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Alamat Penyunting dan Tata Usaha  
Sekretariat Pengelola KHAZANAH IAIN Antasari, Jalan Jend. A. Yani. Km. 4,5  
☎ (0511) 3252829 Faks. (0511) 3254344 Banjarmasin 70235  
Kalimantan Selatan. E-Mail: khazanah@telkom.net

# EPISTEMOLOGY: ARGUMENTS AGAINST PHENOMENALISM

Oleh : Z. Fikri\*

## Abstract

In this essay I examine one model of critical epistemologies, namely the phenomenism. It is a form of anti-realism; the phenomenist denies the existence of a physical world when it is unperceived. I argue that the phenomenist does not provide us with a meaningful and useful advancement in our understanding of experience and the world surroundings us. Against them I say that the appearances of physical objects are dependent on the nature of the object it-self, the conditions of perceiver and the light falls into the object. The notion of standard conditions put forward by the phenomenist lead them into favouritism and committed to representationalism.

Key words: Critical epistemology, phenomenism, and external world.

## A. Introduction

Our experience of the external world comes to us as a result of our activities of sensing it by using our sensory perceptions. This experience gives us knowledge of the external world. The nature of this knowledge depends on how we understand the relation of our experience to the external world and how we perceive it.

Three models have been put forward by philosophers to help us understand how we experience the world: direct realism, indirect realism and phenomenism.<sup>1</sup> Indirect realists think that we perceive physi-

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\*Writer is teaching Philosophy at IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin, obtained MA in Philosophy at the University of Nottingham England 2004.

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Dancy, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.144-48.

cal object indirectly. What this means, roughly, is that the indirect realists think that we are aware of 'sense-data' which are mental properties whose existence is dependent on the mind, but whose character is determined in part by physical objects and the perceiver's relation to them.

Direct realists think that we perceive physical objects directly. However, direct realists do not agree in the nature of the properties of physical objects when unperceived. Those who are called Naive Direct Realists hold that physical objects retain when unperceived all of the properties of all the types we perceive them as having. By this they mean that an unperceived object may still have not only a shape and size, but also be hot or cold, have a colour, a taste, and a smell, be rough or smooth and make a noise or keep silent. On the other hand, those who are called Scientific Direct Realists hold that unperceived physical objects do not retain *all* of the properties we perceive them as having; for some of those properties are dependent for their existence upon the existence of a perceiver. Thus colour, taste, sound and smell, heat and roughness are not independent properties of the object which it can retain unperceived. The physical object only has them in relation to the perceiver. They hold that we perceive directly a special group of properties.

Unlike two models above, phenomenism is a form of anti-realism; the phenomenist denies the existence of a physical world when it is unperceived. This physical object is unable to become a part of the world of experience. For him, the only possible object of awareness is experience and complexes of experiences; there is not reality apart from experience.

In this essay I will examine this third model of theories of perception. I will look at the doctrines of phenomenism and offer arguments against them and objections to them. Here, I show that the phenomenists are inconsistent with their positions and their doctrines are false. I examine their doctrine of the existence of the physical object and the properties they supposed to have.

## **B. Context**

What is epistemology? The standard very short answer to the question is that epistemology is the theory of knowledge. In fact, as we know, "epistemology" and "theory of knowledge" are used interchangeably

in, for instance, college course catalogues. Epistemology, then, is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge.

History of Western philosophy offers us three perspectives in epistemology: (1) Dogmatic Epistemology; (2) Critical Epistemology; and (3) Scientific Epistemology.<sup>2</sup> *Dogmatic Epistemology* first developed by Plato. This traditional approach to epistemology through Plato was to place metaphysics first and then append an epistemology. The methodology was to ask what was the basic reality and then add an epistemology to explain how we know that reality. So, in this model, epistemological efforts come after metaphysical doctrine of what exists. The *Theaetetus*, Plato's work, is useful for getting the standard analysis of knowledge as true opinion plus an account up for consideration. The reason that Plato does not accept this account is his acceptance of the forms as the ultimate reality that leads him to account for knowledge as an intuitive awareness of the forms.

