

A STUDY IN PHENOMENALISM

By

JAMES LEIGH GILES

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Department of

Philosophy

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date

April 1983

ABSTRACT

The philosophical theory of perception called phenomenalism had its beginnings in the empirical philosophy of Locke and the subsequent criticism by Berkeley. Although Berkeley improves on Locke's account in many ways, it is not until Hume that the way is cleared for a purely empirical theory of perception. Hume, however, does not follow this through. Mill likewise encounters difficulties, though of a different sort than Hume's, in his attempt to deal with perception empirically.

With Price and Ayer we have the appearance of modern phenomenalism which, in the latter's case is finally presented as a thoroughgoing empiricism. Price, however, falls into confusion when he attempts to introduce certain physical concepts. Ayer too, in the end, rejects phenomenalism. However, his argument in this regard is fallacious.

The problem of translating physical object language into sense-data language relies mainly on an argument of Austin's which Coval and Todd demonstrate to be untenable. The problem of the given, as presented by Sellars, is likewise unacceptable as it is based on a misunderstanding of the analysis of perception and sense-data language. Williams' critique fares no better as it rests upon a misconception of the concept of ineffability. It is concluded that phenomenalism has withstood the force of these attacks and that various other problems which have a bearing on phenomenalism still need inquiry.

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I EARLY EMPIRICISM

For only after men had tried their hand for thousands of years at merely objective philosophizing did they discover that, among the many things that make the world so puzzling and precarious, the first and foremost is that, however immeasurable and massive it may be, its existence hangs nevertheless on a single thread; and this thread is the actual consciousness in which it exists.

SCHOPENHAUER

1. Introduction

This study is an exegesis and defense of the philosophical theory of perception known as phenomenism. Our starting point shall be an investigation of the arguments which gave rise to its development. For now, let it merely be said that phenomenism is a reductionistic form of radical empiricism which seeks to translate all statements about material objects into statements about both actual and possible sense-experience. A more definitive account of the phenomenist's programme will emerge as we proceed with an examination of its philosophical ancestry.

There are two significant names in the early history of phenomenism. One of them is John Locke whose empiricism allowed a new approach to the problem of perception, and the other is naturally George Berkeley, the first philosopher to propound the doctrine of what he calls 'immaterialism'.

And it is with Berkeley's immaterialism that a position resembling modern phenomenism is first presented. Although Locke is far from being a phenomenist and is in some ways a realist, his arguments for the foundational role of sense-experience seem to call his own realism into question and, in the end, point to a phenomenistic view of reality.

Another name which requires our notice is that of David Hume, who, of these three philosophers, was by far the most thoroughgoing empiricist. Yet there remains a deeply held scepticism in his approach to the problem of perception which, unfortunately, blinds him to the possibility of carrying his empiricism to fruition with a purely phenomenal account of the external world.

2. Locke's Theory of the Material World

In An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Locke claims that the immediate objects of perception are ideas. For Locke, ideas are 'whatever it is which can be employed about in thinking.'¹ Ideas are 'in' the mind and are therefore mind dependant. What this means is were there no minds there would likewise be no immediate objects of perception. A further characteristic of ideas is their being composed of sensible qualities which have as their cause either the operations of the mind, as when we are self-conscious, or material objects which exist in the external world.

Thus, says Locke, although material objects are causally responsible for our ideas of them, they are not themselves sensible qualities and are therefore beyond the bounds of sense.

With the distinction between ideas, or sensible qualities, and material objects established, Lock goes on to draw a further distinction between what he calls primary and secondary sensible qualities. Primary or original qualities are those such as size, shape, speed, solidity, and number while secondary or imputed qualities consist of colour, taste, smell, warmth, and so on. Both types of qualities are ideas and therefore immediate objects of percpetion. However, although primary qualities are ideas in the mind they are also resemblances of the actual properties of material objects. This is not true for secondary qualities which have no physical counterpart and exist only in the mind. In this case the realtionship of the quality to the object is not one of resemblance, but one of 'power'. That is, material objects have the 'power' to produce qualities such as colour or warmth in the mind of an observer even though the objects themselves do not have such qualities. From which it follows, says Locke, that secondary qualities depend on primary qualities, for 'what is sweet, blue, or warm in an idea, is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts, in the bodies themselves which we call so.'²

One of Locke's main reasons for making the distinction between the two types of qualities is found in what is known as the argument from variability.

This argument turns on the premise that secondary qualities have a greater variability than do primary qualities. That is, the colour, smell, taste, etc., of an object are quite often inconstant which does not seem to be true of its shape, size, solidity, etc. Locke believes that this apparent divergence in variability can best be accounted for by regulating the existence of secondary qualities to the mind and explaining their fluctuations by actions of primary qualities upon which they are causally dependent. 'For', states Locke,

'if we imagine warmth', as it is in our hands, to be nothing but a certain sort and degree of motion in the minute particles of our nerves or animal spirits, we may understand how it is possible that the same water may, at the same time, produce the sensations of heat in one hand and cold in the other; which yet figure never does, that never producing the idea of a square by one hand which has produced the idea of a globe by another.'³

Another notion of Locke's which is related to his qualities distinction is his concept of substance. For Locke, substance is that which 'supports' the qualities of an object, 'the cause of their union.' It is also asserted that there exists a substance which supports the operations of the mind, i.e. thinking, reasoning, fearing, and so on. In both cases substance functions as something which 'ties' together the various qualities of an individual; it is not itself a quality, it is 'always something besides the extension, figure, solidity, motion, thinking, or other observable ideas.'⁴ From here it follows that substance is beyond any possibility of observation for the immediate objects of perception are just sensible qualities, i.e. ideas.

And thus Locke's claim that 'it be certain we have no clear or distinct idea of that thing we suppose a support.'⁵

The argument given by Locke in support of his doctrine of substance is presented in the form of an appeal to reason. Thus, says Locke, 'not imagining how these simple ideas can subsist themselves, we accustom ourselves to suppose some substratum wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call substance.'⁶ Or stated in its stronger form; 'because we cannot conceive how they should subsist alone, not one in another, we suppose them existing in and supported by some common subject; which we denote by the name substance.'⁷

Locke's dualistic picture of the world can thus be summarized as follows. There exists both a corporeal substance and mental substance of which we know nothing save that they exist. The former is a substratum for the qualities comprising material objects, the latter for those comprising the mind. Both material objects and one's own mental operations cause ideas, i.e. sensible qualities, in the mind of the observer. While some of these ideas do in fact resemble qualities of material objects, others bear no such relation and exists only in the mind.

This Lockean view of nature met strong criticism with the appearance of Berkeley's The Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous.

Although Berkeley here gives several arguments against Locke's position, three stand out as decisive. In the first place, it is pointed out that the main premise in the argument from variability is false. That is, figure, size, and motion are no less variable than are colour, temperature, and smell. Thus, says Berkeley, even figure and extension appear different to the same observer at different stations or to different observers at the same station. And indeed, the further one is from moving object, the slower its motion appears to be. Likewise, concerning Locke's assertion that the figure which produces an ideas of a square in one hand will never produce the ideas of a globe in the other, we see that there is no reason why this is obviously true. For depending on my expectations or the condition of my hand, e.g. if it were partially numb, I may indeed experience as a globe in one hand what seems like a square in the other. But even if this was not true, at least it would be possible to take what seems a square in one hand for a rectangle in the other, and this is all Berkeley needs to make his point.

The second criticism that Berkeley raises against Locke is directed at his concept of corporeal substance. Here, it is argued that even though we are told that substance must somehow 'support' the qualities of an object, there is no sense of the word 'support' that is herein applicable. For whatever sense of 'support' we decide to use in describing substance it will always refer to some quality or other, and this is according to Locke, just what substance is necessarily lacking.

Thirdly, Berkeley asks how it is possible that we could ever know about the existence of substance. For if everything is known about substance it must either be through experience or reason. However, since we only experience ideas, and since there is no logical connection between them and substance, in neither case are we compelled to introduce the concept of substance.⁸

3. Berkeley's Immaterialism

It is with the denial of corporeal substance that Berkeley's own doctrine of immaterialism has its beginning. For Berkeley, the notion of material objects or 'unthinking substance' existing apart from being perceived 'seems perfectly unintelligible. Their esse is percipi, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the mind or thinking things which perceives them.'⁹ In this passage Berkeley is making two claims which are fundamental to his theory. First, he is stating that as far as material objects are concerned, esse is percipi, that is, their existence is their being perceived. So if the apple is not now being perceived by some mind or other, then, accordingly, it does not exist. The apple is therefore nothing more than a certain colour, bulk, taste, figure, etc., that have been observed to occur together. Berkeley feels such an analysis to be intuitive if we just reflect upon what is meant by the word 'exist' when applied to sensible things.

Second, he is not just claiming corporeal substance to be unknowable, but alleges further that the very concept seems 'perfectly unintelligible', or as he also says, is a 'manifest contradiction'. Berkeley's position here has its roots in his appraisal of Locke's arguments. Although Berkeley's agrees with Locke that the immediate objects of perception are ideas, he does not, as shown above, accept the distinction between primary and secondary qualities; rather he feels that the arguments which serve to place secondary qualities in the mind can only do likewise for primary qualities. In which case 'an idea can be like nothing but another idea.' And if qualities exist only in the mind, then, asks Berkeley, what are material objects' but the things we perceive by sense. And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and it is not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?¹⁰

In rejecting the existence of matter Berkeley is likewise rejecting the casual theory of perception, i.e. the doctrine that ideas have as their cause things existing in an external world. He further discounts the possibility that ideas can affect one another. For there is nothing in an ideas except what is immediately perceived and were there any power or activity in them it would be plainly evident, which it is not; ideas must consequently be passive. And, therefore, says Berkeley, the cause of ideas must be incorporeal active substance or mind. It is true however, that we must have no idea of any mind, our own included, yet, 'a little attention will make it plain to anyone, that to have an idea which shall be like that active principle of motion and change of ideas, is absolutely impossible'.¹¹

What Berkeley is saying here is that since an idea is passive, it cannot be of some things which is active, for in doing so it would no longer be an idea. 'Though', states Berkeley, 'it must be owned at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, in as much as we know or understand the meaning of these words.'¹²

From here Berkeley goes on to make a distinction between ideas of the imagination, which can be excited and extinguished at will and those ideas of sense, which, following the laws of nature, are 'more strong, lively, and distinct'. The former, it is said, are more properly called ideas while the latter are called 'real things'. The fact that there are constant and regular ideas of sense, however, in no way demonstrates the reality of an external world, but only that the author of such ideas is of a mind more powerful than ours. And this mind is, for Berkeley, the mind of God. Thus those objects of sense which exist apart from our own volition, which are taken for things of the material world, are nothing but ideas existing in the mind of God.

