CHAPTER-III
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A.J. AYER'S PHENOMENALISM

In this chapter, we propose to discuss A.J. Ayer's (1910-1989) phenomenalism which states that all material object statements can be reduced to sense-data statements without residue. We propose to say that his phenomenalism is necessarily related to his ontology and epistemology. In order to achieve our objective, we will discuss first Ayer's claims regarding the subject matter, method and his aim of philosophy. Prof. Suman Gupta states that Ayer's main objectives are: "Language as the only valid subject matter of philosophy, analysis as the only legitimate method of philosophy" and "... clarification of concepts and propositions in ordinary language and in science" as "the only function of philosophy." \(^1\)

Contrary to the claims made by Ayer, we will try to show that even though he claims that his method and subject matter consist of a neutral analysis of language, but this analysis is based on certain ontological presuppositions. We will attempt to prove that Ayer can not escape from solipsism and scepticism because of his ontological and epistemological frame work. We will try to show that even though he claims to deny an
ontology, his analysis itself is based on certain ontological presuppositions. In this connection Prof. Suman Gupta states: "Irrespective of the professed objectives of a philosopher, his views on language and meaning are logically bound up with his world view i.e. a particular ontology and epistemology."\(^2\) She further says "No philosophy can be a pure analysis of linguistic concepts. All philosophers, whether openly or in a disguised form, contain a world view i.e. an epistemology and ontology."\(^3\)

Our contention, in the course of this thesis, will be to show that the doctrine of phenomenalism rests upon the premises which are objectively false and it is in glaring contradiction to actual scientific proof. Not only this, though Ayer claims that his empiricism differs from the traditional empiricism, in the final analysis his logical positivism is no way different from the idealistic empiricism of Berkeley and Hume, which in turn is the continuation of Lockean system. We propose to say that Ayer, in his phenomenalism, misconceives the function of philosophy by reducing it to be mere analysis of language, which does not yield any knowledge of the objective reality. In other words, his phenomenalism deprives philosophy of any epistemological content. Moreover, Ayer takes for granted as if

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 115.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 115.
language is a ready-made thing without taking its development into considerations. He does not take into account that language is a social product through the practical activity of man.

In this chapter we will try to disclose the ontological and epistemological aspects of Ayer's philosophy in terms of what a philosopher claims to be doing and what he actually does, as we have stated earlier. Further we will also try to show that Ayer's philosophy also is a continuation of the mental side of Cartesian dualism.

We propose to say also that the influence of empiricism, especially that of Hume, is the most striking on Ayer. This dependence upon Hume's procedure is evident when he, in the very beginning of the "Language, Truth and Logic", writes "The views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume."4 He stresses this point again when he writes in 'Logical Positivism In Perspective' that "... Apart from my later works, I sometimes think of Language, Truth and Logic itself as being no more than Hume in modern dress."5 Like Hume, Ayer reduces the whole material world into

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‘sense-contents’ or ‘sense-data’, i.e. material objects are nothing but logical constructions out of actual and possible sense-data. This position has been advocated in *Language, Truth and Logic* and *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* but he deviates slightly in *The Problems of Knowledge*. But he claims that his empiricism is different from Hume because of its incorporation of the ‘logical techniques’. Stressing this point he writes: “Their (logical positivists) originality lay in their attempt to make it logically rigorous and in their use for the purpose of a developed and sophisticated logical technique.”6 This shows that Logical Positivism adds a logical rigour to the traditional empiricism of Hume. Here we propose to say that “Logical positivists are not only continuing Hume’s tradition but have exactly copied his philosophy and have stated in their pseudo-logical terminology.”7 To quote Suman Gupta: “It is this approach (idealistic, empiricist pluralism) of Hume which the linguistic philosophers want to present in their own framework. They use a logical and linguistic garb in order to vindicate their idealistic-pluralistic world view. Like Berkeley and Hume they also claim that their position is strictly based upon empirical evidence.”8

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In order to understand his phenomenalism, let's first see what, according to Ayer, is the function of philosophy. Ayer states that the function of philosophy is the clarification of concepts of ordinary language. Explaining this he writes: “But wherein that case does the philosopher come in? One thing he can do, of course, is to act as a sort of policeman, seeing that nobody trespasses into metaphysics. In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein seemed to think that this was all that he can do ... The Vienna Circle, however, was not content with quite so negative a conception of philosophy as this. They thought that the philosopher still had a useful function to perform in analyzing and clarifying the concepts which figure in the everyday, and also in the scientific use of language, but chiefly in the scientific use, as this was held to be the more important. Philosophy was to merge with science. There would not be a set of philosophical statements embedded among the scientific ones, but the scientific statements themselves would be refined by logical analysis.”

As for as Ayer's views regarding the nature and method of philosophy are concerned, for Ayer the activity of philosophizing is essentially analytic. According to him, all those who are commonly called philosophers have actually been engaged in carrying out analysis. He holds “It can be shown that the majority of those are communally supposed to

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have been great philosophers were primarily not metaphysicians but analysts.\textsuperscript{10} Accordingly, he considers his British empiricist predecessors (Locke, Berkeley and Hume) as great. In fact Ayer’s philosophy “is a continuation of the empiricist movement started by Locke in the seventeenth century and carried on by Berkeley and Hume.”\textsuperscript{11} For Ayer “The ultimate constituent of reality are not material objects but sense-data. Matter for him is only a logical construction and the aim of philosophical activity is to reduce it to sense-contents or sense-data.”\textsuperscript{12}

In fact, the purpose of his reductionist thesis (phenomenalism) is to deny the existence of material objects. Though the linguistic philosophers claim that they are dealing with the language, in fact, “All philosophers, whether openly or in a disguised form, contain a world view and the world view of a specific philosophy is conditioned by the objective reality.”\textsuperscript{13} All this we will discuss in the course of our thesis.