A *Critical Epistemology* is a trademark of modern philosophy. The period of history which is commonly called 'modern' has a mental outlook which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways. Of these, two are the most important: the diminishing authority of the Church, and the increasing authority of science. The authority of science, which is recognized by most philosophers of the modern epoch, is a very different thing from the authority of the Church, since it is intellectual, not governmental. No penalties fall upon those who reject it; no prudential arguments influence those who accept it. It prevails solely by its intrinsic appeal to reason. Emancipation from the authority of the Church led to the growth of individualism, even to the point of anarchy. Modern philosophy, however, has retained, for the most part, an individualistic and subjective tendency. This is very marked in Descartes, who builds up all knowledge from the certainty of his own existence, and accepts clearness and distinctness (both subjective) as criteria of truth.<sup>3</sup>

A *Critical Epistemology* is introduced by Rene Descartes. There is a revolution in this model of epistemology in that he placed the question

<sup>2</sup>Keith Lehrer, "Theory of Knowledge: General Course," <http://www.ditext.com/clay/lehrer.html>

<sup>3</sup>Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 479-482.

of what we can know prior to questions of what is ultimately real. Here, the existence of a thing is established by epistemological efforts. A thing exists if only if we know that it really exists. He believes that we know a thing directly by our minds or that what we know immediately is confined to ideas in our own minds. This is called an immediacy thesis in epistemology.

René Descartes' approach to the theory of knowledge plays a prominent role in shaping the agenda of early modern philosophy. It continues to effect (some would say "infect") the way problems in epistemology which are conceived today. Students of philosophy (in his own day, and in the history since) have found the distinctive features of his epistemology to be at once attractive and troubling; features such as the emphasis on method, the role of epistemic foundations, the conception of the doubtful as contrasting with the warranted, the sceptical arguments of the First Meditation, and the *cogito ergo sum*—to mention just a few of the issues of his epistemology.

Descartes' method is called Cartesian methodological doubts. In order to have the whole system of knowledge grounded on the firmest foundation, which should be the very first principle of philosophy, he attempts to discard every belief he has as long as it allows any slightest doubt about it. The way he proceeds his methodological doubt is by criticizing the major principles with which we gain beliefs, not by reviewing one by one all individual beliefs we have. The first kind of victims of his methodological doubt is the beliefs we acquire with our sensations. He says: "Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once."<sup>4</sup>

The next kind of beliefs discarded are our beliefs about the existence of our bodies; considering the possibility of our dreaming about our bodies, Descartes puts aside this kind of beliefs too. Even in regard to arithmetic and geometrical knowledge, doubt is always possible because there may be an evil demon that exerts all his power to deceive us. However, there remains something that I cannot doubt at all; even if

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<sup>4</sup>Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, edited by John Cottingham, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.12.

I were being deceived by the evil demon all the time, I should at least exist in order to be deceived. After considering everything thoroughly, Descartes finally concludes: "[T]his proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."<sup>5</sup> Hence comes his famous dictum: "*Cogito ergo sum* (I am thinking, therefore I exist)."<sup>6</sup> What is this *thinking*? - It is consciousness that includes doubting, conceiving, imagining, perceiving, affirming and denying, feeling, etc.

Descartes further proceeds to prove the existence of God and the external world. He provides two arguments to prove God's existence: (1) Cause is always greater than the effect. We are God's creation, which is finite and imperfect. But somehow we have the idea of infinite and perfect being, God, which would be impossible unless this idea was implanted in us by God Himself. Therefore, God must exist. (2) God cannot be perfect if He lacks existence. Since God is perfect, God must exist. He concluded that "the mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is, God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists."<sup>7</sup>

From his proof of God's existence, Descartes proceeds to prove the existence of the external world. Since God is benevolent, those sensory experiences that were given to us by God must be something we can trust. Therefore, the external world must exist as the way we perceive it because God must not be deceiving us with the sense organs He gave to us.