Although Berkeley's immaterialism avoids many of the difficulties inherent in Locke's system, it nonetheless has several problems which require examination.

First, it does not look as though Berkeley's claim 'that material objects are just collections of the ideas can stand up to analysis. For if material objects are mere collections of ideas, then ex-hypothesi they do not exist when not perceived.

But if this is true then Berkeley cannot explain why material objects are still there after a gap in perception has occurred during which they were not sensed. It is commonly thought that Berkeley deals with this difficulty by contending it is through God's perceptions that the ideas of sense persist when we are not experiencing them; a thesis which renders God on par with matter. However, nowhere does Berkeley say this. Rather, he uses God to explain why the ideas of sense are more vivid and less subject to our will than are those of the imagination.

A glimmer of the solution to this problem occurs during a few places in the Principles. For example, when claiming his table exists inasmuch as he sees and feels it, Berkeley goes on to say, 'and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I were in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.'¹³ Or again, in contesting the objection that because we do not experience it, the motion of the earth cannot be explained by his philosophy, Berkeley replies,

'for the question, whether the earth moves or no amounts in reality to no more than this, to wit, whether we have reason to conclude for what hath been observed by astronomers, that if we were placed in such and such circumstances, and such and or such a position and distance, both from the sun and earth, we should perceive the former to move along the choir of the planets, and appearing in all respects like one of them.'¹⁴

In constructing the question about the continuity or actions of unperceived objects in terms of counter-factual conditionals, Berkeley has—accidentally it seems—strayed into the realms of phenomenalism.

That this is not Berkeley's conscious intention is apparent from an exchange in the Dialogues where Hylas the materialist says to Philonous the immaterialist, 'I grant the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, but not in being actually perceived.' Perceivable just meaning 'if such and such were the case, it would be perceived.' Philonous, however, sees this as a doubtful attempt replying merely, 'And what is perceivable but an idea? And can an idea exist without being actually perceived?'¹⁵ And so Berkeley is still left with the problem of why our ideas of sense re-appear after an interval during which they were not perceived.

Further problems with Berkeley's theory become evident upon analysis of his arguments for the existence of mental substance. The first argument takes the following pattern:

- 1) Ideas have a cause;
- 2) Ideas cannot cause one another;

therefore

- 3) Ideas must be caused by a substance;
- 4) There is no such thing as corporeal substance;

therefore

5) Ideas are caused by an incorporeal active substance which is mind.
As can be seen this argument is fallacious. In the first place, premise 1) is not at all obvious. Why must ideas have a cause? Is it not possible they could just happen? The only support that Berkeley himself offers for this proposition is the fact that we perceive a 'continual succession of ideas', which does not prove anything about the causal origin of ideas.

Secondly, premise 2) also is questionable and indeed seems contrary to experience. Thus, considering the imagination, it often happens that when thinking of the past, for example, we become nostalgic. And if questioned as to the cause of our nostalgia we find it quite natural to say it was our thinking about the past. In such an instance it appears prima facie that one idea has caused another. Berkeley argues for premise 2) by asserting that were ideas causal agents we would consequently be aware of a power or activity in them—and we are not. Yet it is unclear what he could possibly mean by 'power or activity' if not the mere succession of ideas themselves; and of this we are amply aware. If, however, what Berkeley means is a 'power' which causally connects and occurs in addition to the succession of ideas, then it must be agreed that no such idea presents itself to our awareness. But again it is unclear why such a thing is necessary for the concept of causality. For, as shown above, we often speak of one idea causing another, and, as Berkeley says, never experience any 'power' therein.

However, even if premises 1) and 2) were correct it would not justify the move to sub-conclusion 3). For this conclusion is dependent on the tacit premise that, excluding other ideas, the only possible cause of ideas is substance. Unfortunately, Berkeley offers no support for this view and seems to accept it as self-evident. Yet, at the same time, it appears possible for there to exist a manifold of things not falling under the category of substance which could be the cause of ideas. Indeed, Berkeley himself states, 'Many things for ought I know, may exist where neither I nor any other man hath or can have any idea or notion whatsoever.'¹⁶

Berkeley has given no a priori reason why some of these things, whatever they are could not be the cause of ideas from what has been said it is evident that, even if we give Berkeley premise 4), which has been well argued for, the final conclusion 5) will still not follow.

Berkeley's second argument for mental substance is not quite as elaborate. Here it is stated that although we have no direct empirical evidence for the existence of the mind insofar as we have no idea of it, we do nonetheless have a 'notion' of the mind. This is held on the grounds that we know or understand the meanings of such words as spirit, soul, mind and so on. And having a notion of something Berkeley seems to equate with 'knowing it by reflection.' Thus, he says in the Dialogues, 'I have a notion of spirit, though I have not, strictly speaking, an idea of it. I do not perceive it as an idea or by means of an idea but I know it by reflection'.¹⁷ The problem with this, of course, is that we also understand the meanings of words like unicorn, dragon, and gremlin and so may be said to have a notion of them. And thence it may be concluded that we know dragons by reflection, and therefore that knowledge by reflection tells us nothing about existence.

A further difficulty with Berkeley's immaterialism is although he dispenses with matter, which is in principle out of the reaches of perception, he nevertheless employs the concept of mental substance which is itself open to the same criticisms. Berkeley anticipates this objection and deals with it by maintaining there is no parity between corporeal and mental substance.

He does not discard matter merely because he has no idea of it, but rather because first, it is an inconsistent concept, and second, it does not serve a purpose. Mind, on the other hand, is consistent as 'it is no repugancy to say, that a perceiving thing should be the subject of ideas, or an active thing the cause of them.'¹⁸ In addition, it explains both the origin of ideas and the actions of agents like ourselves.

Berkeley's reply here fails for several reasons. First, his argument which purports to demonstrate the inconsistency of the concept of matter is fallacious. Material objects, we are told, are the things perceived by sense, but the things perceived by sense must be ideas which themselves exist only when perceived. It is concluded, therefore, that the notion of material objects existing unperceived is self-contradictory. With this, Berkeley's error become apparent. The concept of matter as a mind independent substance becomes self-contradictory only if, at the same time, we try to define it in terms of ideas, that is, in terms of mind-dependency. The inconsistency, therefore, is not in the concept of matter; which is nothing more than the concept of a stuff which exists apart from our awareness, but rather in Berkeley's attempt to define such a concept in terms of our perception.

The second problem with Berkeley's reply to the above objection is it does not seem the postulation of mental substance is necessary to explain the cause of ideas. For, as mentioned above, it may happen that ideas cause one another or even that ideas have no cause at all. In any case Berkeley has not given us reason to dismiss such alternatives.

Likewise, if ideas can cause other ideas, then there is no reason why they cannot cause the actions of agents; for, on Berkeley's own account, what are actions but other ideas? Or, alternatively, it may be possible that the notion of cause does not apply to the actions of agents. In either instance the concept of mind is unnecessary to explain the actions of agents. The upshot of this discussion is that mental substance, like matter, serves no purpose. There remains therefore a parity between corporeal and mental substance. And if Berkeley is to dispose of the former on the grounds that it serves no purpose—which, if the above criticism are right, is the only argument left open to him—then he must similarly dispose of the latter.

The final aspect of Berkeley's theory to be herein examined is the role of God. According to Berkeley, God is the powerful mind, whose ideas being more steady, orderly, and coherent than ours are allowed to have 'more reality in them.' The objects of sense are therefore the ideas of God. But my perceptions of these ideas cannot involve me having ideas of God's ideas, for that would be one idea causing another; a possibility which Berkeley discounts. And yet, if I am to perceive something, I must have an idea of it; the idea must in some sense be mine. Therefore, when I perceive the 'more strong' objects of sense, it can only be that I am having one and the same idea as God's idea. And herein lies the problem. What can it mean to state that two minds have numerically the same idea. For this is just what the concept of an idea is meant to exclude. An idea is something which is by definition private and therefore accessible to only one mind.

To hold otherwise is merely to re-define the word 'idea.' It is true that some philosophers disagree with the notion of privacy, but their contention is not with the meaning of 'idea;' rather it is with the claim that such things in ideas do in fact exist. In any case, it does not seem that Berkeley himself wants to use 'idea' in other than its usual sense of a private object of awareness. Thus, the notion of 'God's ideas' is functioning as a manner quite different from the usual notion of ideas. And even though Berkeley is not holding God's ideas to have a continuous existence, inasmuch as they are publicly accessible, God's ideas are, for Berkeley, operating in logically the same format as the concept of matter.

4. Hume's Scepticism

The Berkeleian rejection of corporeal substance is for the most part followed through by Hume; or at least he saw no need to postulate matter. And indeed he carried Berkeley's reductionism one step farther by repudiating the notion mental substance also. Yet in ascertaining Hume's position with regard to perception we must observe a caveat; for Hume, unlike Locke and Berkeley, does not say much under this heading and what he does say is in some places at variance with what he says elsewhere. Further, Hume's concern is mainly epistemological rather than ontological.

So, whereas Berkeley essays to show us what the world is made of, Hume's interest is to discover what we can legitimately claim to know about the world and why we know it, if indeed we know anything at all.

Hume opens his discussion of perception in the Treatise of Human Nature by raising the question of what causes us to believe in the existence of body, i.e., material objects. The other question, as to whether or not there exists bodies, however, can only be asked in vain; for, claims Hume, that is something which we take for granted in all our reasonings. He then goes on to explore possible answers to the first question.

It is clear, says Hume, that neither the senses or reason can be responsible for a belief in external bodies, for the senses present us with only a series of different impressions and, without having to reason about it we easily come to accept such a belief. Therefore, the imagination must be the culprit. However, the imagination does not attribute a 'continued and distinct' existence to all our impressions, but only to those bearing the marks of constancy and coherence. The imagination works on these two perceptual qualities to set on foot our belief in an independently existing world. For, 'the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its objects fails it, and like a galley put in motion by oars, carries on its course without any new impulse'.¹⁹

Therefore, even though our perceptions are 'internal and perishing', the imagination draws us to conclude that they are external and continuous. But, says Hume, a little bit of reasoning about our perceptions quickly demonstrates this conclusion to be 'contrary to the plainest experience.'²⁰ Thus, when we press one eyeball with a finger there immediately appears a double image and, yet, we are not inclined to hold that both have an existence independent of our sense organs. But since both of these perceptions are qualitatively similar, we must conclude that all our perceptions are dependent on our sense organs.

But now there arises a problem. For on one hand, our imagination persuades us that impression continue in an object-like existence whether we are 'impressed' with them or not, while on the other hand, reflection tells us this cannot be so. And we cannot escape this paradox, as it seems we should, by dispensing with the unreasonable dictates of the imagination. This is just because 'that opinion has taken such deep root in the imagination, that't is impossible ever to eradicate it, nor will any strained metaphysical conviction of the dependence of our perceptions be sufficient for that purpose'.²¹ It is true that philosophers have occasionally sought their way out of this dilemma by arguing for a double existence of both external objects and impressions, but Hume feels that is merely the 'monstrous offspring' of two opposing principles. For only through the relation of cause and effect, itself being derived from experience, can we conclude the existence of one thing from another. But, as the only things we experience are perceptions, it is plain that while we can observe causal relations between our perceptions, we can never observe these relations between objects external and perceptions.