Regarding Hume, Ayer says that it is a well known fact that he is opposed to metaphysics “Of Hume, we may say not merely that he was not

in practice a metaphysician, but that he explicitly rejected metaphysics.\textsuperscript{14}

In this way Ayer tries to explain that the activity of analysis is a common characteristic of British empiricists. It follows that the philosopher does not or should not, as has been commonly thought to do, analyse ‘facts’ or ‘notions’ or even ‘things’. Therefore, Ayer discards all empirical facts as irrelevant to philosophy. For Ayer, a philosopher should be concerned only with the definitions of his own use. This is clear from his statement when he writes: “It may be suggested, therefore, that if I wish to give a strict account of my present visual experience, I must take a more cautious statement. I must say not that I see the cigarette case, if this to carry the implication that there is a cigarette case there, but only that it seems to me that I am seeing it.” And Ayer further explains “The next step, continuing with our example, is to convert the statement ‘It now seems to me that I see a cigarette case’ into ‘I am now seeing a seeming-cigarette case’. And then seeming cigarette case, which lives only in my present experience, is an example of sense-datum.”\textsuperscript{15}

Ayer distinguishes philosophy from other sciences and proclaims that statements of philosophy are of a different nature. According to him, the questions such as whether the material objects are real, or, whether


\textsuperscript{15} p. 96.
objects continue to exist at times when they are not perceived, can not be decided on the basis of scientific information. He holds that these are not the questions which would be settled by experimentation but can be resolved on the basis of language. Then the question arises what exactly this activity of philosophical analysis consists of?

Regarding the nature of philosophical analysis, Ayer holds that the definitions which philosophy provides are not 'explicit definitions' but 'definitions in use'. Ayer states that definitions in use show "how the sentences in which it (symbol) significantly occurs can be translated into equivalent sentence, which contain neither the definitiendum itself, nor any of its synonyms."\(^{16}\) Thus, holds Ayer, that every sentence which consists of a symbolic expression "can be translated into a sentence which does not contain any such expression, but does contain a sub-sentence asserting that one and only one object possess a certain property, or else, that no one object possess a certain property."\(^ {17}\) According to Ayer, 'the round square does not exist' is equivalent to 'No one thing that can be both square and round. According to this analysis of Ayer, a statement of an equivalent is, if correct, a tautology and if incorrect, a contradiction.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 61.
In an attempt to define ambiguous symbol, Ayer states: "That a symbol is constituted by signs which are identical with one another in their sensible form and in their significance, and that a sign is a sense-content, or a series of sense-contents, which is used to convey literal meaning, is not to say that a symbol is a collection or system of sense-contents."18 From the above statement of Ayer we can deduce that he is heading for a 'reductive' analysis. It shows that, according to Ayer, a symbol is reducible to 'signs' which are identical in their sensible form. To quote Ayer, "We may explain the nature of logical constructions by saying that the introduction of the symbols which denote logical constructions is a device which enables us to state complicated propositions about the elements of these constructions in a relatively simple form."19

This kind of 'reductive analysis', according to Ayer, is equally applicable to material object statements. That is to say, the statements about material objects can be translated without residue into the statements about sense-contents. Ayer presupposes "The problem of giving an actual rule for translating sentences about a material thing into sentence about sense-contents, which may be called the problem of the reduction of

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18 Ibid., p. 63.
19 Ibid., p. 63.
material things to sense-contents, is the main philosophical part of the traditional problem of perception".20

He states that the reason for adopting this reductive analysis is "that certain types of entity are philosophically suspect, and the purpose is to show that references to entities are nevertheless innocuous; they can be constructed as disguised references to entities which are relatively less problematic."21 It implies that the propositions expressing facts of ordinary perceptual knowledge contain such expressions as 'table' 'chair' etc. but such objects and their properties and relations are not simple, and so are not the ultimate constituents of knowledge. This is, precisely, what Ayer means by 'some entities are problematic'. And when the propositions containing such expressions are analysed, they will be expressed in terms of ultimate constituents. In other words, ordinary unanalysed knowledge seems to be about such things as tables, chairs etc. but analysis will make clear the ultimate constituents of knowledge. In this way, Ayer identifies philosophy with analysis and claims that "the only positive contribution that philosophy can make to knowledge is in the field of analysis."22

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20 Ibid., p. 64.

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In fact, the chief object of Ayer’s phenomenalism, in identifying philosophy with analysis, is to dismiss the aspects related to objective material world. If all that a philosopher can do is the logical analysis of concepts of every day language and science then what kind of knowledge do we acquire about the objective material reality. Thus Ayer’s phenomenalism leads us away from the path of knowledge to the path of empty arguments about world or concepts. Castigating the method of analysis in philosophy, Maurice Cornforth illustrates how far this method of analysis is useful in the acquisition of knowledge. He poses a question—If philosophical analysis “is not a means of advancing our knowledge, then in the sense intended in the question, it is not a useful method in philosophy.”23 According to Maurice Cornforth, the analysis adopted by analytic philosophers explains that the elements of facts displayed in a new level analysis are ‘more ultimate than those which were displayed before the analysis took place’.24 This is to say that the ordinary products of our common sense and scientific knowledge are not clear as to the ultimate character of the facts to which they refer. Regarding the phenomenalistic interpretation of the material world, Cornforth holds that it is ‘misinterpretation of the character of knowledge’.25 Cornforth asserts that the main aim of this analysis is to distort the whole picture of reality by

24 Ibid., p. 95.
merely concentrating on the logic of language as if language is a ready-made thing. Cornforth holds that philosophy as a method "is to unravel the general laws of motion of all real process, to elucidate the general principles of all real change and development and to explain by what means men are able to gain accurate knowledge of world in which they live."26

The above account of Maurice Cornforth brings our clearly the distinction between scientific and pseudo-scientific or metaphysical philosophy of Ayer. In our opinion, philosophy is a world outlook with it's own specific content and form, a world outlook which offers practical grounds for its principles and conclusions. "A genuine philosophy, through the most general concepts and categories of cognition, is concerned with understanding the natural and social reality with a view to bring about, through cooperative practical activity, a better world for man to live in."27 But Ayer is far from unanimous on this point. He believes that there is no integral philosophical system and that a philosopher creates his own system. In the exposition of Ayer's views on philosophy, we have already shown that Ayer's main contention, in introducing 'analysis' as a method of philosophy, is to prevent philosopher from trespassing into science and metaphysics and to make philosophy as an independent branch of

25 Ibid., p. 110.
26 Ibid., p. 118.
knowledge. In fact, this attitude of Ayer towards philosophy is one sided and erroneous in the context of a modern scientific conception of philosophy.