After Descartes, much of epistemology has arisen in defence of or in opposition to various forms of scepticism. Indeed, one could classify various theories of knowledge by their responses to scepticism. For example, rationalists could be viewed as sceptical about the possibility of empirical knowledge while not being sceptical with regard to a priori knowledge and empiricists could be seen as sceptical about the possibility of a priori knowledge but not so with regard to empirical knowledge. In addition, many traditional problems, for example the problem of other minds or the problem of our knowledge of God's existence, can be seen as *restricted* forms of scepticism which hold that we cannot

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35.

have knowledge of any propositions in some particular domain thought to be within our ken.

Later Hume developed the consequences of this theory. And Reid refuted the thesis by arguing that we have immediate knowledge of the external world. Reid pointed out that the diversity of appearances of an object, rather than showing that we do not perceive the object, is a necessary condition of perceiving it. He also noted that the sceptics assume that our beliefs resulting from consciousness and reason are justified and that they have no more justification for assuming those beliefs to be justified than the beliefs resulting from perception. All the faculties are fallible, and some perceptual beliefs are as certain as any beliefs. For example, the belief that I see a table and am not asleep and dreaming is immediately justified. I may not be able to say how I know that I am awake and perceiving a table, but that is because such knowledge is immediate.

Sceptical doubts are sometimes said to characterize times of social upheaval (a connection said to be evident, not only in the ancient world, but also in the fourteenth century and our contemporary era). It is difficult to judge such claims, just because the relationship between the philosophy of a time and its prevailing social trends is influenced by many variables that are easily debated.

The last is *Scientific Epistemology*. This third approach to epistemology gives theories about what we can know and theories about what is real an equal status, that is, neither is assumed to be prior to the other. Consequently, a theory of knowledge should explain how we know those things which we most clearly do know and at the same time provide a critical standard of evaluation for knowledge claims.

### **C. The Existence of a Material Object**

In our ordinary life we usually perceive physical objects surrounding us, such as a tree, a flower, a house, a book, and etc. Based on this perception, we believe that there is a tree in our garden. When somebody asks us, 'Is there a tree in your garden?' We answer, 'Yes'. Some might ask us a further question, 'How do you know that there is a tree in your garden?' We usually reply, 'I know it because I see it'. And we might get another thoughtful question, such as, 'Do you believe that it really exists'?

The last question is metaphysical. In the critical epistemology, as mentioned before, the question comes after epistemological efforts to establish what is an ultimately real. The last question provokes us to think the relation between us and the objects outside us. In reply to this question, the phenomenalist, a variant of critical epistemology, says that a tree exists as long as there is somebody who perceives it. If nobody perceived, perceives, will perceive it, then it does not exist. To illustrate this position, let us think about the tree we see in our garden. We can see the tree, its colour, its shape, its height and so on, in day light or at the night if there is a light. Imagine that we do not perceive this tree, or nobody perceives it. How do we know that this tree could exist without someone's perceiving its sensory properties—its colour, its shape and so on? Certainly we cannot observe the tree existing unperceived. If we observe it, we perceive it. No perceiver, no tree. In other words, no perceiver—no material object exists.

Why this physical object could not exist unperceived? The phenomenalist says that what we perceive are the appearances of the physical object, not the physical object itself. Audi best illustrates this phenomenalist's position by inviting us to imagine that we perceive a book—its colour, shape, weight, and so on. This book retains its sensory properties when perceived. When it is unperceived, what is left of its properties? These properties are like layers of an onion. We imagine subtracting the book's sensory properties like we are stripping layer after layer from an onion until nothing remains. From this example, we conclude 'that the book is not only known by its properties,... but simply is a stable collection of sensory properties, a collection of visual, tactual, and other sense-data.'<sup>8</sup>

This version of phenomenism is attributed to George Berkeley. He used the term 'sensations', 'appearances', and 'ideas' to describe the phenomena of a perceptible object. He says in *Principles* 87.

