Chapter 5

Conclusion

Throughout our study in the preceding chapters, we have compared different aspects of the epistemology and ontology of Locke and Hume separately. In this concluding chapter, we present a holistic view of their comparative positions in these two interconnected fields. We have attempted to assess their views within their empiricist framework as well as from the broader perspective of scientific knowledge. In course of our study, we have expounded and examined the views of Locke and Hume in the light of the three main components of knowledge, viz. object of knowledge, subject of knowledge and the source of knowledge.

Starting with the object of knowledge, we have observed that Locke, coming under the profound influence of Descartes, the rationalist thinker, has adopted ‘ideas’ as the only direct entities of knowledge in his empiricist system. Accordingly, he has defined knowledge as the perception of the agreement or disagreement between ideas. Nevertheless, he has accepted the realities of mind-independent material substances, unitary selves and God. He has accounted for our knowledge of the external material world through Sensitive knowledge by introducing the complex ideas of
substance, modes and relations. With a view to explaining our knowledge of the self, God and the logical relations between ideas, he has also acknowledged Intuitive and Demonstrative knowledge in addition to Sensitive knowledge. On the contrary, for Hume, sense-experience is the sole criterion for knowing the existence of anything. Combining this with the Lockean premise that all that sense-experience provides us with are only 'simple ideas' (which Hume calls 'impressions'), he has drawn the logical conclusion that 'impressions and ideas' (or 'perceptions') are the sole existents of the world. In his view, in the absence of any empirical evidence, we have no logical justification for asserting the existence of external material substances, identical selves or God. Apart from empirical knowledge which concerns all matters of fact or existence, Hume has also taken into account rational knowledge, comprising intuition and demonstration, but for Hume, this kind of knowledge is thoroughly conceptual, dealing only with the relations of ideas.

In the process of our analysis of Locke's position, in this thesis, we have found that on the one hand, following Descartes, he has taken for granted the priority of mind. While on the other hand, with the intention of justifying scientific knowledge, he has accepted material substances along with their primary qualities. As an inevitable consequence of these two irreconcilable trends, his philosophy has landed in a number of self-contradictions. However, Locke, through his epistemology and ontology (specifically through his theories of matter and causation) has striven to bridge the gulf between idea and reality - to account for our knowledge of objective reality in and through the ideas. For example, he has defined the primary qualities of matter as 'utterly inseparable' from every
particle of matter. Thereby, he has implied that in the process of having the ideas of these qualities of matter, we come to know matter itself in terms of its universal properties. He has explained the differences in particular kinds of substances through their 'real essences' i.e., their internal material structures. This structure, being different in different kinds of objects, gives rise to a different set of qualities, thus distinguishing one kind from all others. Having held that if microscopes would have augmented the acuteness of our senses, we could have the ideas of the primary qualities of the minute material particles, he has entailed the knowability of the 'real essences' with the advancement of science and technology.

From our analysis of Hume's position, we have gathered that following Berkeley, he has embraced only the idealistic side of Locke's dualistic empiricism, to the complete exclusion of its materialistic side. As particulars alone exist for both Berkeley and Hume, they have rejected the general ideas of material substances and modes, as advocated by Locke. Hume has renounced both the essential properties of material substance, namely, its 'continuity' and 'mind-independence', on the ground that it is impossible for the senses to guarantee the existence of a thing either when it is not present to them, or as something different from the 'perceptions'. Our belief in external enduring material substances, in Hume's contention, is a creation of our imagination due to the operations of the laws of association through memory.

In order to validate scientific knowledge which consists in exploring the necessary causal connections of objects, Locke has endeavoured to establish the reality of causal connections through the concept of 'power'. Objects can be causally connected to each
other if and only if they persist through time - a fact which Locke has accepted. On the other hand, Hume's denial of enduring material substances has logically implied that there cannot be any objective causal connections.

According to Locke, it is by virtue of the 'powers' emanating from the specific internal structures of objects that they act or react to each other and thus, get causally interconnected. By interpreting this idea of 'power' as a 'simple idea' received both through our sensation and reflection, Locke has attempted to account for its reality. Moreover, according to Locke, all our ideas are generated in our mind by the minute particles of matter together with their primary qualities acting on our senses. Even though the ideas of secondary qualities do not have real qualities corresponding to them, like the ideas of primary qualities, yet they are produced by the 'powers' i.e., different configurations of the real qualities of the material particles. Thus, we notice that although Locke has conceded to the Cartesian priority of mind yet, unlike Descartes, he has clearly accepted the causal connection between mind and matter.

Hume has denied the Lockean concept of 'power' because what sense-perception reveals to us, in his view, is not any 'power' or the manner of its execution, but only constant conjunction or regular succession of two events. As a result, he claims, the mind gets habituated to expect one event from the appearance of the other. Hence, Hume has reduced both external material substances and their causal connections to feelings of the mind. In the case of the former, in his view, the mind confuses the interrupted impressions for a continuous object, while in case of the latter, the mind extends
its own feeling of determination onto the objects. Now, Locke has also maintained that it is only a mental assurance and not certain knowledge that we receive through our senses about the existence of material objects. However, the cardinal difference between the two thinkers lies in the fact that while according to Locke, the mental assurance is produced by our senses being actually affected by external material objects, in Hume's opinion, our belief in such objects is illusory.