Ayer claims to get rid of metaphysics from the sphere of philosophy to make philosophy a genuine branch of knowledge. However, his position results in abstraction because of its confinement to a specific problem i.e. analysis of language (which is speculative and has no links with the empirical world). There is also a form of metaphysics which regards things and phenomena as fixed and immutable, independent of one another. Thus his position is (because these are mental units) pluralistic. Like his world view, the conception of language in Ayer is equally an abstraction. But “Language is, no doubt, an aspect of philosophy because all knowledge is assimilated, recorded and communicated through language. But certainly ... this is not the sole function of philosophy.”28 It emerges in the course of the development of social production, of which it is an indispensable aspect- a means of coordinating activity. In this way Ayer’s philosophy is not a theory which explains world in its interconnections but a kind of activity which analyzes the concepts of everyday language. Ayer’s philosophy has a practical purpose but no objective inquiry. This analysis

28 Ibid., p. 288.
of Ayer deprives philosophy of any cognitive activity of real objective material world, and confines it to the subjective analysis of language.

The main purpose of introducing analysis as a method, as it is claimed by Ayer, is to clarify the concepts of language and to prevent the philosopher from trespassing into the world of metaphysics. Accordingly, he conceives that one of the main functions of his philosophical activity is to draw a distinction between what is on the one hand verifiable and scientific and hence meaningful, and what on the other hand is not verifiable, unscientific and hence not meaningful. Here his term scientific is being assumed that verification must always at least terminate in empirical observation or sense-experience.

Ayer defines the verification principle of meaning as: “a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful. A simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition in it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable.” \(^{29}\) Ayer makes a distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition of all meaningful sentences. He says that the validity of analytic proposition “depends solely on the definition of the symbols it contains.” \(^{30}\) He holds that the truths of logic and mathematics,


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 78.
which are analytic propositions, are tautologous because "...they are independent of experience in the sense that they do not owe their validity to empirical verification."31 Thus Ayer concludes that these propositions are necessarily true. He writes: "Once we have apprehended them, we see that they are necessarily true, that they hold good for every conceivable instance."32

On the other hand, Ayer says, that the synthetic propositions are dependent on sense-experience. He writes: "a proposition is synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience."33 According to him, these propositions are not universal and necessary. He states: ".... a proposition whose validity depends upon experience can not be seen to be necessarily and universally true."34 As a result, Ayer concludes that synthetic propositions are highly probable.

Thus we find that according to Ayer, analytic propositions are independent of experience and they already constitute the necessary truths, therefore it logically follows that the principle of verifiability as a criterion of meaning or literal significance is applicable only to the synthetic propositions. But the question is- how does Ayer relate the validity of

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31 Ibid., p.75.
32 Ibid., p.75.
33 Ibid., p. 78
34 Ibid., p.75
synthetic propositions to sense-experience? To answer this question, Ayer uses the criterion of verification.

This implies that a proposition or a statement is literally meaningful if it is empirically verifiable. According to Ayer a proposition is empirically verifiable and only if it is tested by empirical observations. In this connection, Ayer himself writes in the context of the verification principle of meaning that: "... roughly stated it lays it down that the meaning of a statement is determined by the way in which it can be verified; where it is being verified consists in its being tested by empirical observations."35

This implies that Ayer emphasizes an the factual significance. He writes: "We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express....that is, if he knows what observation would lead him under certain conditions to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false."36

Thus Ayer deduces 'literal significance' from factual significance. Consequently he claims that a proposition is literally meaningful, if it is

factually verifiable. This is because, according to Ayer, the factual contents of a literally meaningful proposition consists only of the 'sense-data' or 'sense-contents'.

Now before we give an analysis of his factual contents, which he arrives at through the verification principle, let us see how Ayer makes room within his own framework of the verification principle for:

1. the propositions
2. statements about the past and
3. metaphysical propositions

In an attempt to accommodate such propositions, Ayer proposes four senses of verifiability. In this connection he observes two distinctions. Firstly, between verifiability in practice and verifiability in principle and secondly, between strong (conclusive) and weak (probabilistic) verification. In each case he claims to choose what he regards to be the literal alternative.

Thus, in first distinction, Ayer claims to acknowledge the significance of the proposition that there are mountains on the other side of the moon. He writes: "no rocket has yet been invented which would enable
me to go and look on the other side of the moon, so that I am unable to
decide the matter by actual observation. But I do know what observations
would decide it for me, if as is theoretically conceivable, it were once in a
position to make them. And therefore I say that the proposition is
verifiable in principle if not in practice and is accordingly significant."

We may state here that since now people have landed on moon, so
the proposition that there are mountains on the other side of moon has been
verifiable even in practice. Consequently we may replace Ayer's example
of moon by that of 'Saturn'.

Regarding the distinction between strong and weak sense of
verifiability Ayer writes that "A proposition is verifiable in strong sense of
the term if and only if its truth could be conclusively established in
experience. But it is verifiable in weak sense if it is possible for experience
to render it probable."

In the context of this distinction, Ayer argues that: "if we adopt
conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance.... our argument will
prove too much" He holds that in this sense of verification, many

37 Ibid., p. 36.
38 Ibid., p. 37.
39 Ibid., p. 37.
significant empirical statements can not, even in principle be conclusively validated or confuted. As a result he uses 'verification' in the weak sense. According to this sense of verifiability, Ayer says that factual significance depends not on conclusive verifiability but merely on the possibility of favorable or unfavorable evidence.

In this context he writes: "Accordingly we fall on the weaker sense of the verification. We say that the question must be asked about any.... statement about fact is not, would any observation make its truth of falsehood logically certain? But simple would any observation be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood and it is only if a negative answer is given to this second question that we conclude that the statement under consideration is non-sensical."\textsuperscript{40}

Thus on the basis of the weak sense of verifiability, Ayer holds that most of the above mentioned general propositions will be significant because he holds that we can not at least find evidence for or against them.

But what can be verified through the principle of the verification?