Colour, figure, motion, extension and the like, considered only as many sensations in the mind, are perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived. But if they are looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p.42.



are we involved all in scepticism. We see only the appearances, and not the real qualities of things. [...] Things remaining the same, our ideas vary, and which of them, or even whether any of them represent the true quality really existing in the thing, it is out of our reach to determine. So that, for anything we know, all we see, hear, and feel, may be only phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with the real things, existing in *rerum natura*.”<sup>9</sup>

These sensations or appearances or ideas, according to Berkeley, cannot exist independently. Their existence depends on there being minds to have them. The material object must, if it is to exist at all, exist in some mind or minds. These beings who have minds are human beings and God. Armstrong says that Berkeley introduces this notion of the infinite mind of God to evade the difficulty created by his doctrine that the physical world is nothing more than our sense-impression of it.<sup>10</sup> Berkeley needs God who always perceives everything to make it logically possible for a particular physical object to exist, if nobody (human being) is having sense-impressions of that object. By introducing the notion of God, Berkeley comes into a new difficulty; He has to prove that God exists. But it is implausible to invite God when we analyse the existence of a physical object in its relation to human perception. It is clear that we do not speak about God when we say that there are objects in the world that nobody has perceived or will perceive.

This new difficulty is solved by the modern phenomenologists, such as John Stuart Mill. He says that material objects are “permanent possibilities of sensation.”<sup>11</sup> Here, Mill introduced the notion of ‘permanent possibilities of sensation’. These possibilities are conditional certainties, thus distinguishing them from mere vague possibilities which experience gives us no warrant for reckoning upon. For example, when we cut open an orange we are presented with certain sensory impressions, shapes, colours and textures with which we were not previously presented. However, we also firmly believe that those parts of the orange

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<sup>9</sup>Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.62.

<sup>10</sup>D.M. Armstrong, *Perception and the Physical World*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p.53.

<sup>11</sup>Laurence Bonjour, “Epistemological Problems of Perception”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2001 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/perception-episprob/>>.

were there even when we were not perceiving them. Our experience has so formed our habits of expectation that we not only form the conception of those things as existing when they were not being perceived but firmly believe them so to exist. These are things, parts of the orange, existing unperceived; they are possible sensations, which, through our expectations, have become conditional certainties.

It is important to note that, while we do not experience these permanent possibilities, they are not mere fictions. To the contrary, as just indicated, Mill carefully distinguishes between the permanent possibilities that constitute ordinary things from the mere or "vague" possibilities that we conjure up in our imagination. The acceptance of these possibilities is a matter of certainty, though, to be sure, a certainty that is conditional, based on inference from what we do actually experience. With regard to the ontology of ordinary objects, Mill is a phenomenalist, but among the parts of those things are un-experienced phenomena.<sup>12</sup>

Mill's "permanent possibilities of sensation" are what later philosophers such as Bertrand Russell would refer to as "un-sensed sensibilia." Mill's phenomenalism is similar to what they were to call "neutral monism." The later philosophers differ in the more sophisticated logical apparatus that they could bring to bear.

Ordinary things, physical objects, are clusters of sensations, actual and possible, that is, permanent in Mill's sense. These clusters are lawfully ordered; it is our knowledge of these laws or regularities that make the permanent sensations conditional certainties. The clusters include not only visual but also factual and other forms of sensation. Ideas of depth arise from associations of kinaesthetic sensations that arise as we move from here to there. At a certain point, here, there are visual sensations of colour and shape. At another point there are different visual sensations, perhaps the same colour, but a different shape — things are seen in perspective. Also at the other point that shape is presented not only visually but factually. Relative to the actual experience of the former the others are conditionally certain possibilities located at the appropriate distance.

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<sup>12</sup>Fred Wilson, "John Stuart Mill," *The Stanford*, URL= <[http:// plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/)>

When we perceive an orange we have certain visual sensations which through our expectations we refer to a collection that includes not only these actual sensations but also the permanent possibilities that are there but which we are not sensing. A perceiving is in effect an associational inference from given sensations to things taken as clusters of sensory parts, most of which are there as unperceived but permanent parts. Like all inferences, those inferences are associations of ideas. But these perceivings are so ingrained as to be in effect instantaneous. The ideas which are their parts fuse into a single whole. Through the chemistry of association the perceiving of an ordinary thing is an emergent unity, a new whole which has that thing as its cognitive or intentional object.