Hume can see no solution to this dispute between reason and the imagination. And, therefore, relinquishing the role of the philosopher for that of a therapist, he prescribes the remedy of carelessness and inattention.

From the foregoing it is apparent that although Hume starts out inquiring into the causes of our belief in the existence of material bodies, he ends up answering the censored question of whether or not there are material bodies. Thus although Hume assures us that we cannot bring ourselves to question the existence of material bodies, this is just what he himself proceeds to do. Hume's reasons for denying the possibility of our raising this question are therefore unclear. H.H. Price points out in Hume's Theory of the External World, that in addition to his official answer that bodies plainly do not exist. Hume also implicitly entertains the further position that such a question is meaningless. Thus Hume's remark that he intends to pursue the causes of our belief in bodies as 'These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject.'²² Price represents Hume's unofficial view as follows.

'The hypothesis of unsensed sensibilia, he would say, is unverifiable by definition, since to verify it one would have to sense them; and if a hypothesis is unverifiable, not merely de facto (owing to human incapacity) but by definition, then it is meaningless to ask whether it is true, and any argument which professes to establish its truth must be irrelevant.'²³

Price thinks this could explain Hume's statement that we cannot set ourselves to question the existence of objects—it would be meaningless to do so. This view, however, is not outrightly stated by Hume and, as Price himself says, is only hinted at in the earlier passages. It is therefore questionable that Hume held this 'unofficial' view.

A better explanation of what is going on here may be this. Hume feels that we are so deeply committed to the belief that there are material objects that we cannot bring ourselves to question it with the expectation of revising our belief should it turn out false. Therefore, says Hume, we would do better to devote our energies to discovering the causes of this obstinant belief. And yet, in the course of our inquiry it will become evident that there are no such things as material objects--whether or not we can psychologically accept it. That something like this is what Hume had in mind is supported by his claim at the end of his discussion to 'take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world.'²⁴ Therefore, Hume is not claiming that it is meaningless or even psychologically impossible to question the existence of the external world, but only that whatever the results of our questioning be, we will, as a matter of fact, end up accepting the belief in a continuous and distinct world beyond our perceptions.

Apart from these interpretive difficulties there are other problems to be found in Hume's account. To begin with, it is clear that the argument which Hume mobilizes to demonstrate the dependency of our perceptions on our sense organs begs the question. Before Hume can prove that such a dependency exists he must first prove the existence of his sense organs which, themselves being material objects, number among the things whose existence is in question. This is not to say that Hume's argument establishes nothing, but only that it does not prove what he thinks it does.

Indeed, when formulated correctly this argument--which has been called the argument from illusion--is essential in establishing the phenomenalist's position. We shall examine this argument in more detail in the next chapter.

A further problem with Hume's account lies in his sceptical approach to the theory of perception. For inasmuch as he construed belief in the external world as being delusion, he saw his duty as being one of accounting for the origin of this delusion. This led him away from the Berkeleyan enterprise of demonstrating how the physical world could be explained in terms of experience. Thus Hume saw in the marks of constancy and coherence those features of our perceptions which lead the over-enthusiastic imagination to postulate a distinct and continuous world of objects. What Hume's approach did not allow him to do was to entertain the possibility that rather than being the well-spring of delusion, constancy and coherence might just be those perceptual characteristics which serve to define our concept of the external world.

Finally, we must ask whether Hume's sceptical conclusion regarding the conflict between reason and the imagination is as much a quandry as he makes it out to be. For the problem is not that we can never know whether there are material bodies, indeed reason tells us there is not; rather, it is that in addition to this rational conclusion we find ourselves in the grips of an opposing imaginative belief. We therefore are in a conflict. However, it is not a conflict of the insoluble sort. In the present case, I know what the truth is, it's just that I am strongly inclined to believe otherwise.

This is a psychological problem, not a logical one. It is the same kind of thing that happens when I cannot bring myself to believe that my friend would commit a crime, but all the available evidence makes it clear to me, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she did. If there is any problem here; it is a problem which goes no further than my unwillingness to follow where the argument leads. For in both cases it is, contra Hume, carefullness and attention that solves the apparent difficulty, i.e. by carefully attending we come to see the irrationality of entertaining a belief which is contrary to what we already know.

II MODERN PHENOMENALISM

5. Introduction

In the last chapter we saw how the problem of perception was, for Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, construed as a question about whether such a thing as an external world does in fact exist. Modern phenomenism can be said to have begun when philosophers saw that the way to deal with the problem of perceiving the external world was not to deny its existence, or to affirm the being of some of its qualities while rejecting others, but rather to give an analysis of the concept in a manner that is consistent with experience.¹

The main difficulty which besets philosophers assaying such an analysis is to deal with the question of why physical objects continue to exist after intervals during which they were not perceived, that is, to fill the gaps in perception. The reason for this presenting a problem is just that gaps in perception are the absence of experience; and how does an empiricist maintain his title while philosophizing about the absence of experience?

6. Filling the Gap

An attempt in this direction is made by John Stuart Mill who proposes a solution to the problem of the apparent persistence of matter by defining physical objects in terms of permanent possibilities of sensation.

Thus, states Mill:

'I believe that Calcutta exists, though I do not perceive it, and that it would still exist if every percipient inhabitant were to suddenly leave the place, or be struck dead. But when I analyze the belief, all I find in it is, that were these events to take place, the Permanent Possibility of Sensation which I call Calcutta would still remain; that if I were suddenly transported to the banks of the Hoogly, I should still have the sensations which, if now present, would lead me to affirm that Calcutta exists here and now.'²

Therefore, unlike Berkeley or Hume, Mill does not deny the notion of unperceived material objects as self-contradictory, as a matter of fact, or even deride the question of their existence as meaningless, but rather, affirms his belief in such a thing and proceeds to give a definition of the concept which he sees as being consistent with both the ordinary notion of matter and an empiricist's epistemology. Thus his claim that the whole meaning attributed by the 'common world' to the idea of matter is easily contained in the notion of a permanent possibility of sensation. And with this Mill feels it is safe to infer that when we actually conceive of matter there is nothing more to our conception than just this. He is, however, aware that most philosophers and, if questioned, the world at large, believe there to be something more to matter than the mere permanent possibility of sensation. Therefore, like Hume before him, Mill feels himself obligated to explain the source of the belief in 'an existence transcending all possibilities of sensation.'

Mill starts by pointing out our capability of forming generalizations of observed laws of sensation. And upon discovering a relation which holds between a particular sensation and one which differs from it, we are easily led to generalize the same relation to maintain between the sum of our experiences and something from which it differs. The differences that we experience among our sensations provide the basis for the conception of something's being different from something else; a conception which we invariably apply to each of our sensations, i.e., that it is different from other sensations. As this notion is reinforced by experience, we feel compelled to employ it in every instance. And so we arrive at the idea of something which is different from all our experience. Of course, we will never have a picture of this 'something different' for qua something different it is beyond experience. Any such proposal must thus remain merely negative, but then, says Mill, the concept of something apart from our perceptions is merely negative.

Therefore, concludes Mill, we find it no endeavour to entertain the notion of a substantive reality transcending both actual and possible sensation, and, as we have no conception of it, nothing is more likely than this imaginary concept being confounded with the experientially grounded concept of the permanent possibility of sensation.

From the foregoing exposition it is evident that Mill's psychological explanation of the belief in an external world makes some significant improvements over Hume's.

For, rather than leaving us in the midst of an irreconcilable skirmish between reason and the imagination, Mill has simply given the psychological biography of our belief in matter and, in the same breath, demonstrated the way out of this misconception, namely, the theory of permanent possibilities of sensation.

There is however, a problem with Mill's account of matter which is exposed by the reference to a material object in what purports to be a purely phenomenal translation. Thus, in analyzing his belief in the existence of Calcutta, Mill speaks of the sensations he would expect to have were he to suddenly emerge on the banks of the Hoogly. But now we must ask what does he mean by 'the banks of the Hoogly?' For ex-hypothesi the now unperceived banks of the Hoogly are themselves nothing more than a permanent possibility of sensation. This is not, of course, itself a conceptual difficulty with Mill's reductionism. For indeed, if his analysis of his belief in the existence of Calcutta contained an analysis of his belief in the existence of the banks of the Hoogly, this little oversight would easily disappear. Where we would begin to suspect a conceptual impasse would be when, in analyzing the belief in the banks of the Hoogly, there likewise appears a reference to a material object; for then it would seem that a purely phenomenal translation of the belief in the existence of Calcutta was in principle impossible, i.e. that the language of permanent possibilities of sensation was somehow dependent on the language of physical objects. The plausibility of this often voiced protest to the phenomenalist's mission will be explored in Chapter III.

7. The Theory of Phenomenalism

Mill's programme of reducing the concept of a material object to a set of actual and possible sensations is pursued in great detail by H.H. Price in his book on Perception. The aim of this work is to investigate the experiences of sight and touch, which are the basis for our belief in a material world, and to examine the manner and extent to which they justify such a belief. Price points out that although it may be thought that science can provide us with the answers to these questions, this cannot be the case; for science itself is based upon perception, not the other way around. That is, it is only because of what goes on in perception, not the other way around. That is, it is only because of what goes on in perception that we have found a need for science at all. And thus, 'Science only professes to tell us what are the causes of seeing and touching. But we want to know what seeing and touching themselves are. This question lies outside the sphere of Science altogether.' And so, concludes Price, if our aim is to be fulfilled, 'We must simply examine seeing and touching for ourselves and do the best we can.'³

It is clear, therefore, that if a theory of perception is to avoid the criticisms that go with the scientific account of perception, it must ultimately start with what is given, in perception. The concept of the given which is central to Price's theory, is what he refers to by the word 'sense-data'—a term which was originally introduced by Bertrand Russell to refer to things that are immediately known in sensation. Price retains Russell's definition but expands upon it in some interesting ways. Thus, states Price,

'When I see a tomato there is much I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing there at all. Perhaps what I took for a tomato was really a reflection; perhaps I am even the victim of some hallucination. One thing however I cannot doubt; that there exists a red patch of a round somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness.'⁴

From here Price goes on to say:

'This peculiar and ultimate manner of being present to consciousness is called being given, and that which is thus present is called a datum. The corresponding mental attitude is called acquaintance, intuitive apprehension, or sometimes having. Data of this special sort are called sense-data.'⁵

In defining sense-data thusly, i.e. in terms of that which is given and cannot be doubted in experience, Price has left open the question of their ontological status. For the issue of whether a sense-datum is a substance, a state of a substance, is mental or physical is merely something else which may be doubted. However, Price does believe the argument from illusion is sufficient to refute the view that what is given in perception is a material objective. The argument from illusion starts off by pointing to the existence of delusive perceptions and, as constructed by Price, proceeds as follows: 'Here is a particular sense-datum s and here is a particular material thing M. According to Naive Realism s ought to be part of the surface of M. But it is obvious on inspection that s is not part of the surface of M because M is in another place or because it has another shape or size.'⁶ Or, to take a specific example, a straight stick when partially immersed in water will appear to be bent.