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 38.
We will try to show that one can verify only the ‘abstract’ objects of sensations. These ‘objects of sensations’, according to him, are ‘sense contents’ or ‘sense data’. Here, the question that arises is that what is the ontological status of these ‘sense-contents’ or ‘sense-data’. What are they-subjective or objective? Ayer holds that these sense data are ‘neutral’. Thus he claims to hold a ‘neutral monist’ position. Neutral Monist position maintains that sense data are neither mental nor materiel entities but both matter and mind are ‘logical constructs’ out of them. In this connection he writes: “We replace the word “idea” by the neutral word “sense-content” which we shall use to refer to the immediate data not merely of “outer” but also of “introspective” sensation”41 But the ontological status of Ayer’s sensed-data have been interpreted to be the same as that of ‘ideas’ of Berkeley and the impressions of Hume. In this context Suman Gupta writes: “What Berkeley called ‘ideas’ Hume called ‘impressions’ ... and Ayer called them ‘sense-contents’ or ‘sense-data’”42

We will try to show that irrespective of Ayer’s claims, he is not a neutral monist but a subjective philosopher. Michael Williams also criticizes Ayer by saying: “Neutral monism is surely a metaphysical doctrine, if any is, even by Ayer’s own standards. It is hardly analytic .... It

41 Ibid., p. 53.
is curious to note that Ayer gives as an example of a senseless metaphysical statement the claim that the universe consists of experience, while himself holding that minds and material objects are alike logical construction out of 'neutral' sense-contents, as if semantic assent could turn metaphysical nonsense into philosophical truth."43 Let's now expound and examine Ayer's concept of 'sense content' or 'sense data' because in his phenomenalism, it is the sense-data only to which he reduces all material object statements.

Ayer introduces sense-datum language mainly to uphold his phenomenalism which holds that the statements about the material objects can be translated into statements about sense-data. We will see, in the course of this thesis, that the verification principle of Ayer, in any attempted formulation, rests upon the possibility of having sense-experience. The question before Ayer is how to construct such experience. Thus the principle of verification is connected with the problem of perception. Ayer holds that knowledge is based on immediate data of sense-experience. He writes: "Sense data are the only objects of which, in sense perception, we are immediately aware."44 Then what is it that we really perceive when we perceive material things? Are the things we

perceive real? Do we have any good reason for believing in a world outside ourselves? In this way, positivists claim, the problem of perception has been directed to give an account of the relationship of sense-experience and material objects. They hold that the relationship between sense-experience and material objects is only logical, i.e. a matter of showing how our statements about material objects can be shown to be equivalent to the statements about sense-experience. Ayer says that we can have a direct, certain and uninferred acquaintance only with our sense-experience, with our sense-data. Consequently, if our believes about objects are to have any secure foundation, it must consist in what we are directly aware of, namely, sense-data. These sense-data are regarded as transitory, discrete and unconnected elements of sense-experience. According to Ayer, material object is nothing but a 'logical construction' out of actual and possible sense-data. This phenomenalistic analysis of perception has been advocated by Ayer in 'Language, Truth and Logic'(1935) and 'The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge'(1945). However, Ayer's position results in contradiction because of the acceptance of sense-data which, according to Ayer, are the only objects given in sense-experience. It has been discussed in the introductory chapter how for Hume, nothing but

‘impressions’ could be the objects of sense-experience. It is this position of Hume which Ayer moulded in his own logical framework.

The term ‘sense-data’ has been used by different philosophers in different senses. However, their main contention is to show that in perception what we immediately know is a ‘sense-datum’ and not a physical object. Bertrand Russell introduced the term sense data for the first time in his book *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) in connection with ‘Appearance and Reality’ where he writes as:

“Let us give a name ‘sense data’ to the things that are immediately known in sensation, such as colours, sounds, smells, hardness, roughness and so on. We shall give the name sensation to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation of colour, but the colour is that of which we are immediately aware of, and the awareness itself is sensation.”

It is clear from the above account that, according to Russell, sense-data are objects of sensations. Same view is shared by Ayer when he writes: “The definition of sense-data that ... philosophers commonly give us that they are objects of which, in sense perception one is directly aware. But this they must be understood to mean, not that only those objects which

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someone is in fact directly aware are to be called sense-data; but rather that the word sense-data is to stand for any object of which it is conceivable that someone should be directly aware.\textsuperscript{46}

Like Hume, Ayer reduces the concept of material object to sense-datum. Ayer calls it translation of material object sentences into sense-datum sentences. According to Ayer, "There is a general agreement among the philosophers to make use of the term 'sense-datum' or some equivalent term, that what we immediately experience is always a sense-datum and never a material thing."\textsuperscript{47} In support of his analysis of sense data, Ayer uses the 'Argument from illusion. Let's us now discuss this argument in order to see how, on the basis of this argument, he claims that sense data are the only realities.\textsuperscript{48}

Ayer says that appearances of material things change from one observer to the other; and even to the same observer under different conditions they differ. He states: "This argument, as it is ordinarily stated, is based on the fact that material things may present different appearances to different observers, or to the same observer in different conditions, and

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 3.
that the character of these appearances is to some extent causally
determined by the state of the conditions and observer.\(^{49}\)

In his attempt to exemplify this argument, he takes an instance of
coin which looks circular from one point of view and may look elliptical
from another; or a stick which normally appears straight but bent when
seen in water. He says that these illusions are not the peculiarity of visual
appearances but also occur in the 'domains of other senses'. Ayer says that
in the case of such appearances, one of the appearances is veridical and the
others are delusive. But even in the case of delusive or non-veridical
appearances, we still see something. This something is what he calls
'sense-datum'. To quote Ayer: "Nevertheless, even in the case where what
we see is not the real quality of a material thing, it is supposed that we are
still seeing something; and that it is convenient to give this a name. And it
is for this purpose that philosophers have recourse to the term 'sense
datum'."\(^{50}\)

On the basis of the acceptance of 'sense content' or the 'sense data',
as the immediate objects of sensations, Ayer tries to abolish the distinction
between illusion and reality. According to him reality is nothing but

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 3.
\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 4.
appearance under normal conditions. Thus he tries to show that even the delusive appearances have a definite content.