In this context, it has been noted that although Hume has declared our beliefs in external material substances as well as in their necessary causal connections as irrational, he has held that in consideration of their utility in our everyday life, we cannot reject them. We believe in them because their denial will make all experience useless and inference impossible. Hume, therefore, thinks that it is because of their practical necessity that we assent to them. This shows the trend of pragmatism in Hume. We have traced the spark of this pragmatic note even in Locke's philosophy. He, too, has maintained that the range of certain knowledge being very limited, we cannot live by it alone; we have to rely on probability for our survival on the earth.

When we look at the positions of Locke and Hume from the viewpoint of scientific knowledge regarding the object of knowledge, we observe that both of them have overlooked the fact that what they call the direct objects of knowledge (i.e., 'simple ideas' of Locke and 'impressions' of Hume) are actually the first impacts of material objects on our consciousness. Scientific knowledge, however, penetrates deeper and explores the universal characters and the inter-relations of the objects through abstract thinking in
terms of concepts. Emphasising this aspect of knowledge involving objective reality as well as its conceptualisation, Suman Gupta holds,

"It is the reflection of the dynamic laws of objective reality ... through a conceptual apparatus, in human consciousness that constitutes knowledge." ¹

It is the objective world which, interacting with our body, produces the subjective images in our mind. Locke, we have noticed, has recognised material objects as the causes of our 'ideas', but as knowledge for him consists only in the theoretical activities of the mind, both the material world and the interaction with it have remained beyond the purview of knowledge. Hume has abstracted the 'impressions' completely from their original link with the body as well as the material world. James Noxon has brought out this point in the following terms:

"In the main philosophical tradition from Descartes to the phenomenologists of the present day, epistemologists have isolated the data of consciousness from their necessary physical conditions in the external world and in the body." ²

Locke, with the intention of making knowledge possible, has accepted an identical self as the subject of knowledge, because knowledge, being a process continuing through time, necessarily requires a continuous subject. As Hume's task consists not in

showing the possibility of knowledge but in exhibiting that Lockean empiricism cannot make us aware of anything except mental fleeting ‘impressions’, he has rejected the reality of a simple unitary self.

In order to account for our knowledge of the identity of the self, Locke has defined it in terms of consciousness alone. His reason is that as consciousness implies self-consciousness, the self becomes aware of its existence directly or intuitively through every conscious activity. Again, as the self becomes conscious of its past actions and thoughts through memory, due to the same principle of self-consciousness, it becomes aware of its continuity through time.

Another main reason of Locke for interpreting self-identity in terms of consciousness is its moral importance which he has stressed while discussing personal identity. He has emphasised that a person is held responsible for his actions only as long as he performs them consciously. Hence, identity of a person, in his view, consists neither in bodily nor in mental continuity, but only in his consciousness.

Hume has denied the existence of any abiding self. All that we discover by looking inward, in his view, are only ‘perceptions’ in quick succession, and due to the association of our ideas, we mistake these successive ‘perceptions’ for a continuous self. We have marked that Hume has also taken recourse to ‘memory’ for explaining the continuity of the self. However, what distinguishes his theory from that of Locke is that Locke believes in the reality of a continuous self and has attempted to establish it through memory. Hume, on the other hand, has resorted to ‘memory’ in
order to explain what he considers to be a fictitious belief.

Hume's position with regard to the self is a controversial issue, because on it depends the settlement of the question as to whether he should be regarded as a realist or a subjective idealist. Weighing the views on both sides of the issue, we have endeavoured to interpret him as a subjective idealist. The ground of our argument is that the very existence of 'impressions and ideas' as 'perceptions' logically depend upon a perceiving subject. Moreover, all the mental processes involved in his theories of matter, mind or causal connection are inexplicable without an integrated self. However, the self, the existence of which is thus implied in Hume's philosophical system is only a conscious self, and not a concrete human being, as it is with Locke also.

From the angle of scientific knowledge, consciousness is only one aspect of man's total being, which Locke and Hume have abstracted. As consciousness cannot exist independently of a biological as well as socio-historical basis, Suman Gupta holds,

"man, as a subject of knowledge, is not an abstraction
- a pure consciousness of Descartes - but a concrete socio-historical being . . . "  

What we intend to imply is that consciousness, the prized possession of man which distinguishes him from the rest of the animals, develops in a socio-historical setting only, where he can communicate with others, share the experiences of others and avail himself of the accumulated knowledge of generations.

---

In course of our study, we have noted that both Locke and Hume make use of the association of ideas, but while in Hume's epistemology and ontology, it plays an indispensable role, it is not so with Locke's philosophy. Hume has denied all enduring substances and it is in terms of the association of ideas that he has tried to explain all our fundamental beliefs in matter, mind and causal necessity. On the other hand, Locke has only introduced it in order to explain our erroneous judgments which, in his view, originate from wrong association of ideas.