However, since the stick is straight and what I see is bent, and since a stick cannot be both straight and bent, what I see cannot be the stick. It is concluded that what is seen cannot be a material object. This argument, of course is the sophisticated version of that used by Hume to challenge the imaginative view that our perceptions are external and continuous.

The mental attitude that we have toward sense-data is deemed to be 'intuitive apprehension.' According to Price such an attitude, which he also calls sensing, is one of knowledge by acquaintance. In other words, to sense a sense-datum is to know it by acquaintance. And since our beliefs about the material world are dependent upon the sensing of the sense-data, sensing is plainly a necessary condition for such beliefs. However, states Price, it is not sufficient. For the sense-data belonging to any one material object must be collected in our minds both across time and space. Therefore both memory and recognition of similarity or spatial collocation will be important. And this is not all; that some further mental process will be required is evidenced by our propensity to believe in the existence of material objects even though we could not possibly sense all the sense-data which belongs to any particular object. Price elects to name this nonsensuous mode of consciousness 'perceptual consciousness.' Within the sphere of perceptual consciousness Price distinguishes between an elementary and more developed form which he terms 'perceptual acceptance' and 'perceptual assurance' respectively. What perceptual acceptance involves is not so much the belief that there exists a material object to which a particular sense-datum belongs, but rather the absence of disbelief or the taking for granted that this is so.

In the mode of consciousness, as it is an unreflective one, we fail to distinguish between a sense-datum and the material object to which it belongs. It is this process that is often referred to, says Price, by the phrase 'jumping to conclusions.' Perceptual assurance, on the other hand, is a settled conviction that the existence of a material object has been confirmed. The state of perceptual assurance is arrived at by passing through a series of perceptual acts, each of which confirms its predecessor. Thus, for Price, the process of confirmation consists in the making definite what was left indefinite in a previous perceptual act. As this is an ongoing process, Price sees our usual condition of perceptual consciousness as falling somewhere between acceptance and assurance; a condition he terms 'perceptual confidence'. However, one perceptual act confirms another only if the 'principle of confirmability' is true. This principle states that 'the existence of a particular visual or tactual sense-datum is prima facie evidence (1) for the existence of a material thing such as that this sense-datum belongs to it, (2) for the possession by this thing of a front surface of a certain general sort.' Clearly, this principle is a priori, for it is not the kind of thing that could be arrived at through empirical generalization. Rather, says Price, it is only because of such a principle that empirical observation is possible at all. Yet it is also clear that the principle is not self-evident; therefore the question arises, how we could know the principle of confirmability to be true? According to Price, the only route open to validating this principle is to consider instances of its application—'we must simply reflect on the perceptual consciousness which we actually possess.'⁷

Now when we proceed through a chain of successively confirming perceptual acts what becomes more and more definite (i.e., confirmed) is that a particular sense-datum bears its relation to a material object in a special way. That is, we discover that a sense-datum is related to a family of other sense-data by the way of family membership. Our assurance therefore of a material object's existence consists in the discovery of families of sense-data.

These families of sense-data are, of course, not all sensed simultaneously and therefore do not all exist at once. But now a problem arises: in what sense can a family of sense-data be said to exist if the majority, if not all, of its constituents are at any one time non-existent? Price, like Mill, deals with this problem by bringing in the notion of possible sense-data.

'Thus a family would primarily be an ordered system of possible sense-data, some of which would happen to be also actual; and the actualization of them, though of course essential to our knowledge of the family, would be inessential to the being and constitution of the family itself.'⁸

A possible, or as he says 'obtainable' sense-datum is 'one which would be actual if certain events occurred in the observer.' Of course, to avoid circularity, obtainable must itself be defined in terms of sense-data. It is proposed that we do so employing the data in which a change of point of view is defined. Thus, Price tells us, S is an obtainable sense-datum means 'if I change my point of view (or 'point of contact') in such and such a way, then a sense-datum of the S kind will exist and I shall sense it.'⁹

However, unlike Mill, Price does not consequently affirm that material objects are identical with families of sense-data. This is because he claims the former to possess the characteristics of physical occupancy or causal powers which the latter does not. Price's reason for asserting the existence of physical occupants is simply that the effects of a material object are often observed to occur in a region where the corresponding family of sense-data does not; so that 'the alleged subject of the characteristics is just not there to be the subject of them.'¹⁰ Physical occupants therefore function to explain the causality of such events. Yet, of anything besides their causal role can say nothing, 'For of the intrinsic qualities of physical occupants, apart from their relations to sense-data, we have no knowledge at all, and no prospect of getting any.'¹¹

Price's theory of perception makes some important contributions to Mill's theory, e.g. an exposition of the nature of the given, an analysis of perceptual consciousness, the relation of sense-data to matter, and so on. Nevertheless, Price does fall into difficulty; and, instructively, this happens precisely where he abandons his empiricism and thus his phenomenalism.

He tells us the principle of confirmability, which is not derivable by empirical generalization, is a necessary condition for any empirical observation. And so concludes that it must be an a priori principle. Yet, a brief inspection will demonstrate that the only way the principle of confirmability could be supported is through empirical generalization.

That is, the only way I know that the sensing of a particular sense-datum is prima facie evidence for the existence of material thing to which it belongs (i.e. clause (1) of the principle), is by having amassed a set of previous experiences in which other sense-data turned out to likewise be evidence for the material object to which they belonged. Clearly, it is not necessary that any of this previous experience involves the material thing in question; for under certain conditions a single sense-datum of an object I have never observed before will be sufficient for me to be assured of the object's existence. But even here there must be some previous experience of the sort that allows me to move from the existence of a sense-datum to the existence of a material thing. The same argument applies mutatis mutandis to the second clause of Price's principle.

Further, it is just because a state of affairs is conceivable where sense-data are not prima facie evidence for an object's existence (i.e. where a sense-datum does not bear the relation of family membership to a family of other sense-data) that, if the principle of confirmability holds true, it can only do so a posteriors. Also, there is nothing in such a world to prevent the practice of empirical observation. Of course, the occurrence of a sense-datum would no longer be evidence for a material object, but this is of no relevance as far as observation itself goes. Therefore, it is false that the principle of confirmability is a necessary condition of empirical observation.

Another non-empirical notion of Price's which needs comment is that of physical occupancy. Physical occupants are postulated to answer the question of how a material object can have an effect in a region where there is no corresponding family of sense-data? The problem however is that in divorcing physical occupants from any actual or possible sense-data Price has merely reintroduced the Lockean notion of corporeal substance. And consequently all of Berkeley's criticisms of that puzzling doctrine apply equally well to Price's physical occupants. Yet Price feels his concept is justified inasmuch as it is a concept whose postulation is necessary to explain causation.¹² But there is no obvious reason why the cause of an event should be in the vicinity of the event. Causality is an aspect of the empirical world—it is something we know about through observation. And if observation informs us that a cause need not be near its effect, there is no point to resist this and complicate the picture in such unhelpful ways as postulating substance, physical occupants, and what have you.

I am aware that there are philosophers who, in the tradition of Kant, believe propositions about causality to be synthetic a priori, or at least that it is in some sense 'necessary' that causality function in certain preordained ways, e.g. an event's cause be in the vicinity of the event. As this is not the place to embark on an analysis of the concept of causality I will reply merely that such causal arguments against a thoroughgoing phenomenalism have received extensive criticism by A.J. Ayer in Chapter Four of The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge and in 'Phenomenalism.'

In the Foundations Ayer also sees reason to challenge Price's exegesis of the argument from illusion. And it is this criticism which sets the stage for Ayer to introduce his own version of phenomenalism.

Ayer points out that the conclusion of the argument from illusion—that we never experience material things, only sense-data—can go through only if certain assumptions are made. Thus in considering the case of a coin which appears circular from one angle and elliptical from another, Ayer notes, 'there is no contradiction involved in my supposing that in each case I am seeing the coin as it really is. This supposition becomes self-contradictory only when it is combined with the assumption that the real shape of the coin has remained the same.'¹³ And this goes mutatis mutandis for other instances of the argument from illusion.

But, says Ayer, none of the requisite assumptions are logically necessary. And although these assumptions are made in an attempt to bestow a definite order to our experience, it is nonetheless possible to deny them. Thus one who did not accept these assumptions might say that the stick's returning to its original appearance of straightness upon being removed from the water does not demonstrate that the crooked stick of our earlier perception was not itself a material object. For it may well be the case that upon immersion the stick actually does change its shape. And it will be of no avail to object that although the stick may appear bent it will nevertheless feel straight; for it is perfectly consistent that both perceptions be veridical. The contradiction arises only when further assumptions are embraced about correlations between the visual and tactile sense domains.

How then, inquires Ayer, can someone setting forth this position be refuted? 'The answer is that so long as we persist in regarding the issue as one concerning a matter of fact it is impossible for us to refute him.'¹³ This is so because as far as the facts go, there is no disagreement between the two accounts. The disagreement, rather, is over how to describe the phenomena. 'Where we say that the real shape of the coin is unchanging, he prefers to say that its shape is really undergoing some cyclical process of change.'¹⁵ It is therefore concluded that sense-data theory is merely a different method of describing the same facts, that is, it is an alternate language. This is why asserts Ayer, it is incorrect to speak of theories of perception. A theory, in the normal sense of the word, is capable of verification or falsification. But how could sense-data theory ever be shown true or false? For as just demonstrated the realist's account of the facts concerning non-veridical perceptions is just as plausible as the sense-datatist's.

But this is not to say there are no criteria by which one perceptual language can be chosen over another. Indeed, one may be more cumbersome or contain more ambiguities than another. And this, says Ayer, is a reason for preferring sense-data language over the language of naive realism. In the latter language there are a variety of senses of the verb 'to perceive' which make it quite acceptable to say that one perceives something which does not exist. Thus, when observing a distant star which is itself many times larger than earth, I may correctly say that what I perceive is a shimmering spec which is no larger than a penny and not necessarily imply that there really exists something which is no larger than a penny.

Since the facts remain the same regardless of how they are described, the question of whether there really is such a spec will depend on the sense of perceive that is being used.