According to him, sense data are not part of a material thing but are the objects of which we are directly aware in the perception. In the final analysis, he concludes that: "it is the character of our perception that makes it necessary for us to say that what we are directly experiencing is not a material thing but a sense-datum."\(^{51}\) Trying to draw a distinction between material things and sense-data, Ayer holds: "It is held to be characteristic of material things that their existence and their essential properties are independent of any particular observer ... whether they are observed by one person or another, or not observed at all. But this, it is argued, has been shown not to be true of the objects we immediately experience. And so the conclusion is reached that what we immediately experience is in no case a material thing. According to this way of reasoning if some perceptions are rightly held to be veridical, and others delusive, it is because of the different relations in which their objects stand to material things, and it is a philosophical problem to discover what these relations are. We may be allowed to have indirect knowledge of the properties of material things. But this knowledge, it is held, must be obtained through the medium of

sense-data, since they are the only objects of which, in sense perception, we are immediately aware.\footnote{Ibid., pp.10-11.}

In fact, from the above statement we can deduce that, if only the sense-data are the objects of sense experience, then we can not see through the sense-data to material reality which lies beyond them. Then it results in the denial of material reality as such. This position ends in subjective idealism. In other words, the sense experience consisting of the occurrence of sense-data is the ultimate basis from which the whole concept of knowledge is derived.

In fact the assumption behind the argument from illusion is that in order to have knowledge of the world, we start from sense-experience, that things must be essentially private, and then somehow move from them to knowledge of a public world independent of ourselves. This implies that any adequate understanding of sense perception must involve an understanding of how this is done. This implies, in turn, an account of the concept of perception, which takes perception to be based on certain basic experiences (sense-data). In these experiences we are given knowledge on which our knowledge of physical world is somehow based. For the objects of these perceptions are sense-data, then these sense-data are themselves

\footnote{Ibid., pp.10-11.}
more basic than the physical objects with which they are constructed. Thus, the position of Ayer involves both an ontological and epistemological claim of sense-data; both, a claim about what fundamentally exists and a claim about what is the basic object of knowledge.\textsuperscript{53}

We will discuss Ayer's sense data further but now let's revert back to his concept of delusive and veridical one. Ayer gives further arguments to support his denial of any distinction between appearance and reality and his acceptance of everything that is given in experience as sense data. He further claims that there is no qualitative distinction between appearance and reality. In this context he argues through the amputated legs of a person. He says: "When people whose legs have been amputated continue to feel pressure upon them, their experience is qualitatively the same as if pressure really were being exerted upon their legs."\textsuperscript{54} This is because, according to Ayer, that had there been any distinction between our veridical and illusory perceptions, we would have been able to know it through our sense experience. But since through our sense experience we can know only the sense data, therefore, Ayer holds that we can never know such a distinction. In this connection he says: "We should expect to be able to tell from the


intrinsic character of a perception whether it was a perception of a sense-datum or of a material thing. But this is not possible...”\textsuperscript{55}

Thus through the ‘argument from the illusion’ Ayer claims to arrive at his ‘observational ontology’ of the sense data.\textsuperscript{56} Within his Semitic framework, he claims that these sense data are not factual entities but they are linguistic concepts. In this connection Prof. Suman Gupta says that: “Ayer says that these sense data are ‘private’ and ‘transitory’, because being the object of direct awareness, their existence logically dependent on one’s own perception.”\textsuperscript{57}

These sense-data can be known without going farther than what the experience strictly warrants. In other words, it can be said that these sense-data are free of all the interpretations, inferences and interrelations and in this way they are independent of our activities. On this point, it appears that sense-data are the only objects which we are immediately aware of. In other words, it means that through sense experience, we can verify only the sense-data. But if only the sense data are directly verifiable, then what is the status of material objects?

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 6.
In philosophy, this problem is directly linked with the theory of perception. We find that mainly there are three theories of perception. They are:

1. The Naive Realist theory of perception which states that we can directly perceive only the material thing.

2. The causal theory of perception which states that we can directly perceive ideas and that the material objects are the causes of these ideas. This is the theory which Locke advocates which we have dealt with in Chapter II.

3. The phenomenalist theory of perception which states that we can directly perceive the sense data and that the material objects are logical constructions out of these sense data.

Ayer accepts phenomenalist theory of perception in the context of material objects. In this connection he writes: "We know that it must be possible to define material things in terms of sense-contents, because it is only by the occurrence of certain sense-contents that the existence of any material thing can ever be in the least degree verified." But material things continue to exist even when they are not perceived. Then how can
we 'construct' a material thing from the sense data, which exist only then they are perceived by us?

In order to solve this problem and to interpret the material thing, Ayer talks about 'possible' sense-data in his ontological framework. His introduction of the sense-data is similar to that of Hume. As we have already stated earlier, Hume introduces 'ideas' besides 'impressions' in his ontology, to interpret the material things. According to Ayer, these possible entities become actual sense-data only when certain conditions are fulfilled. Here he talks about four such conditions. These also constitute his 'laws of sensory association' which, he says, give rise to our conception of material world. These conditions may be stated as: "first the relation of resemblance between individual sense data, secondly, the comparative stability of the contexts in which these resemblent sense data occur. Thirdly, the fact that the occurrence of such sense data is systematically repeatable and fourthly, the dependence of this repetition upon the movements of the observer."

Here we find that Ayer uses 'laws of sensory association' in his attempt to construct the objects in the material world. Thus it becomes

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evident that Ayer, through his phenomenalism, tries to interpret material things in terms of actual and possible sense-data. Therefore the whole purpose of the phenomenalism seems to be the denial of the material substance. Not only this, Ayer tries to deny the mental substance also.

Therefore, Ayer’s verification principle of meaning as a criterion for truth introduces actual and possible sense-data and at last it denies both the material and spiritual substance. This is Ayer’s phenomenalistic interpretation of the material objects and the self. Now let us see Ayer’s phenomenalistic analysis of the material objects and self in a more detailed manner.