In experience we often find that whenever a given cluster of certified possibilities of sensation obtains, then a certain other cluster follows. In such a context through a further process of association our ideas of causation, power, and activity become connected not with sensations but with groups of possibilities of sensations. The perceptual object thus comes to be thought of as having the power of producing sensations. It becomes the permanent material source of the sensory data that we actually experience. As far as it goes, this inference is legitimate. But there is a tendency of the human mind to transform this material object into a noumenal object that thought somehow to exist apart from all sensory appearances. But it is precisely this tendency that Mill decries as illegitimate: this is his empiricism. "I assume only the tendency, but not the legitimacy of the tendency, to expand all the laws of our own experience to a sphere beyond our experience"<sup>13</sup>

By introducing this notion, Mill believes that the material objects are not only collections of sense-data which are actual in the past, present or future, but they are also possible. By his notion, he means that to say that certain sense-data are *possible* is to say, not just that it is *logically* possible for them to be experienced (which would apparently always be so as long as the description of them is not contradictory), but that they would in fact be experienced under certain specified circumstances (themselves specified in sense-datum terms); thus it would be clearer to speak of actual and *obtainable* sense-data.

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<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*

Without God, the modern phenomenalist can ascribe to objects a continuous existence, since it is all the time possible that they will be perceived. The possibility of perception is sufficient for the existence of a material object.<sup>14</sup>

There is a problem with this kind of doctrine. It gives unperceived objects nothing more than hypothetical existence, not real existence.<sup>15</sup> Berlin says that the phenomenalist replaced the categorical propositions about material objects with unfulfilled 'counter-factual' hypothetical about observers. The existence of material objects is dependent on sense-data and sense-data are dependent on the activity of observers 'so that the material object becomes analysed into a series of either purely hypothetical, i.e. non-existent, or at best, intermittent data occurring and disappearing as the observer observes and ceases to observe.'

There were material object in the past, for example, existed before human kind existed. At the time nobody or no mind perceived this past object, so there were not any sense-data of this object. But this object really existed, even though there were no sense-impression of it. Here, we can see that the existence of a physical object is one thing. And the presence of the absence, even hypothetically, of an observer, is another. We cannot say that the existence of a physical object is dependant on the existence of a perceiver, hypothetical or actual.

The existence of a physical object, for example, the computer at my bedroom, is a series of intermittent data. Because, I am not always observing it, usually, I leave the house at 9 am and I lock the door of my bedroom, nobody perceives my computer during my absence. I go home at 1 pm and I see my computer still exists. I touch it and turn it on. Did my computer really exist when I left the room? No. It did not exist, in the sense of common ordinary use of the existence. It stopped to exist or it did not continue to exist, if the phenomenalist had to be consistent with his doctrine of possibilities of perception. Because the unperceived object failed to fulfil the possibilities of having sense-data, these unfulfilled possibilities of sensations are mere potential existences. The phenomenalist is trying to reduce actual but unobserved physical objects

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<sup>14</sup>Dancy, *Berkeley: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.67-68.

<sup>15</sup>Isaiah Berlin, 'Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements.' *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 59, No. 235 (Jul., 1950), 289-312; Armstrong, *Perception*, p.53-56.

to mere unfulfilled possibilities of the existence of objects. He attempts to reduce unperceived physical objects to anything merely hypothetical.