Sense-data language dispenses with such ambiguities by resolving to use perceptual verbs of both veridical and non-veridical experiences in such a way that whatever is experienced must exist and must have the properties that it appears to. And it is this usage which leads philosophers to the introduction of sense-data. 'For, having adopted it, they find they cannot say, in the case of a delusive perception, that what is experienced is a material thing; for either the requisite material thing does not exist, or else it has not got the requisite property. And so they say that it is a sense-datum.'¹⁶

One question which now presents itself is, if sense-data theory is merely an alternate language, what do phenomenologists mean when they say that the physical world is constructed out of sense-data? Ayer answers that this means simply that propositions which contain references to material objects can also be expressed by propositions whose terms refer exclusively to sense-data. Of course, many propositions will involve references to possible sense-data; but this means only that these propositions will be hypothetical in form.

It must not be inferred from this, however, that a translation from material object language to sense-data language can be carried through without an alteration of meaning.

Because material object language is necessarily vague in its application to our perceptions, no proposition about a material thing will ever be equivalent to a finite set of statements about sense-data. Another way of putting this is that for any particular set of sense-data which verify a proposition about a material object, there will always be some other set which would have done just as well. And not only will no finite set of sense-data be necessary for the truth of a particular material object statement, but further, no such occurrence will even be sufficient; for no matter how many sense-data occur which act to verify a material object statement, it will always be possible that recalcitrant sense-experience could ensue which would effectively falsify the earlier judgement.

However, these considerations, warns Ayer, should not lead us to the view that propositions about material things are about something altogether different than are those which make reference to sense-data. To suppose thusly would be analogous to believing that 'because sentences referring to "someone" cannot be translated into a finite disjunction of sentences referring to particular persons, therefore "someone" is the name of a peculiar being, a "subsistent entity" perhaps, who is distinct from any person that one can actually meet.'¹⁷

And yet, it is because of such logical differences between the two languages that one is inclined to be wary of Ayer's pronouncement that sense-data theory and naive realism are merely two different ways of speaking. Indeed, in 'The terminology of Sense-Data', a paper which appeared after the Foundations, Ayer himself acknowledges a critical dissimilitude which renders the alternate language thesis untenable.

He remarks here that since it is a contingent fact that sense-data order themselves in such a manner that makes it possible to construct material objects out of them, it is apparent that the sense-data language is more comprehensive than the language of naive realism; for it could be the case that sense-data did not occur in a way that would allow us to describe them using material object language. However, even under these circumstances sense-data language would still be applicable. Thus, there is an asymmetry between the two languages inasmuch as sense-data language is logically prior to material object language. And this priority is evinced by the fact that although referring to a material object is necessarily a way of referring to sense-data, the converse does not hold.

But now a dilemma appears which, as construed by Ayer in his '**Phenomenalism**', can be put as follows:

'Now the sensory language to which the phenomenalist seeks to reduce the other must also have its logic, and this logic must either be the same as that of the physical language or different. If it is made the same—if, for example, the phenomenalist allows himself to speak of 'sensibilia' having a continued and distinct existence in space and time—then we are inclined to say that he has not carried out his programme, because these sensibilia are only physical objects, or attenuated physical objects, in disguise.

But if the logic of the sensory language is different, then we are inclined to say that the statements which are expressed in it are not perfect translations of the statements at the physical level, just because their logic is different.'¹⁸

Ayer's suggested solution to this problem is to treat propositions about physical objects as constituting a theory which works to explain the behaviour of sense-data.

And even though the theoretical physical language will not be exactly translatable in terms of statements about sense-data, the concept of a physical object will function as a procedure for grouping sense-data. The validity of this theory will be contingent on the way that sense-data do in fact conduct themselves.

In his further work on The Problem of Knowledge Ayer is not so optimistic about the phenomenalist's programme. He argues here that not only is a finite set of sense-data never sufficient condition for the existence of a physical object, but further, and more importantly, the existence of a physical object is never sufficient for the appearance of sense-data. To hold otherwise one would have to believe a set of definite conditions are specifiable such that any observer placed within them must perceive the physical object in question. But this is not true, replies Ayer, for in these circumstances it may still be the case that the observer has perceptual aberrations. And this objection cannot be parried by adding the requirement that the observer be free from defects for that would involve building in the further requirement that if he were to be tested, he would be found perceptually unimpaired. And this, of course, gives birth to a regress; for now further conditions must be specified to ensure the examiner is functioning up to par, and so on ad infinitum.

At this point, someone might be tempted to interject that the route out of this problem lies in stipulating that the test for a physical object's existence comprises what a normal observer would perceive in normal conditions.

But, again, this will do no good, as how does one determine what constitutes a normal observer or normal conditions except by saying that in these circumstances such an observer will perceive what is really there? That is, since there is no independent means of defining the requirements for normal observation, it will only be logically true that a normal observer in normal conditions will perceive what is really there. And so, concludes Ayer, the phenomenalist's programme must fail.

It is indeed peculiar that Ayer should desert phenomenalism on these grounds. Why should there be a problem with the logical truth of the proposition that a normal observer in normal conditions will perceive what is really the case? for a phenomenalist, the question of material object's existence reduces to the question of whether so and so sense-datum is veridical or delusive. And, so phenomenalism makes no ontological distinctions among sense-data, the question of which sense-data are veridical and which are not will depend entirely on pragmatic considerations. Thus, because we have such goals as discriminability, and communicability, the characteristics of our sensory experience which aid in the achievement of these goals (e.g., Hume's constancy and coherence) will play in our decision about which of our sense-data are to embody the veridical or standard case.

It should therefore be clear that all that can be meant by a normal observer in normal conditions is just this: that kind of observer and conditions which are conducive to the production of sense-data which are themselves pragmatically superior inasmuch as they serve the goals of discriminability, communicability, and so on. To demand an independent means of 'getting at' what is real is to misunderstand the function such a word must play.

III OBSTACLES TO THE REDUCTION

8. Introduction

From its early beginnings phenomenism has met with heavy resistance. Not all of which has had a philosophical grounding. Thus one of the first reactions to the appearance of Berkeley's Principles was for a doctor to diagnose its author as insane. Similarly, here, in addition to the presumptuous title, we are given the following introduction we are told of a story in which, upon paying a visit to the college dean. Berkeley has the door shut in his face with the remark that if his philosophy is true he should have no difficulty walking through a closed door¹. Such reactions need not be taken seriously by the phenomenist, unless of course they lead to his being institutionally committed. However, even in the more philosophical criticisms of phenomenism the attitude of the 'obvious falsehood of phenomenism' is prevalent to such a degree that it may well be dubbed the 'first dogma of realism.' A good example of this can be seen in J.L. Mackie's paper 'What's Really Wrong with Phenomenism?' Here we are given the following introduction: "Phenomenism has been refuted so often that it might seem tedious and unnecessary to examine it again.

But I, for one, do not find the present state of discussion entirely clear or satisfactory.² From this remark it seems natural to conclude that if phenomenalism has been refuted, it has not been done so in an entirely clear or satisfactory way; and therefore that it has not really been refuted; for a refutation that is either unclear or dissatisfactory is not refutation at all.

I share Mackie's concerns about the present state of discussion regarding this topic and therefore will in this chapter embark on an examination of some of the major criticisms aimed at phenomenalism. This examination will consider two main areas of critique: 1) the problem of the translatability of physical object language into sense-data language, and 2) attacks on the concept of the given.

9. The Problem of Translation

Since phenomenalism is a thesis about the translatability of physical objects statements into sense-data statements, one avenue for critique would be to demonstrate the impossibility of such a translation. Of course, as pointed out earlier, phenomenologists accept that some alteration of meaning will survive the translation, but this is to be expected since while physical object language is necessarily indefinite in its application, sense-data language is not. However, if it can be shown that sensory terms carried implications with them that material terms did not—that sensory terms were logically posterior to material terms—then it would appear that a radical reductionism was untenable.

One of the arguments which has been advanced to this end runs as follows. Physical object statements are categorical, taking the form of 'This is F', while sense-data statements are experiential and run 'This appears (looks, seems) F'. However, perceptual verbs like 'appears', 'looks', and 'seems' carry with them an implication of doubting or denial which 'is' does not. Therefore appearance statements can never be adequate renditions of physical object statements.

This problem is taken up by H.P. Grice in 'The Causal Theory of Perception', where he attempts to show that the truth or falsity of an L-statement ('looks to me' statement) is not dependent on the fulfillment of a D-or-D (doubting or denying) implication that L-statements carry with them. His first move is to produce a counter-example in which someone is suffering chronically from Smith's disease. What this disease entails is that whenever an attack occurs, the sufferer is prone to have reds appear to him in a different colour. Thus when one having an attack says of a red object (with which he was previously acquainted before his attack) 'It looks red to me', although the D-or-D condition is not fulfilled, i.e. he or anyone else is neither doubting or denying that the object is red, the L-statement is false; for in truth it does not look red to him. But as Grice points out, if a precondition for an L-statement's having a truth-value independent of the D-or-D condition being fulfilled is that the L-statement itself is false, then the precondition is inconclusive.

For the fulfillment of the precondition should not necessarily assign a truth-value to the L-statement. Still, he has shown that an L-statement can have at least one truth-value regardless of the D-or-D-condition's fulfillment. From here it follows that there must be another truth-condition besides the D-or-D condition. As can be seen from the above argument, holds Grice, this other condition consists in there being nothing to make the L-statement false.

Although Grice seems to have shown that both the truth and falsity of L-statements are independent of the truth-value of the D-or-D condition, there remains a peculiarity with his procedure; for a question can be raised as to what, if anything, Grice's truth-condition for true L-statements says. He deals with the objection that he has only produced a false L-statement by asserting that the truth-condition for a true L-statement consists in there being nothing to make the L-statement false. This much is obvious. But why are we not told just exactly what it is that would make an L-statement true. Grice has given the condition in the form of a negative i.e. we are not told what the condition consists of, but rather what it does not consist of. And consequently Grice has not produced the truth-condition for a true L-statement.

The most obvious way to approach this problem would be to ask what conditions must be satisfied for there to be nothing to make the L-statement false? And the answer to this question, it would seem, is that when observing a red object the asserter of the L-statement 'It looks red to me' should not be simultaneously having an attack of Smith's disease.

Or, to put it positively, 'It looks red to me' should be asserted when in the visual presence of something which does look red to the asserter. But now we notice a re-emergence of the problem which the Smith's disease story was originally meant to solve, i.e. we have an L-statement on our hands which seems to carry a D-or-D condition with it.

But is this true? Does 'It looks red to me', when uttered in the present circumstances, have a D-or-D implication? There seems to be no reason to hold that it does. For why should a D-or-D implication appear ex-nihilo just in case there is no attack of Smith's disease? To claim as much we would have to hold the meaning of 'looks' depends on the truth-value of the statement in which it is used, which forces us to the conclusion that the meaning of an L-statement cannot be known until its truth-value is known. And this is false just because before we can discover the truth-value of any statement we must first know what it means. Therefore, there is nothing in the logic of an L-statement which requires that its truth or falsity depend on the fulfillment of a D-or-D condition.