Ayer defines phenomenalism as ‘a theory of perception’ according to which “physical objects are logical constructions out of sense-data.”60 Through phenomenalism, he defines the material things in terms of sense-data or sense-contents. He writes: “We know that it must be possible to define material things in terms of sense contents, because it is only by the occurrence of certain sense contents that the existence of any material thing can ever be in the least degree verified. And thus we see that we have not

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to inquire whether a phenomenalist theory of perception or some sort of
theory is correct, but only what form of phenomenalist theory is correct."\(^{61}\)

From the above argument it follows that the existence of material
things is dependent on the occurrence of certain sense data. But Ayer
argues that the term ‘material things’ is not equivalent to any term or set of
terms that stand for a species of sense-data. He writes: "...the term
material thing is not synonymous with any term or set of terms that stand
for species of sense-data."\(^{62}\) This is because the ontological status of
material things and the sense-data is not the same. Here he makes an effort
to explain the relation between material thing and sense-data to solve the
problem. Ayer says that the relation between material thing and the sense-
data is not factual but a linguistic relationship. And thus "it is logically
necessary that any situation that in any degree establishes the existence of a
material thing should also establish the existence of sense-datum."\(^{63}\)

He tries to explain this position by the example of a match box and
writes: "If, for example, it is the fact that I am seeing a match box.... then it
follows that .....I am seeing sense-datum."\(^{64}\) Thus he writes: "Thus when I

1971, p. 229.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 230.
say, truly as it happens, that I am now perceiving a match box, part of
which I am saying is that I am sensing sense data of a certain kind, but only
part. I am saying that and something more. But what more? ....and the
phenomenalist answer to it is that the more that I am saying is that further
sense data of the appropriate sort would, in the appropriate conditions, be
obtainable."65

And this happens because in Ayer’s ontology sense-data are the only
observable entities. And since it is impossible to make a transition from the
observed to the unobserved, it is only through the occurrence of ‘further
sense-data still’ that the existence of a material thing can be verified. In
other words Ayer holds that the statement about the material things are
equivalent to statements about sense-data. He writes; “if this is correct then
it seems to follow that the statement that I am perceiving this match box, or
whatever other physical objects may be taken as an example, must be
equivalent to some set of statements about sense-data”66

And this is ‘logical construction’ according to Ayer. But here he
argues that it doesn’t mean that physical objects are literally composed of
sense-data but, according to him, it only means that statements about

65 Ibid., p. 132.
66 Ibid., p. 132
physical objects are reducible without residue into actual and possible sense-data. In his own words; "It means simply that statements about physical objects are somehow reducible to statements about sense-data, or, as it is sometimes put, that to say anything about a physical objects is to say something though not necessarily the same thing about sense-data".\(^{67}\)

He says that a logical construction is a "linguistic assertion to the effect that the symbol 'table' is definable in terms of certain symbols which stand for sense-contents, not explicitly, but in use. And this ..... is tantamount to saying that sentences which contain the symbol table ..... can all be translated into sentences of the same language which do not contain the symbol or any of its synonyms, but do contain certain symbols which stand for sense-contents, a fact which may be loosely expressed by saying that to say something about a table is always to say something about sense-contents".\(^ {68}\)

But Ayer holds that this claim can evidently not be upheld if we confine ourselves only to actual sense-data. This is because the sense-data do not exist continuously whereas material objects are supposed to exist continuously. As a result Ayer introduces possible sense-data and the

\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 133.

hypothetical propositions within its ontological framework. Here he again takes the example of match box and writes: "This match box is not continuously perceived either by me or by anybody else. And yet at times when no one is perceiving it, that is, when there are no sense data that are directly relevant to its existence, the match box may still exist."69

Ayer says that it is not correct to say that a given physical object exists in a certain place and throughout a period of time and during that period of time no one was sensing any such sense data. That would constitute direct evidence for the existence of that physical object in question. He says: "If the sense datum language is to do the work that phenomenalists require of it, it must permit us to refer to possible sense data. And what thus means is that some at least of the statement about the sense data that are supposed to yield the equivalence of statement about physical objects will have to be hypothetical."70 According to Ayer, the hypothetical statements state "not that any sense data have occurred but that in certain specific conditions, certain sense data could occur."71

Thus it is through the hypothetical conditions that Ayer deduces the existence of the material things. This is because, he argues: "The fact that
we do constantly perceive them in certain conditions give us a good inductive ground for believing, at times when we are not perceiving them, that we should be perceiving them if these conditions were fulfilled.” On the basis of the above statement it follows that within Ayer’s ontological framework, it is neither necessary nor an altogether sufficient condition for the existence of a material thing that it should be actually perceived, whereas for the existence of a sense datum, he holds that it is both a necessary as well as sufficient condition that it should be actually sensed.

Thus Ayer claims that no statement about material things can be conclusively verified. He says: “....however much favorable evidence there may be for it, it is still always conceivable that further evidence will show it to have been false all along.” This implies that statements about physical things are indefinite. And from the above mentioned premise, Ayer deduces that statements about material things can not be equivalent to the finite set of statements about sense-data. In other words, he holds that material object statements can not be translated into statements about sense-data. He writes: “The reason is that all statements about physical objects are indefinite....consequently, the comparatively definite statements that one makes about sense data can not be exact translations of the

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72 Ibid., p. 135.
73 Ibid., p. 135.
indefinite statements that one makes about physical objects.”74 Thus Ayer deviates from his phenomenalistic position in *The Problems of Knowledge* in which he holds that reduction of ‘material object’ statements into ‘sense-datum’ statements is not possible because no finite number of sense-datum statements can ever be equivalent to a material object statement, since the number of possible appearances which an object may manifest are unlimited in number.75 He writes: “... the phenomenalist programme cannot be carried through. Statements about physical objects are not formally translatable into statements about sense-data.”76 Nevertheless, Ayer’s position on sense-data remains same.

Let’s now see his phenomenalistic analysis of the self.

Ayer tries to reduce self to sense experience. He writes: “We know that a self, if it is not to be treated as a metaphysical entity, must be held to be a logical construction out of the sense-experiences. It is, in fact, a logical construction out of sense-experiences which constitute the actual and possible sense-history of a self.”77 He further holds that sense experiences out of which the notion of the self is derived, must belong to the sense history of the same self. “For any two sense-experiences to

74 Ibid., p. 140.
76 Ibid., p. 122.
belong to the sense-history of the same self it is necessary and sufficient that they should contain organic sense-contents which are elements of the same body. But, as it is impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body, the elation of “belonging to the sense-history of the same self” turns out to be a symmetrical and transitive relation. And from the fact that the relation of belonging to the sense-history of the same self as symmetrical and transitive, it follows necessarily that the series of sense-experiences which constitute the sense-histories of different selves can not have any member in common. And this is tantamount to saying that it is logically impossible for a sense-experience to belong to the sense-history of more than a single self."