#### **D. The Properties of a Physical Object**

Chisholm says that there are several terms used by phenomenologists for 'sensations', such as 'appearances', and 'sense-data'.<sup>16</sup> They also use various terms for describing sensations, such as 'thought-symbols' and 'rules of translation.' Despite of these variations of terms, Chisholm states that 'every form of phenomenism involves the thesis that anything we know about material things may be expressed in statements referring solely to appearances'. This version of phenomenism can be found in Ernst Mach and A. J. Ayer. Ernst Mach defined phenomenism by saying that 'all bodies are but thought-symbols for complexes of sensations'. This definition can be compared to what Ayer says about phenomenism, that is "What is being claimed is simply that the propositions which are ordinarily expressed by sentences which refer to material things could also be expressed by sentences which referred exclusively to sense-data."<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere, Ayer says that the position which the phenomenologist takes is that "every empirical statement about a physical object, whether it seems to refer to a scientific entity or to an object of the more familiar kind that we normally claim to perceive, is reducible to a statement, or set of statements, which refer exclusively to sense-data."<sup>18</sup> By this thesis, Ayer means that whenever we make a statement about a physical object we perceive by our sense organs, we do not refer to the physical object itself. Instead, we refer solely to our sense-data or to the appearances of that physical object. Ayer states that by committing to his thesis, the phenomenologist needs not to deny that there are observable entities, but when he talks about these observable entities in the end he talks about sense-data. In other words, while talking about a physical object the phenomenologist does not need these observable entities. All what he needs is sense-data. In short, according to Ayer, It is possible to translate a statement about a physical-object into some set of statements about sense-data.

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<sup>16</sup>Roderick M Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, 5<sup>th</sup> Printing, (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p.189.

<sup>17</sup>A.J. Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1940), p.232.

<sup>18</sup>Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.118.

This thesis can be described as follows; for example, when I perceive a physical object, *x*. This object *x* appears as *y* to me. This *y* is not identical to *x*. Therefore, I do not see *x* itself, but I see *y*. I believe what I see is *y*. When I make a report, my statement will refer to *y*, the appearance of *x*. Take this thing as a flower. Then, our ordinary statements about this thing—such as ‘This is a flower’, or ‘This flower is yellow’—are referring to the appearances of the flower or to sense-data, not to the flower itself.

This thesis is true, if we can refer exclusively to sense-data whenever we make any empirical statement about a physical object. It is true, if phenomenal statements are not dependent on physical descriptions of the observation conditions and conditions of perceiver. But, it is not true, this thesis is false, because it cannot accommodate the fact of perceptual relativity. This perceptual relativity usually occurs when there are different conditions of perceptual objects and the conditions of perceivers. The perceptual relativity shows us that any statement about a physical object does not entail any statements referring exclusively to appearances. We also have to refer to a physical object to make any statement about it. By referring solely to appearances we are unable to differentiate one object with another. Therefore, we are dependent on material objects whenever we make any statement about them. Chisholm says, “To calculate the appearances, it is necessary to know both the thing perceived and the observation conditions, for it is the thing perceived and the observation conditions working jointly which determine the way thing is to appear.”<sup>19</sup>

How can I differentiate, for example, (1) a red flower, (2) a green flower, and (3) a yellow flower, if these perceptual objects do not determine the way they appear to me? Imagine that I enter into a garden in the plain daylight. There are three flowers in front of me. I can see them because I am not blind. (1) The first flower looks red; (2) the second flower looks green; and (3) the third flower looks yellow. These flowers appear with different colours to one perceiver in the same daylight. Can I refer exclusively to their appearances or sense-data to report what I see? No, I cannot. The reason is that, these different appearances are partly caused by the nature of the objects themselves (flowers). They

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<sup>19</sup>Roderick M Chisholm, *op. cit.*, p.191.

would not have had these differences if they did not have any unique qualities. If they did not have any unique qualities, their appearances were determined solely by the light and my perceptual conditions, it is impossible, because they had different appearances to the same perceiver in the same daylight.

Armstrong says that there is a doctrine of phenomenalism which he calls as 'Phenomenalism of sensible qualities'.<sup>20</sup> This doctrine is attributed to Wilfrid Sellars. 'According to this view, to say that a certain physical object is red means that this object would look red to standard observers in standard conditions'. By standard conditions, Sellars means 'conditions in which things look what they are'.<sup>21</sup> He says that to have the concept of looking colours, such as red or green, we must be able to recognize that something looks red or green not only by looking to it, but also by knowing the conditions of our observations and conditions the light in which we perceive the object. He gives an example of somebody looking at an object in different conditions of lights. From this example, he concludes that things look what they are to standard observers in standard conditions.