A similar argument against the possibility of the phenomenalist's translation is put forward by Anthony Quinton in his 'The Problem of Perception.' Here he examines what he calls the three principle methods of introducing the sense-data theory. These being the arguments from illusion, certainty, and inference. Let us look at the latter two arguments first.

The argument from certainty, as formulated by Quinton, runs thusly:

- 1) Statements about objects are empirical;
- 2) Empirical statements can be shown to be false;
- 3) If a statement can be shown to be false there can be reasonable doubt of its truth;

therefore

- 4) Statements of which we are certain cannot be about objects

Likewise we have his construal of the argument from inference:

- 1) What is known directly is known without inference;
- 2) All knowledge of objects is inferred;

therefore

- 3) Only experience is known directly.

Quinton sees both these arguments as ranking among the principle methods of establishing sense-data theory and consequently believes that his criticism of them is, in the same stroke, a criticism of sense-data theory. Unfortunately, however, both the argument from certainty and from inference are not arguments for sense-data per se, but, inasmuch as they rely on a distinction between objects and experience are arguments for the causal theory of perception. If either argument fails, this does not construe a failing of sense-data theory by only a failing of the view which constitutes sense-data as being caused by physical objects. A phenomenalist does not hold, as a causal theorist might, that knowledge of experience is more certain or more direct than knowledge of objects. For on his account a knowledge of objects is nothing more than, can be translated into a knowledge of experience. Thus phenomenalist would reject premise 3 of the argument from inference as the ill-starred thesis of the causal theory. Likewise, what the argument from certainty purports to establish does phenomenism neither harm nor good, and is therefore inconsequential to sense-data theory.

This argument can only be of interest if an ontological dichotomy of physical objects and experience is supposed.

We shall therefore turn to Quinton's evaluation of the argument from illusion as this is indeed an argument for sense-data theory and thus for phenomenalism. Quinton deals with the argument from illusion by attempting to refute its conclusion, i.e., that we have direct knowledge only of appearances. This he does by giving an analysis of the perceptual verbs 'appear', 'seem', etc. Here he distinguishes three senses. Of the first use Quinton says 'it is clearly untrue that they figure in description of experience.'³ He gives the example 'They appear to be away' uttered after having no one answer the door. This statement he sees as meaning much the same as 'they must be away'. 'Appear' in this context is thus an indicator that the conclusion is drawn 'with less than full confidence'.

The second use of 'appear' is also denied to have any reference to sense-experience. Such statements as 'It appears to be green' when said of a distant house fall into this group. Quinton says 'It appears to be 'green' could be replaced by 'It is green, I think' and thus is an observational report made in a tentative way. Statements like these differ from categorical description such as 'The house is green' by expressing 'inclination to believe, rather than full beliefs'.

The final use of 'appear' is the only case, according to Quinton, in which the description of appearance and experience coincide. This use of 'appear' resembles the second use but differs in that certain general conditions of observation are supposed to be present. Statements of this class would be answers to questions like 'What exactly do you see?' But even here Quinton wants to hold that an 'appears to me' statement may only be a guarded way of asserting an 'it is' statement.

From here it is concluded that the 'appearance' left over from the argument from illusion as the proper objects of acquaintance 'are not ordinarily sense-experiences.'⁴ We are told the 'appears' statements are not usually statements about sense-experience and are simply modified ways of saying 'This is ϕ '. Such statements, Quinton informs us, are 'appropriate for one who is inclined, but not inclined quite confidently enough, to make a categorical statement itself.'⁵

In examining Quinton's critique of the argument from illusion it becomes apparent that his analysis of 'appear' is unacceptable. Although it is true that the first use of 'appear' does not refer directly to sense-experience, it is nevertheless a conclusion drawn from the sense-experience of having the door remain shut after knocking.

The second use of 'appear', however, is clearly a case of sense-experience. In this instance the 'appears' of 'It appears to be green' refers directly to the experience of observing a distant house. Consequently, 'It appears to be green' is not, as Quinton believes, equatable with 'It is green, I think.' The former means that I am having direct visual contact with green while the latter could be asserted whether or not I have had such contact, e.g. someone may have told me that x is green.

As for the third sense of 'appear' it is interesting that Quinton now allows the verb to refer to sense-experience. Of course, even here he wants to maintain that it is more often used to modify an 'is' statement. This is so because 'the description of experience proper is a sophisticated procedure and one seldom called for.'⁶ But now it seems Quinton has allowed too much. For the point of interest is not whether a description of sense-experience is a sophisticated or simple task, or even how frequently it is required; but rather, it is whether or not such a description is possible. And in conceding that 'appear' does occur in the description of sense-experience. Quinton has accepted the possibility of such a description which, in Grice's words, allows the detachment of the D-or-D condition from an L-statement.

What both of the above arguments against the sense-datatist's translation share in common is the supposition that the propositions about 'being x' are in some sense prior to those about 'looking x,' or, as it was suggested in the last chapter, that permanent possibility of sensation language is dependant upon the language of physical objects. This line of thought was first put forward by John Austin in Sense and Sensibilia. Austin argues here that we can have the notion of something looking like a so-and-so only if we already have the notion of something being a so-and-so. And therefore that the concept of sense-data presupposes the concept of material objects. Or, to put it another way, sense-data language is 'parasitic' on material object language.

This argument has been attacked by Sam Coval and D.D. Todd in their paper '**Adjusters and Senses-Data.**' They start their critique by pointing out that for a language to be functional it must have the factors of fixity and flexibility. That is, it must display standard terms whose meanings are readily available to speakers and hearers, and it must further have adjuster terms which allow language users to communicate about deviations from these standards. 'We do not then need to strike a new term when faced with a new turn in the world, for with the aid of adjusters such as "like", we can bring to bear all of the riches of our already incorporated stock of terms.'⁷ However, the reason for the existence of the standard-plus-adjuster mechanism must be distinguished from the reason for deciding which cases are to constitute a standard, and which are to be deviants. Coval and Todd point out that an important principle operating here is the standard-adjuster role-shift. That is, it is in principle possible for the value of the standard to take on the value of the adjuster, and vice versa. Also, it is possible for the adjusted case to itself become the value of the standard without requiring that the previous standard consequently fill the role of the adjusted case, i.e. either converse or partial converse role-shifts are possible.

With this much established Coval and Todd proceed to examine various applications of the principle of role-shift. One case considered is that of a shadow. Here it is stated even though the anti-separationist would argue for a conceptual dependence of a shadow on a material object--i.e. the notion of light occluded by a material object is part of the meaning of shadow, or again, a shadow is always a shadow of something--the dependency of the concept of a shadow on the concept of material object will have to derive from particular facts about shadows.

The two candidates here which Coval and Todd see as most likely to prevent the separationist's thesis from going through are 1) that a shadow is always the result of something that happens to an object and 2) that shadows being two dimensional, cannot be regarded as material objects and thus lack the hallmark of standards.

The first candidate, pointed out will not do for the reason that whatever the casual relation between shadows and their relevant objects, it is always possible that this could be other than it is. For example, it could be the case that shadows are only thrown at extreme distances from their objects. Such a state of affairs would render it most difficult to know which object was responsible for which shadow. Consequently, there would be no need for our language to maintain a conceptual linkage between a shadow and a material object.

The other candidate, that shadows can never be standards due to their lack of three dimensions (i.e. of objecthood), also falls short. For there are other cases, such as rainbows and flashes, which bear no conceptual connections as adjusters to other standards. To the objection that rainbows and flashes are not strictly speaking two dimensional, these philosophers reply merely that neither is a shadow nor anything else.

The conclusion drawn from this it is it is the goals of coherence and communicability that direct our selection process of which case is to be the standard.

What this shows is that although Austin is right to claim that 'is x' is prior to 'looks x,' he has failed to notice the logical separability of the two cases and thus the pragmatic basis of this priority. And it is because of the separability that the phenomenalist is free to ask the question raised in the argument from illusion, namely, what are the similarities between a specific standard case and a deviant one? 'Instructively', say Coval and Todd, 'the possibility of such a set of similarities itself implies a set of terms "simpler" than the terms being compared.'⁸ This is so because comparison is a three term relation; two things can only be compared in terms of their features. And since the relation between 'is x' and 'looks x' already implies a comparison, there must be a third 'simpler' term which, being common to both cases, is metaphysically neutral between veridical and non-veridical cases. And this, of course, is just what the phenomenalist means by sense-data.

Thus we see that not only have Coval and Todd shown there to be serious problems with Austin's argument, but they have further demonstrated how the pragmatic basis for the conceptual priority of 'is x' over 'looks x' presents positive implications for sense-data theory.

At this point, it may be felt necessary to object in the following manner. Coval and Todd are certainly right, it could be said, in maintaining that whatever the casual relation between a shadow and its object, we could always imagine it to be other than it is.

Thus, not only could we imagine shadows being thrown at a distance from their respective objects, as Coval and Todd suggest, but we could also imagine shadows to come in a variety of glowing colours, to move about freely while spontaneously popping in and out of existence, and even to display intelligent behaviour. All of this is perfectly consistent. The problem, however, is that at some point what we are dealing with is no longer a shadow. That is, our concept of a shadow does not encompass iridescent autonomous intelligent beings. We may, for whatever reason choose to call such entities 'shadows,' but this would not be what we now mean by 'shadow.' And so, the conclusion would go, even though our concept of a shadow is logically separable from our concept of light occluded by an object, there are some concepts upon which it is clearly dependant and thus inseparable from.

The reason that this objection misses the mark is because all it proves is that concepts have circumscribed boundaries. In other words, that for a word to maintain its current meaning, it must only be used to refer to phenomena which continue to display certain definitive characteristics. What it does not prove—and this is what is necessary for the objection to have any force—is that the phenomenon of a shadow is itself inseparable from the role it plays within the concept of light that is occluded by a physical object.

10. The Problem of the Given

Being a foundational theory of perceptual knowledge, phenomenalism holds there to be a given element in experience; that is, an epistemological footing upon which all empirical knowledge must rest. The given, as it is called, has been characterized in various ways. It has been termed as that which cannot be doubted, as the place where the regress of justification must ultimately terminate, and as what is known directly, by acquaintance, or non-inferentially. Although, as we have seen, phenomenologists identify the given with sense-data, in *'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'*, Wilfred Sellars points out that several things have been christened with this piece of epistemological 'shoptalk.' He produces the following list: 'sense contents, material objects, universals, proposition, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself.'⁹

Sellars feels that the entire framework of givenness is in error and that the 'Myth of the Given' is at the heart of what is wrong with sense-datum theory. Sellars attack on sense-datum theory is therefore only a 'first step' in his more general critique of the Myth itself. We will proceed by evaluating Sellars critique of the given as applied to sense-data theory. For if Sellars can be shown to stumble in his first step, then, as our concern is with sense-data theory, we need not accompany him on the rest of his journey.

