

Realism vs. phenomenalism

Philosophy



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Realism versus phenomenalism Between phenomenologists and realists, there is a debate regarding the existence and perception of physical objects. Several philosophers such as Berkeley and Mill have come out to defend phenomenalism. Sense-data has featured in support of phenomenalism. Sense-data, which is used as an argument in support of the assertion that physical objects exist in the mind only, finds favor among phenomenologists. Therefore, the perception of objects is a response to some form of sensory stimuli. This is in line with Berkeley and Mill's argument that immediate perception is subject to different perspectives under different perceptual conditions, although the physical object under review does not change. It is also possible for people to perceive qualities under conditions whereby no physical object exists at all.

However, Barnes does not agree with this point of view and terms the sense-data argument a myth. According to Barnes, people have the capacity to perceive by seeing, tasting, smelling, feeling, and hearing; it is an indisputable fact. He proceeds to give three arguments that dispel the existence of sense data. For instance, he gives the example of a penny placed on a table. When observed from above, the penny appears circular, but when viewed from miles away, it appears elliptical.

The elliptical and circular appearances are not the aspects of the penny, but entities of some kind. Another example is a stick that appears straight in the air, but bent in water. This is an aspect of sense-data. The third argument Barnes presents is that people seem to see objects which do not exist in reality. For example, mirages that appear in the desert (Barnes 92). This suggests that what people observe in some cases are not physical entities. The non-physical entities are what phenomenologists refer to as sense-data.

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Barnes arguments favor realism. Realism asserts that the existence of physical objects is independent of the human mind; therefore, the universe exists independent of the human mind. Barnes argument is convincing as it follows the tenets of logical reasoning. Therefore, physical objects exist whether human beings perceive them or not.

Works Cited

Barnes, Winston H. F. The myth of sense-data. In the proceedings of Aristotelian society . 1945. 89-117. Print.