensum only, not for the whole”. The development of the sense- datum theory gave rise to controversy between those who regarded sense data as “objects distinguishable from the act of awareness of them (act/ object and analysis) and those who denied this and claimed that sensing is really of sense contents”.

FORMS OF SENSE

John Locke’s Ideas of sense: Locke assumes that knowledge could be explained by discovering the raw materials out of which it was made. Locke spoke this way: “let us then suppose the mind to be , as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas:- how comes it to be furnished?... whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To I answer, in one word, from experience.” (Stumpf: 254) According to Locke experience gives us two sources of ideas namely sensation and reflection. Thus;

From the senses we receive into our minds several distinct perceptions and thereby become conversant about objects external to us. This is how we come to have the ideas of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, sweet, and all the other sensible qualities.(Stumpf: Ibid)

Locke says that sensation is the “great source of most of the ideas we have.” (Stumpf: Ibid) An idea for him is anything that is “immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding.”It can be the very specific and concrete qualities found in sensation, such as colour, tastes, and sounds. (Lawhead: 280)

George Berkeley’s Ideas or sensible qualities: Berkeley’s notion of “ideas” is similar with that of Locke. Thus, ideas are images or sensory data that are directly present to the mind either in vivid sense experience or in the less vivid presentations of either memory or imagination.(Lawhead: 297) Berkeley claims that all our knowledge relies upon actual vision and other sensory experiences. He argues that space and magnitude can never be sensed; but we can have visions and or perceptions of things when seen from different perspectives. All that we can see says Berkeley is “the qualities of an object that our faculty of vision is capable of sensing.” We do not see the closeness of an object; we only have a different vision of it when we move toward or away from it. (Stumpf: 262)

David Hume’s Impressions: In Hume’s theory of knowledge, impressions and ideas make up the total content of the mind. Hume states that the original stuff of thought is “an impression”, whereas an idea is a copy of an impression. He maintains that what differentiates an impression from an idea is only the degree of their vividness. Thus;

The original perception is an impression, as when we hear, see, feel, love, hate, desire, or will. These impressions are “lively” and clear when we have them, and those ideas are less-lively versions of the original impressions. To feel pain is an impression, whereas the memory of this sensation is an idea. In every particular, impressions and their corresponding ideas are alike, differing only in their degree of vivacity. (Stumpf: 269)

Hume besides distinguishing between impressions and ideas further argues that there can never be ideas without impressions, stating that an idea is simply a copy of an impression. In other words, for every idea there must be “a prior impression.”

NOTABLE PROPONENTS OF PHENOMENALISM THEORY

The two proponents of phenomenalism were Johannes Nicolaus Tetens and John Foster.

Johannes Nikolaus Tetens and His Theory of Objectivity

Johannes Tetens was a German philosopher, a scientist and also a statistician. The theory of objectivity according to Tetens holds that all knowledge, even the most abstract, originate from sensitive representations. These representations constitute the material from which the understanding shapes our ideas and thoughts. Thus,

All representations have their object and can themselves be objects of other representations in turn. Appearances are the only objects that can be given to us immediately, and in them which is immediately related to the object is called intuition. However, these appearances are not things in themselves, but themselves only representations, which in turn have their object, which therefore cannot be further intuited by us... (Creek: xviii)

The expression above was the question that Tetens poses after he abandons the traditional notion of objectivity. Tetens hoped to reform and restore metaphysics in a new form in order to meet the criticisms based on the skeptical and psychological orientations of the English and French schools in Germany. On the other hand Tetens defended phenomenalism against “the adherents of the schools of common sense and of popular philosophy.” Tetens gave three fundamental activities of representation namely: perception, reflection and fiction, stating that the three activities of representation together with the forms bring about the concept of an object. He further proposes a rule for deciding if something exists subjectively or objectively.