With regard to the source of knowledge, we have noticed points of both agreement and disagreement between Locke and Hume. Though both of them have claimed sense-experience to be the sole source of our knowledge, in actual practice, Locke has recognised the mutual contributions of experience and reason in the acquisition of knowledge. As far as our knowledge of the material world is concerned, he has taken into account various mental operations through which complex ideas are formed.

Again, our Intuitive and Demonstrative knowledge, according to Locke, are not confined to the relations of ideas alone, because it is through intuition that we know the existence of the self while it is through demonstration that we know the existence of God. Even in the case of purely rational knowledge concerning the logical relations between abstract ideas, Locke is of the opinion that the ideas are ultimately derived from experience. For example, the mathematical ideas of unity, equality, space, etc. in his view, are first received through experience.

Hume, in contrast, has completely separated the region of experience from the region of reason, thus leaving no scope for in-
teraction between the two. As far as the existence of anything is concerned, he is of the view that sense experience is the only source at our disposal, and reason has nothing to do there. Similarly, in the case of rational knowledge of the relations of ideas, there is no involvement of existence.

Both Locke and Hume have agreed that we cannot achieve logical certainty through sense-experience. However, Locke has maintained that the mental assurance that our simple ideas provide about the existence of the material world takes sensitive knowledge beyond doubt and makes it eligible for being called 'knowledge'. Hume, on the contrary, has not considered our sensible awareness of any matter of fact or existence as knowledge, because experience, being confined to the past and present only, yields nothing but probability. In Hume's view, whatever falls short of logical certainty cannot be brought under the category of knowledge.

Even though Hume has conceded that logical certainty can be attained through demonstrative reasoning in the field of the relations of ideas, he has implied in the Enquiries, that such knowledge is only verbal, or tautologous. As the 'relations' are already contained in the ideas, they do not provide any new information. In the Treatise, he has brought the faculty of reason into question. As human beings are not infallible, he argues that there is a possibility of error even with regard to rational knowledge. Hume has thus resolved both empirical and rational knowledge into mere probability. Locke in contrast, has regarded mathematical knowledge as both absolutely certain and instructive. As mathematics is based on a precise set of symbols which can be recorded and checked at every step, according to Locke, there is hardly any chance of error
in it. Moreover, the mathematical relations, in his view, are not always contained in the definitions of the terms involved, hence it is informative also.

In spite of all these disagreements between Locke and Hume with regard to the source of knowledge, we have demonstrated a close affinity of their thought as far as their division of knowledge is concerned. Although there is no apparent similarity between Hume's two-fold division into Matters of Fact and Relations of Ideas, and Locke's four-fold division in terms of 'Co-existence', 'Real Existence', 'Identity or diversity' and 'Relations', we have shown that the basis of division is the same in the case of both. Hume's Matters of Fact concern the existence of things, while his Relations of Ideas have nothing to do with existence. Locke's four-fold division can also be seen in the same light. Whereas 'Co-existence' and 'Real Existence' involve existence, 'Identity or diversity' and 'Relations' are concerned only with the logical relations between ideas.

When we examine the role of 'experience' as the source of knowledge in the philosophies of Locke and Hume, we observe that by 'experience' they have meant only the passive reception of 'ideas' ('impressions'). In the scientific sense of the term, 'experience' signifies man's practical activities. In this sense, 'experience' includes both sensation and abstraction, practice and theory as well as induction and deduction. Even the sensory images are formed on the basis of one's experience and historically accumulated information. Similarly, abstraction takes shape only under the influence of the regular interaction with objective reality. In view of the fact that the subject of knowledge stands for pure
consciousness only for Locke, and just a ‘bundle of perceptions’ for Hume, it is evident that in their philosophies, there is no scope of active encounter of the subject with the object. Thus, we have observed that none of the three aspects of knowledge - subject, object and source - has been interpreted by Locke and Hume in the sense in which knowledge is possible.

As a result, Locke has not succeeded in justifying our knowledge of the objective world, while Hume’s empiricism has only led the way to scepticism. However, their controversies centreing around different epistemological and ontological aspects have clarified the issues, thereby enhancing our understanding of ‘knowledge’ and ‘being’.

There are other positive sides of their epistemology and ontology which we have taken notice of in our comparative study. Locke, through his onslaught on innatism has protested against authoritarianism. He has laid stress on the capacity of the individual for acquiring knowledge. Locke, through his emphasis on both matter and mind, has inspired the development of the two opposite schools of thought, namely, materialism and idealism. With regard to Hume, we have observed that his philosophy contains the germs of many new lines of thought. Different aspects of his epistemology and ontology have initiated the development of many new trends. For example, we may cite associationism, agnosticism and pragmatism. Even the twentieth century philosophy of Logical Positivism has its roots in Humean Philosophy. Hence, we may conclude that the epistemology and ontology of Locke and Hume have contributed greatly to the continuity of philosophical heritage and development of new philosophical thoughts.