The standard conditions of perception may be explained as the circumstances in which a certain physical object can be perceived by our senses organs, eyes for example. In order for us to be able to see an object, besides sound eyes, normally we need the lighting. We can illustrate these perceptual conditions as follows:

Supposed there is a duvet at my bedroom. I cannot see this duvet when there is no light in my bedroom at the dark night. When I turn on the light I see the duvet and it looks white. Based on the light in my bedroom and my perceptual conditions, I see the white duvet. And I believe that it is white. Usually, or every time I see the duvet under the light in my bedroom and my normal perceptual conditions, the duvet looks white. These usual or normal conditions can be regarded as what Sellars calls 'standard conditions'. Thus, this duvet is white or it would look white to standard observers in standard conditions.

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<sup>20</sup>D.M. Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp.51-2.

<sup>21</sup>Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* in *Minnesota Studies in The Philosophy of Science*, Vol. I: *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p.275.

There is a problem with the notion of 'standard conditions'. Armstrong says that the phrase 'standard conditions' 'involves the notion of *normal* and *usual* conditions.'<sup>22</sup> Is it a necessary truth that conditions in which the duvet in above example looks what it is? If it is a necessarily true, then those conditions are normal and usual conditions of perception. Under those conditions the duvet always looks white. Its real colour is white. In other words, it is a real white duvet.

If it is the case that those conditions are necessarily true, then Sellars committed to 'Phenomenalism or Representationalism' or it is a combination of phenomenalism of sensible qualities and a realistic view of physical objects.<sup>23</sup> This position cannot be called a 'Phenomenalism of sensible qualities' any more, because it states that we see an impression of the duvet, but that impression is caused by the real duvet. It is the real duvet, because it really exists: the existence of the duvet in the objective world allows light to reflect from it, which causes part of my sensory perception.

There is another problem with the notion of 'standard conditions'. If there are different conditions in which a physical object appears, then which conditions are considered as the standard ones? If we take only one sort of colour as the real colour of the physical object, among other colours that appear to us, then we will fall into favouritism. We can illustrate these different conditions as follows:

Under different lights the same physical object will have different colours. Suppose I bought a duvet with colour  $x1$  at the super store. The light  $z1$  at that store convinced me that the duvet had that colour. When I arrived at home, I put the duvet on my spring bed under the light  $z2$ , I saw the duvet turned to colour  $x2$ . At the night, getting to sleep I turn of the main light and I turn on the lamp with the light  $z3$ , the duvet then has colour  $x3$ .

If the colour of the duvet changes under different conditions, then which conditions are the standard ones in which the duvet looks what it is? I would argue that we cannot decide the standard conditions without falling into favouritism. Since the colour appears to us is partly depending upon the real physical object and the perceiver and the way

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<sup>22</sup>D.M. Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p.52.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.



the light falls on the physical object, to avoid favouritism, we are compelled to deny that there are any standard conditions at all.

### **E. Conclusion**

Having looked at the phenomenalism and its various doctrines and offered arguments against phenomenalism we can therefore conclude that the phenomenalist does not provide us with a meaningful and useful advancement in our understanding of experience and the world surrounding us. The phenomenalist claims that a physical world is able to continue in the absence of any observer because it is logically possible to be perceived and is clearly implausible. It does not continue to exist, but it ceases to exist as the observer ceases to perceive it. It starts to exist again when the observer resumes perceiving it.

Against the claim that the phenomenalist refers solely to appearances of a physical object when making a set of statements about the object, we have argued that this doctrine is not true since the appearances of physical objects are dependent on the nature of the object itself, the conditions of perceiver and the light falls into the object.

We have also argued that the notion of standard conditions put forward by the phenomenalist leads him into a favouritism. The phenomenalist takes the normal and usual conditions as the standard conditions in which physical objects look what they are. When he selected these conditions he was not consistent with his phenomenalism any more. He committed to representationalism.

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