John Foster and His Phenomenalistic Idealism

John Foster in his book entitled *A World for us: The case of Phenomenalistic Idealism* presents a form of idealism much akin to Berkeley’s idealism which is known as phenomenalistic idealism. Phenomenalistic idealism is a philosophical position which holds that, “as individual minds, we have direct access only to sense and ideas.” Hence all that can be said to exist are minds, they sense they perceived and the ideas they formulate. Foster in his argument says that perception involves a core phenomenological component in which the space and objects of manifest image are presented to us external and possessed of intrinsic qualitative features. Foster argues that any analysis of the physical world physical world must allow for these presentational facts that is, “the physical world is essentially spatial and contains extended, movable material objects, possessed of intrinsic qualitative properties (as does space itself) if space fails to meet minimal conditions imposed by perceptual experience then the physical world is at best a kind of illusion.” (Foster: 89) His analysis of perception reveals that the scientific knowledge we have gained through perception of the physical world under cuts the pretension that perception does in fact yield any information about the intrinsic qualitative features of the manifest image. Thus, the qualitative features turn out to be, in some sense, properties of experiences rather than of physical objects. Foster argues further that empirical investigation has not and cannot discover genuine intrinsic features of the physical world, stressing that it must rather rest content with complex rational, structural, dispositional or topic neutral features, which all received only the response of consciousness to the presence of the mysterious backdrop which usurps to manifest image. Importantly, we must note that foster’s argument has some similarities with arguments by Russell and Eddington which can be traced back to Leibniz.

DIFFICULTIES IN PHENOMENALISM THEORY

There are so many difficulties in phenomenalism. We shall now consider some of these difficulties.

Lack of Equivalence

Basically, the main objective of linguistic phenomenalism was actually to give a full translation of a material object statement into sets of sensum statements, meaning that it meant no more than is meant by a series of such statements. This seems impossible for many reasons. First, “there is a different sensum for every different look, sound, feel, or other appearance of a material object” according to the basic supposition of sense-datum theory that is shared by phenomenalism. Equivalence also has been rejected /denied on the ground of difference in form. The main material-object statement is a ‘categorical statement’ stating clearly that something exists. But the translation is a series of ‘hypothetical statements’ which describe experiences, that is, their basic function seems to ‘avoid asserting’ actual existence or conveying a different thing but rather requesting or suggesting. For example; “if you touch that, you will get burned” or “if you go to the next classroom, you will see a book on the table. By implication an actual existence is denied. The assertion of actual existence is replaced in the translation by assertions about what might have happened but did not. Another problem with the claim of equivalence is the inability to have full mutual entailment of original and translation. The material-object statement can be true and the sensory ones false. For instance, there might be a cup on the table, and yet you might not get sense of it. Anything can happen; you might be careless or the light might fail, the book might be covered by something and so on.

Impurity of Analysis

Another difficulty that phenomenalism is faced with is that it is 'impossible to specify more than a few senses without recourse to material-object language'. For instance; "in considering a book, the formula "sense of a rectangular, red, solid-seeming shape on a flat brown expanse would not differentiate the book from, say, a chocolate box, the temptation is to say a red, rectangular, booklike senseum." Many phenomenologists fall to this problem and put the blame on "poverty of language" designed for speaking about material objects. Protasis of the hypothetical is another type of impurity in phenomenalism. Here, reference is normally made to observers, for instance, "if you go to the next room, you will get sense xyz". However, "such a hypothetical statement is not a pure senseum statement. A. J. Ayer suggests another good way out of this, instead of mentioning the observer and others; one can describe the available sense of the room. For example, "given sense ABC, then sense XYZ are obtainable, where ABC are interior-of-roomlike sense and XYZ are booklike sense."

Publicity and Persistence of Objects

Here, there is difficulty facing any attempt at a fully equivalent and pure translation, the aim of the phenomenologist may be modified by producing just few sentences of the translation and also using short cuts. But this is to abandon the major aim of phenomenalism. "Unless one produces a fully equivalent translation, one cannot be sure that there is not some characteristic of material objects that cannot be rendered in terms of sense". However, this objection is supported by taking a closer look at most features of the ordinary concept of a material object that seem resistant to phenomenologist analysis. The first objection raised is the publicity of material objects and their persistence. Sensea are private and transitory, then how can statements about them convey the meaning of statements about objects? In response to this question, a phenomenologist will reply that all they mean is that "an object is perceived by two people at the same time is that they simultaneously sense similar sense". This can be formulated as: "Observer A has sense XYZ at time t; observer B has sense X'Y'Z also at time t; and both sets of sense are located similarly with respect to other background sensea". Hume argues that it involves "constancy" while Ayer lays emphasis on the recurrence of reversible series of data, as when one you look round the room, then back again". But these answers seem inadequate because they make the analysis impure by reference to observers and also, the assertion of the publicity and persistence of material objects is meant to convey more than the assertion of sets of sense.