Sellars begins by claiming that sense-data theories characteristically make a distinction between the act of awareness and the object of awareness. The act of awareness is known as sensing, while its object--say a coloured patch or a sound--is what we have been calling a sense-datum.

Now, says Sellars, since the concept of the given is suppose to enlighten us on the notion that empirical knowledge has its roots in a foundation, it is peculiar that, according to sense-data theory, particulars are the objects of sense. For what is known, even non-inferentially, is always a fact and never a particular, that is, things of the form 'something's being thus-and-so or something's standing in a certain relation to something else.'¹⁰ The question posed, therefore, is this: how does the the theory of sense-data aid our understanding the concept of epistemic foundations. Sellars believes that the sense-datist must respond in one of two ways to this predicament. He must either say '(a) It is particulars which are sensed. Sensing is not knowing. The existence of sense-data does not logically imply the existence of knowledge, of (b) sensing is a from of knowing. It is facts rather than particulars which are sensed.'¹¹

When confronted with this choice, remarks Sellars, it seems as though the sense-datist wants it both ways. For not only does he want sensing to be an instance of knowledge or cognition, but he also wants it to be particulars which are known. Sellars grants that this end could be realized if it were stipulated that when a sense content is sensed it is sensed as being of a certain character and, further, that if this is so the fact that this it is of this character is non-inferentially known. Although this is stipulation, it is supported to some extent; for normal usage does give sanction to a sense of 'know' wherein it is followed by a noun or descriptive phrase which refers to a particular. Thus we ask 'Do you know John?'

But once it is seen that the only way to have the sensing of a sense content logically imply that one has non-inferential knowledge is by definition, then it becomes clear that to continue to regard the givenness of sense contents as basic or primitive is to destroy the logical connection between sensing a sense-datum and having non-inferential knowledge. And this, we are told, is exactly the confusion inherent in attempting to analyse sensing in non-cognitive terms. However, even those philosophers who believe sensing to be an act which is both irreducible and epistemic still hold such an act to be primitive. For they take the position that knowledge of the given is something which requires no previous learning, 'In short, they have tended to equate sensing sense contents with being conscious.'¹² Sense-datum philosophers befriending such an account cannot escape their own downfall. For, according to Sellars, ex hypothesi they must hold three inconsistent propositions. These are:

- 'A. X senses red sense content s entails x non-inferentially knows that s is red.
- B. The ability to sense senses content is unacquired.
- C. The ability to know facts of the form x is ϕ is acquired.'¹³

Now, says Sellars, 'A. and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B.' Therefore, the only way out of this quandry is to give up one of the inconsistent triad. The problem seems to be no matter which proposition the sense-data theorist chooses to drop, in each case his empiricism is equally jeopardized. The forsaking of A renders the sensing of sense-data a non-cognitive occurrence, while to surrender B is to divorce the concept of sense-data from our ordinary talk about such things as sensations and feeling. Similarly, the abandonment of C would 'do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition.'¹⁴ And so it seems sense-data theory is a confusion.

The first thing to notice with Sellars argument is that although he tells us that sense-data theorists 'characteristically' distinguish between an act of awareness and an object of awareness, some theorists do not make this distinction. One such example would be no less a sense-data philosopher than Ayer. In Language, Truth and Logic we find the following statement. 'To begin with, we must make it clear that we do not accept the realist analysis of our sensations in terms of subject, act, and object. For neither the existence of the substance which is supposed to perform the so-called act of sensing nor existence of the act itself, as an entity distinct from the sense-contents on which it is supposed to be directed, is in the least capable of being verified.'¹⁵ Further, witness his remarks about philosophers who affirm the existence of objects of knowledge. 'The sense of 'know' with which they are concerned is the sense in which we speak of knowing that something or other is the case. And in this sense it is meaningless to speak of knowing objects. Failure to realize this has contributed, I think, to a famous piece of philosophical mythology, the act-object analysis of sensation.'¹⁶ If this distinction is thus not accepted, and there seems to be no reason why it should, then the question of whether it is particulars or facts that are the objects the awareness need never be entertained. And a fortiori the sense-datist's purported dilemma of choosing between (a) sensing particulars non-cognitively or, (b) sensing facts cognitively simply disappears.

It might be objected here that the notion of sensing a sense-datum already implies an act-object analysis of perception inasmuch as sensing is the act of which a sense-datum is the object, and therefore that we are driven to choosing between facts and particulars. But this is false, for, quoting Ayer, 'to say of something that it is sensed need be taken to imply no more than it is sensibly present, or, in other words, that it appears.' Likewise, to say, a sense-datum must be an object of awareness is to misunderstand how the term is used. For, as Price says, the term 'sense-datum' is introduced as being ontologically neutral. Whether or not sense-data are best described as objects is a question which must be decided on empirical grounds.

Sellars further charge--that philosophers who hold sensing to be both irreducible and epistemic are committed to a trilogy of inconsistent propositions--also gives way to analysis. For there is only an inconsistency if, regarding proposition 'C', one fails to make a distinction between facts of the form 'x is ϕ ' where ϕ is a sensory predicate and those of the same form where ϕ is a material predicate. That is, if a distinction is not made between sense-data language and physical object language. For while it is certainly true that my knowledge of the fact 'x is a seagull' is acquired, i.e. I had to learn that this thing floating about up over there is a seagull, it does not follow that my knowledge of the fact 'x' is a whitish-grey patch with a protruding yellow appendage at one end' is likewise acquired.

Thus, if ϕ is proposition 'C' is taken as referring to a sensory predicate, then indeed we have an inconsistent set of sentences on our hands, but this is uninteresting; for no foundational sense-datist would think of maintaining that 'The ability to know facts of the form x is ϕ is acquired' where ϕ is a sensory predicate. However, if, on the other hand, ϕ is dubbed a material predicate, then Sellars is right that its desertion would offend the nominalist leanings of empiricism. But in this instance there is no reason to relinquish 'C;' for in the case that ϕ is material predicate 'C' is perfectly consistent with statements A and B. And with this it can be concluded that sense-data theory, and so phenomenalism, remains untouched by Sellars attack.

Another route that arguments against the concept of the given have gone has been to label the distinction between the given and the interpretation of the given or our conceptual scheme, as the third dogma of empiricism--the first dogma being the analytic-synthetic distinction and the second being the thesis of reductionsism--and so to assail this distinction as untenable or at least pointless.

Michael Williams, for example, argues in Groundless Belief that the third dogma, or 'two components view' of knowledge as he calls it, must contend with the following dilemma:

'in so far as the content of immediate experience can be expressed, the sort of awareness we have in our apprehension of the given is just another type of perceptual judgement and hence no longer contact with anything which is merely given. But if the content of immediate experience turns out to be ineffable or non-propositional, then the appeal to the given loses any appearance of fulfilling an explanatory role in the theory of knowledge; specifically, it cannot explicate the idea that knowledge rests on a perceptual foundation.'¹⁷

Williams believes that phenomenism, being a foundational epistemology, is committed to taking up the latter horn of the dilemma since 'If the given is seen as that which is received passively and independently of the constructive activity of thought, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the content of the given is fundamentally ineffable.'¹⁸

The phenomenist's reason for professing the concept of the given, according to Williams, is what is known as the regress of justification argument. This argument starts from the premise that not every instance of true belief counts as knowledge. What is further required to give birth to knowledge, therefore, is that a true belief is also justified. But with this we have opened up a Pandora's box; for how can we justify a belief except with another belief which in turn must be justified, et cetera as infinitum. And so, it is claimed, the only way out of this infinite regress is to hold that there must be beliefs which are themselves intrinsically credible and thus require no justification outside themselves.

It is the regress argument, states Williams, which 'underpins' Price's attempt to discover the given by his observing a tomato in order to see which of his beliefs he could doubt. For, says Williams, Price does not really discover the mental attitude of acquaintance; he knows in advance that it must exist.

To support his claim Williams quotes Price's statement that 'there must be some sort or sorts of presence of consciousness which can be called 'direct,'... else we should have an infinite regress,' and again, 'eventually we must get back to something which is data simpliciter, which is not the result of any intellectual process.'¹⁹ Price's embracing the regress argument points to why he thinks the study of the nature of perception can only be carried out through phenomenological inspection. For says, Williams, to mobilize any higher-order or scientific concepts would be to appeal to those beliefs whose very credibility is in question.

The problem with the regress argument, we are told, is that it leaves the phenomenalist with the following question: how do we know when we have come upon data simpliciter? In other words, how do we know which of our beliefs are intrinsically credible? The phenomenalist's answer here is that although the characteristics which distinguish data simpliciter from other kinds of data cannot be described, they will be obvious upon inspection. The study of perception therefore, concludes Williams, 'turns out to be a solitary search for ineffable conclusions.'²⁰

One way of escaping this result, it may seem, would be to drop the requirement that the subject of an intrinsically credible belief know why it is intrinsically credible, i.e. that he not be required to justify his basic beliefs. This would allow knowledge to have its foundations while blocking the regress before it can get going. Indeed, such a proposal is given by Sellars when he says to have non-inferential knowledge of x is to have the ability to report facts about x without thinking about it.

However, Williams expostulates that such an attempt is futile. For it will always remain possible that we may eventually discover why our basic beliefs are intrinsically credible. And upon discovering why, that is, upon being able to justify our basic beliefs, we are once again in the throes of an infinite regress of justification.

That this account will not work follows from the very nature of phenomenalism. 'For,' proclaims Williams, 'phenomenalism is not just concerned with what any particular person, or all of us for that matter, might happen to know at some time: the theory concerns the structure of justification, what the grounds for certain beliefs are, and not just whether anyone happens to be aware of them.'²¹

Returning to Williams complaint that insofar as knowledge of the given is non-propositional or ineffable it must fail to explicate the notion of epistemic foundations, we may note that as the given cannot be described within the context of an on-going language it is, in this sense, ineffable. This is the sense that C.I. Lewis seems to have in mind when Williams quotes him as saying 'we cannot describe any particular given as such, because in describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by bringing it under some category of other, select from it, emphasise aspects of it, and relate it in particular and avoidable ways.'²² Thus, for example, to describe my visual experience of a monarch butterfly as a 'monarch butterfly' would, as Lewis says, bring it under a category, select from it, and so on. It might be thought that this difficulty could be allayed by giving the description in purely sensory terms; that is, as a 'fluttering patch of dark orange interlaced with black designs.'