Thus by limiting the various sense experiences to a single self, Ayer claims to arrive at the ‘privacy’ of experience. He writes: “I can have direct knowledge of my own experience and that I can not have direct knowledge of any one else’s....the point is that if the statement which expresses what I claim to know refers only to my personal experience, I am in the best possible position to decide its truth. If I judge it to be true, it is on the basis of an experience which verifies it.”

78 Ibid., p. 125.
He argues that if it is granted that others beside myself come to know about my experience, their knowledge will not be direct. He writes: “For it can be found only upon experience of their own, and however strongly these experiences favor the truth of the statement about my experience, they do not establish it conclusively.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus Ayer concludes: “The reason why I can not directly know the experiences of another person is simply that I can not have them.”\textsuperscript{81}

On the basis of Ayer’s arguments, it follows that for him, only ‘private’ experiences are directly verifiable. And so one can know only such experiences. In this connection he further argues that generally people claim that they have perceived the same object but it is not so. His opinion is that their perception may be qualitatively alike but numerically different in the sense that the object perceived by them is certainly a public object. He says: “There is a good and familiar sense in which two different people be said to perceive the same object, here the same sound, feel the same feeling and from this it follows that they do have the same experience. But, it will be answered, even though they may perceive the same object...they do not sense the same sense data. The sense data which they respectively sense may be qualitatively similar but they can not be numerically the

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 194.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 194.
This is because, according to him: "The sense data are made private by definition; they are characterized in such a way that the statement that one person has another's sense data describe no possible situation."  

Thus it follows, according to Ayer, that various experiences that each person has while perceiving an object are private to one's own self. In this context he writes: "It is maintained .... that two different persons, perceiving the same physical object is really a matter of each one's sensing his own sense data, though they may be similar, they can not be the same. And so we reach the philosophical contention that all one's experiences are private to oneself." Ayer's position is, thus, that of solipsism. Now, here the question arises that if all the experiences are private, then,

1. How do we know the existence of other people and 
2. How can we have the knowledge of the other minds?

Let's first discuss Ayer's analysis of other people's existence. He writes: "And just as I must define material things and my own self in terms of their empirical manifestations, so I must define other people in terms of

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82 Ibid., p. 194.
83 Ibid., p. 194.

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their empirical manifestation— that is, in terms of the behavior of their bodies, and ultimately in terms of sense contents."  

Thus in conformity with his verification principle of meaning and the resultant ontology of sense-data or sense-contents, Ayer tries to make the existence of the people meaningful by reducing them to their bodily behavior which he interprets in terms of sense-contents. He writes: "And thus I find that I have as good a reason to believe in the existence of other people as I have to believe in the existence of material things. For in each case my hypothesis is verified by the occurrence in my sense-history of the appropriate series of sense-contents."  

It clearly proves that one can never know anything except his own sense-contents because "each of us has to define the contents of another man's sense experience in terms of what he can himself observe." But the question is that how does these various sense contents or the experiences explain the identity of a person?  

To answer this question, Ayer makes a 'general criterion' of personal identity. He writes: "Indeed it would seem that there have to be

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86 Ibid., p. 130.
87 Ibid., p. 132.
such criteria if our talk of persons is to have any meaning at all." For this reason, Ayer advocates a practical approach. He asks how do we succeed in recognizing people? What makes me say that a man whom I can now see is the same man whom I had seen a week ago. This is because he looks the same. This seems to imply, according to Ayer, that there is a fairly close resemblance between the appearance of this man and the appearance of the man I saw last week. This constitutes Ayer’s ‘practical method of identification’. Through this method Ayer attempts to convey not only the personal identity of his own self but also the bodily identity of the person seen.

Ayer holds this method to be a practical and clear way of establishing the personal identity. He writes: “The fact that people’s physical characteristics tend to be distinctive and that many constant features commonly persist through out what is only a gradual process of changes; makes this a practical method of identification. As a criterion, it is, however. neither necessary nor sufficient.” In this way Ayer tries to establish the identity of a person through the identity of his body. He says: “In this sense ....the identity of a person is founded on the identity of the body.”

89 Ibid., p. 188.
90 Ibid., p. 189.
Thus Ayer differs from his original phenomenalistic interpretation of the self in the context of personal identity of a person. He says: “And if the sense data have to be defined in terms of persons, and the identity if a person is itself derived from the identity of their bodies, then, the analysis of physical identity in terms of relations between sense data would appear to create a vicious circle. Failing a wholly different account of personal identity, the only way of escape would be to deny that sense datum have to be defined in terms of persons....”\(^{91}\)

Let’s now deal with Ayer’s analysis of one’s knowledge of the other minds; because it is closely associated with his analysis of the existence of other people.

Ayer’s analysis of the knowledge of other minds logically follows from his rejection of the phenomenalistic analysis of the existence of the other people. Ayer argues that one can distinguish his own thoughts, feelings and their outward manifestations but there is no way for him to distinguish other’s thoughts, feelings and their outward manifestations. In this connection he writes: “There can be no empirical grounds for inferring the occurring of the behaviors, on the part of other people, which one is not actually observing, in as much as it is logically conceivable that one should

\(^{91}\) Ibid., p. 190.
observe it, but there can not, on this view, be any empirical grounds for inferring the existence of anything 'behind' their behavior of which it might be supposed to be an external manifestation."\(^{92}\)

Therefore on the basis of the physical manifestations of the other people’s behavior, Ayer holds that we can not infer the existence of anything that is not given in one’s own sense contents. This is because of his verification principle which is the back bone of Ayer’s epistemology and which is restricted only to appearances.

Ayer holds that telepathy can not solve the problem of other minds. Telepathy is considered as extra-sensory perception through which one can know other’s minds. He says: “what is strange about telepathy is that a message is transmitted, apparently without the employment of any physical means.”\(^{93}\) He holds that even the telepathic experiences are private to one’s own self. He says that the person who practices telepathy can know what is going on in other’s mind but still can not share his thoughts or feelings. He writes: “....to be informed of another’s feelings is not to share it, even if it were to share it; there would be exactly the same grounds here


as in the case of any other’s shared feelings for saying that there were two feeling and not one.”\textsuperscript{94}

Thus in Ayer’s ontological framework, sharing other’s mental phenomena does not take place because even individual retains his privacy of experience. Now let’s see Ayer’s ‘argument form analogy’.