Causal Properties and Processes

According to encyclopedia.com, any material object is thought to possess and to exercise many causal properties (its various powers to affect other objects by heat, propulsion, impact, pressure, chemical or electrical properties), and the concept of such an object may be claimed to involve them. Thus,

"Not only are these causal properties regularly exercised when the objects are unobserved. For example, fire still boils the water when the cook is not looking, beam still support the floor and roof even when quite hidden etc. but the properties and processes involved in the causation of perception- the events in the eyes and nerves of percipients are also rarely if ever observed, and then only by scientists with special equipment."(www.encyclopedia.com)

Someone may experience the effects of unobserved causal properties; hence, "actual sense may be causally dependent on what are only possible ones of which is absurd". Another example is; the "observed movement of the hands of a clock caused by unseen works inside it is not a case of actual sense due to possible ones. What one should rather say is that sense of hands moving is sensed, and if one were to get sense of the back of a clock with the cover removed, one would get sense of cog wheels and shafts moving".

OTHER CRITICISMS OF PHENOMENALISM THEORY

Other criticism leveled against phenomenalism theory first comes from Roderick Chisholm. In 1948, Chisholm criticized the logical positivist version of phenomenalism. Another objection was formulated by Roderick Firth in 1950, stemming from perceptual relativity. According to his objection, "white wallpaper looks white under white light and red under red light, etc. any possible course of experience resulting from a possible course of action will apparently underdetermine our surroundings: it would determine, for example, that there is either white wallpaper under red light or red wallpaper under white light, and so on."(Wikipedia.org) The truth maker theorists also criticized phenomenalism. This theory holds that "truth depends on reality that is; a truth bearer (a proposition) is true because of the existence of the truth bearer (a fact). The truth maker theorists accuse phenomenologists of going contrary against this principle and engaging in what they called "ontological cheating": of posting truths without accounting for the truthmakers of these truths.

Generally speaking, realists have criticized phenomenalism on the ground that it is "counterintuitive" to think of physical objects example; tomatoes as being sets of actual perceptual experiences. According to Realists, "one does not have such experiences, or under certain circumstances would have them, because there is an object out

there that exists independently and is their source.” The realists argue that “phenomenalism implies that if no perceivers existed, then the world would contain no objects, and that is surely inconsistent both with what ordinary persons believe and with the known scientific fact that all sorts of objects existed in the universe long before there were any perceivers. All these criticisms are directed at the phenomenalist account of physical objects. They are faced with the problem of how to account for or explain the existence of unobserved physical objects. Importantly, a solution to this problem comes from J.S. Mill. Mills argues that unobserved objects can be accounted for in terms of “counterfactual conditionals” mills claims that it is true that valuables locked in a safe remain in existence, despite being unobserved, because if someone were to look inside then this person would have a corresponding sensory impression. Although, this argument or rather solution does not in any way satisfy the truthmaker theorist “since it leaves open what the truth maker for this counterfactual conditional is”. Therefore, with this, phenomenalist theory seems to have many weaknesses that make it less effective in accounting or explaining the external world.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the central thesis of phenomenism is that there is no difference between the world and our experience of it. Phenomenalists agree that the objects that constitute the world are objects of perception, and these objects can exist only within our experience. For them, all we can know are ideas or sense data; consequently, they reject metaphysics and even the idea of God, which Berkeley attempted to retain. Phenomenalism maintains that when people talk about things like stones, rocks, and other physical objects they are basically referring to their perceptions of those things.

Fascinating as this theory may sound, it has been widely criticized because of its reliance on human perception as the basis for explaining knowledge of the external world. The central problem faced by this theory is its inability to account for or explain the existence of unobserved physical objects. For example, the claim that there is no truth apart from human experience has been strongly challenged. Furthermore, the theory’s emphasis on sense-data has also been criticized as unrealistic. Mill attempted to defend phenomenism theory against this criticism by arguing that unperceived objects can be explained in terms of counterfactual conditions; however, his argument was not entirely satisfactory. This inability to explain how perception can provide us with knowledge or justified belief about an external world (that is, things existing outside ourselves) remains one of the central problems in the epistemology of perception.

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