But even here such words as 'orange' and 'design' are already functioning to place the experience under certain categories. And this should not surprise us; for it is in the nature of language, whether it is physical or sensory, to pick out certain aspects of the world and isolate them under headings of various levels of generality. Elsewise effective communication would be impossible; the only way that you can understand what I mean when I claim to have just seen an orange butterfly is if the terms 'orange' and 'butterfly' designate already circumscribed categories.

However, it should not be concluded from this that the given element in experience is ineffable in the sense that it is beyond any possible linguistic representation. For, upon seeing a monarch butterfly I may simply point and declare 'alpha' and thereby ostensibly denominate this facet of my experience. Of course, such utterances will not constitute effective communications for they will not be part of an on-going language. But this is irrelevant insofar as the question of their ability to pick out the given is concerned.

Williams anticipates this reply and remonstrates that the appeal to ostentation is 'worthless': 'Suppose I point in the general direction of a red box: there will be no purely ostensive way for me to indicate that is the shape rather than the colour, or even the box itself, that I intend to pick out.'²³ On this point it seems that Williams is just wrong.

If I want it to be known that I am referring to the colour of the box when I exclaim 'alpha,' then upon painting it blue I simply stop vocalizing alpha. When it is restored to its original colour, I recommence with 'alpha.' If I want to designate the shape of the box, then I pronounce 'beta' regardless of the colour, as I outline the box with my fingers, as you feel it with eyes both opened and closed, and so on. As for referring to the box itself, i.e. that little object sitting over there, then, whether it is painted various colours, seen or felt, or bashed into a ball, I continue to recite 'gamma' stopping only when the object itself is gone. All of these methods of differentiating among various aspects of the box are purely ostensive. It may therefore be concluded that of the given element in experience can thus be referred to, then there is no force to the charge that it cannot figure in epistemological explanation.

It may be thought that Williams could elude this criticism by appealing to Ludwig Wittgenstein's private language argument. As presented in Philosophical Investigations this argument runs thusly; a language which I do not share with others is in principle not possible. For if I cut others off there will be no criteria whereby I can establish that I am using my language properly. Therefore, it might be continued, voicing 'alpha' upon having a certain experience is merely an instance of private language and thus of an impossible language. The reason why this argument will not help Williams is that even were I to use the word 'red' for the colour of the box (i.e. to use a public language), thus allowing me to check with others about the correctness of my usage, the onus for deciding whether or not they were using it correctly would ultimately still be mine. I cannot escape having to make the final decision.

This conclusion has direct implications for Williams' critique of the regress argument. For, according to Williams' diagnosis, the problem here is that to know we have come upon the given we must simply attend to our experience, and this leaves us with nothing but 'ineffible conclusions.' But if the study of perception is a 'search for ineffible conclusions,' they are not ineffible, as has been shown, in any sense which is destructive to phenomenism. Indeed, our knowledge of the given is ineffible in just the sense that is required if it is to maintain its foundation role. Further, although Williams informs us that the regress argument 'underpins' Price's phenomenological technique of locating the given, and that Price does really not discover the given, there is no warrant for this assertion. Price's observation of the tomato, his raising of various doubts and subsequent discovery of the given, is a procedure which goes on independently of the regress argument. There is therefore no interesting sense in which the regress argument can be said to 'underpin' phenomenological inspection. Indeed, both methods are divergent techniques pointing to the same conclusion.

11. Epilogue

We have now arrived at the conclusion of our study. Tracing the philosophical development of phenomenalism from its first Lockean murmurings to the present day full-blown theory of perception, we have, argument by argument, pushed our way through the many difficulties which beset this theory. Thus we say how Locke, engaging the argument from variability, assigned half of the world--what he called secondary qualities--to an intra-mental existence while leaving the other half, or primary qualities, to be supported beyond the veil of perception by 'something I know not what.' It took the penetrating eye of Berkeley to disclose the insurmountable difficulties that such a dualism must face. And thus it was in the writings of this philosopher that the monistic approach of phenomenalism was first laid down. However, Berkeley himself fell into confusion when he tried to argue for the existence of a mental substance which, like Locke's material world, lay outside the realms of experience. With Hume's philosophy we are finally given a purely empirical discussion of perception. The shortcoming here was that in focusing on the delusive aspect of our belief in the external world, Hume missed seeing how an account of this world could be constructed from our sense impressions. Consequently, he deserted the theory of perception to tread the unpalatable road of scepticism.

In the second chapter we found how the view that matter is nothing more than the permanent possibility of sensation, a position up-held by Mill, enabled the gaps in perception to be filled theoretically. However, Mill's reductionistic programme seemed to be threatened by the presence of a term denoting a physical object in an ostensibly phenomenal analysis of his belief about the material world. Price achieved a more thoroughgoing approach to the problem of perception. By presenting his phemonenological method of locating the given element in experience he was able to define the concept of sense-data in terms of that which could not be doubted. That these sense-data were themselves empirical was shown by his deployment of the argument from illusion. Thus when Price managed to show how the concept of a material object could be analysed into a family of actual and obtainable sense-data, he was on the verge of giving a completely phenomenalist theory of the external world. Price's downfall was his being influenced by causal arguments to introduce the unjustified notion of physical occupancy--a theoretical concept strangely reminiscent of Locke's substance.

Although Ayer tried to improve on Price's phenomenalism by initially proclaiming snese-data theory to be nothing more than an alternate language, this proposal was aborted when sense-data language was discovered to be logically prior to physical object language. Ayer's eventual rejection of phenomenalism was shown to be based on a fallacious argument which purported to demonstrate that the existence of a material object was never sufficient for the appearance of sense-data.

In the final chapter, two major areas of criticism aimed at phenomenalism were explored. These were the problems of translation and the given. Here we found claims, such as those made by Quinton, that perceptual statements were merely guarded forms of categorical statements to be completely unwarranted, and further, as made clear by Coval and Todd, that the pragmatic basis for the conceptual priority of 'is' statements over 'looks' statements is actually what phenomenalism has implied all along. It was also seen that Sellars' attack on the concept of the givenness of sense-data is easily obliterated with the rejection of the act-object analysis of perception, and further, that his scheme of forcing the sense-darist into accepting a trilogy of inconsistent propositions is grounded in a conflation of sense-data language with physical object language. Lastly, William's charge that our knowledge of the given is ineffable and thus non-functional for epistemological explanation was exposed to be in error for the reason that it is only effable within the context of an on-going language, not on terms of ostentation. Since Williams' objection to the regress argument was founded on his misgivings about ineffability, his objection to this argument was dealt with in the same stroke.

It may therefore be concluded that, if the above argumentation is correct, the problems of translation and the given, as presented in Chapter III, are two areas of concern that phenomenalism may safely lay to rest. There are however, other domains of criticism, such as the problems of other minds and personal identity, which have not been dealt with in this essay.

Although many of these are not criticisms of pheomonelaism per se, they are nonetheless, unsolved issues whose outcomes harbour defintite implications for the plausiblity of phenomenalism as a theory of perception. It is therefore necessary, if this theory is to survive, that phenomenologists take it upon themselves to eventually come to terms with these issues.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding 1 New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1959, p. 32

²Ibid., p. 173

³Ibid., p. 177

⁴Ibid., p. 394

⁵Ibid., p. 395

⁶Ibid., p. 390

⁷Ibid., p. 394

⁸In J.L. Mackie's Problems from Locke an interpretation of Locke's theory of substance is put forward in which substance is identified with the 'central core' or particular internal constitution' of an object. This 'central core' view of substance is said to escape Berkeley's criticism; for on this account our inability to know substance is only a contingent matter--its imperceptability being due to the minuteness of the object's internal structure. Indeed, thanks to modern science, there is much we know about substance which in Locke's day was unclear, e.g. atomic structure.

Whether or not this is a plausible formulation of the concept of substance, it can at least be argued that this is not exactly what Locke had in mind when he employed the notion of substance. Mackie himself acknowledges this when he says his interpretation is what Locke 'should have said about substance though it might not be quite what he does say.'(p.82)

⁹George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge in A.A. Luce & T. E. Jessop, eds. The Works of George Berkeley: Bishop of Cloyne 2 London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1964, p. 42

¹⁰Ibid., p. 45

¹¹Ibid., p. 52

¹²Ibid., p. 53

¹³Ibid., p. 42

¹⁴Ibid., p. 55-56

¹⁵George Berkeley, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous Ibid., p. 234

¹⁶Ibid., p. 232

¹⁷Ibid., p. 233

¹⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁹David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature in L.A. Selby-Bigge, Hume's Treatise of Human Nature London: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 198

²⁰Ibid., p. 210

²¹Ibid., p. 214

²²Ibid., p. 188

²³H.H. Price, Hume's Theory of the External World London: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 134

²⁴Op. cit., p. 218

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹It may be thought that what is definitive of modern phenomenism is the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness, i.e. the principle that a proposition is empirically significant if, and only if, it is logically possible that it can be verified. However, it should be seen, in this regard, that a phenomenalist may very well agree that propositions about physical objects are meaningful, but still maintain that they are in fact reducible to propositions about sensory experience.

²John Stuart Mill, An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy in J.M. Robson, (ed.) Collected Works of John Stuart Mill 9 Toronto: University of Tronto Press, 1979, p. 184

³H. H. Price, Perception London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1964, p. 2

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 3

⁵*Loc. cit.*

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 33-34

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 189

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 263

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 264

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 289

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 321

¹²It is interesting to note that it was the problem of causality that lead Berkeley himself to likewise abandon empiricism and postulate the concept of an unobservable mental substance.

¹³A.J. Ayer. The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge London: MacMillian & Co. Ltd., 1963, p. 14

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 18

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 241-242

¹⁸A.J. Ayer, 'Phenonemalism.' Philosophical Essays London: MacMillian & Co. Ltd., 1963, p. 165

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹G.J. Warnock, Berkeley Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1953, p. 13

²J.L. Mackie, 'What's Really Wrong with Phenomenalism?' Proceedings of the British Academy 45 London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 1

³Anthony Quinton, 'The Problem of Perception' in G.J. Warnock, ed. The Philosophy of Perception London: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 68

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Loc. cit.

⁷Sam Coval, D.D. Todd, 'Adjusters and Sense-Data,' American Philosophical Quarterly 9 No. 1, January 1972, p. 108

⁸Ibid., p. 112

⁹Wilfred Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,' Science, Perception and Reality London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 127

¹⁰Ibid., p. 128

¹¹Ibid., p. 129

¹²Ibid., p. 131

¹³Ibid., p. 132

¹⁴loc. cit.

¹⁵A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1946, p. 122

¹⁶Op. cit., p. 127

¹⁷Michael Williams, Groundless Belief: An Essay on the Possibility of Epistemology Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977, p., 31

¹⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 64

²⁰Ibid., p. 67

²¹Ibid., p. 69

²²Ibid., p. 31

²³Ibid., p. 80

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