Argument from analogy assumes that the way we note the connections between our state of mind and their outward manifestations, in the same way we also notice outward expressions in others. He writes: “By analogy with what I have observed of other people and what I have learnt about myself; I infer that some are with the relevant sort of nervous system, when operated on in such and such conditions, will show signs of pain, signs that I may well be able to detect if I watch him closely enough. But then I want to go further and argue from the existence of these signs to the existence of his actual feeling of pain ... since it is not my feeling, I can not detect.”\textsuperscript{95}

He further explains this argument through the example of pain resulting from extracting a tooth. He says that when I am having an

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 196.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 202.
infected tooth, I go to a dentist and get it removed. In such a condition I maintain that by feeling of pain, when dentist operates on me, will provide me with a reason for believing that my friends feels pain when the dentist operates on him. But Ayer argues that the pain experienced by me and the pain experienced by my friend can not be same. It is only because I experienced the pain, that I believe that my friend too is in pain.

He further argues that an argument from analogy is valid, only when there is a possibility of establishing the existence of other minds. Therefore he expresses the futility of this argument. He writes: "An important consequence of this argument, if it is sound, is that we must give up the argument from analogy on which many people have relied as a justification for believing in the existence of other minds."\(^96\)

Thus we see that even the argument from analogy can not justify the existence of other minds in Ayer's ontology. This is mainly because his verification principle entertains only such knowledge as is given in sense experience. It can be said, in other words, that there can be no knowledge, even in principle, of any knowledge of other's minds. We can know what

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is happening in other’s mind by reducing their mental happenings to their perceptible behavior.

Ayer’s denial of material things as well as the self and consequently his phenomenalist analysis of the material things and the self into the actual and possible sense data or sense contents seems to give rise to two independent logical consequences within his philosophical framework. Firstly, this implies a denial of the category of substance and consequently a denial of the dynamic and causally interconnected objective material reality. As a result there is no scope of certain and universal knowledge within his ontological framework. Therefore, he claims that synthetic propositions are all probable and in support of his view he writes: “All propositions which have a factual content can best be a probable hypothesis.”97 This has been supported by him further when he writes “No general proposition referring to a matter of fact can ever be shown to be necessarily and universally true. It can at best be a probable hypothesis. And this ... applies not only to general propositions, but to all propositions which have a factual content. They can none of them ever become logically certain.”98

98 Ibid., p. 72.
The second consequence, which logically follows from his empirical manifestation of the material things and the self, in terms of observable sense data, is a subsequent denial of super-sensible reality. Thus Ayer rejects metaphysics, understood as a study of super-sensible reality. But the term metaphysics may be understood in three different senses. According to Suman Gupta three senses of the concept of metaphysics are as follows:

1. Metaphysics as a world view.
2. Metaphysics as a study of super-sensible reality
3. Metaphysics understood as an abstract system.  

According to Prof. Gupta, the concept of metaphysics as world view has been derived from Aristotle's definition of metaphysics. She holds that metaphysics for Aristotle is the first philosophy, which deals with the theoretical aspect of reality i.e. the being, its components, causes and origin. According to her, in this sense, there is much in common between metaphysics on the one hand and science on the other. For, she says: "Both science and philosophy are not concerned with particular things or processes but with the general laws of development of nature and society."100 She further writes: "According to this view the basic difference between science and metaphysics consists in the fact that whereas science

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100 Ibid., p. 40.
is confined only to one aspect of reality, metaphysics ...provides a holistic view of the world.”\textsuperscript{101} Thus she concludes that metaphysics as a world view not only accepts the existence of objective reality but also includes man’s capacity to transfer the world.

Since Ayer denies the objective reality, it follows, according to above view, that he denies metaphysics as a world view.

According to second sense, metaphysics is interpreted as a study of the super sensible reality that transcends the limits of sensory observations. According to this sense, says Prof. Suman Gupta, that “metaphysics is completely divorced from the world of sense experience and practical life.”\textsuperscript{102}

We find that Ayer uses the verification of meaning to reject this sense of metaphysics as being ‘meaningless’ or ‘non-sensical’. In this connection he writes: “No statement which refers to a reality, transcending the limits of all possible sense experience can possibly have any literal significance.”\textsuperscript{103} He further says: “Metaphysical sentences ...express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypotheses. And as tautologies and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 41.
\end{itemize}
empirical hypothesis form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical."\(^{104}\)

According to the third sense, put forward by Prof. Suman Gupta, metaphysics is understood as an abstract system. She writes: "Metaphysics understood in this sense means- a system where an aspect of reality is abstracted from its totality and is assigned an independent existence."\(^{105}\) She maintains that the second and third connotations of the concept metaphysics are interrelated. She states: "Those who assert the existence of super sensible reality are metaphysicians in the third sense as well because they abstract consciousness in form of God or soul etc. from this objective material totality and posit it in the super sensible world."\(^{106}\) According to her, since Ayer denies objective material reality and accepts only abstract sense-data, therefore he is also a metaphysician in the third sense.

We, now, will discuss Ayer's entire philosophy as presented in this chapter. We will attempt to do it both, within the stream of analytic philosophy and outside the stream of analytic philosophy. Here we will

\(^{104}\) Ibid., p 41.


\(^{106}\) Ibid., p. 42.
examine the verification principle of meaning as well as his
phenomenalism.

Since the verification principle of meaning is based on the division
of the analytic and synthetic propositions, and if it is shown that the
distinction is invalid, then the verification principle would no longer hold
valid. This is precisely what Quine does and rejects the verification
principle. Let's first examine this division. We find that the classification
of all meaningful propositions into analytic and synthetic is not acceptable
to all philosophers. Within the analytical circle, W.E. Quine cites the most
notable objection against this division between the analytic and the
synthetic in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'. Quine asserts that if two terms
are alike in meaning then their identity is analytic. He classifies analytic
statements into two categories. The first one he calls 'Logically true
propositions' for example no unmarried man is married and maintains that
such a proposition remains true under any re interpretation of the term
'man' and 'married'. The other class, according to him, consists of
statements which can be converted into logically true statements by
providing 'synonyms for synonyms' for example, 'no bachelor is married'
can be converted into logically true statement by providing synonyms for
synonyms i.e. by providing 'unmarried man' for its synonym 'bachelor'.
But the question arises what is synonym? Quine states that in order to

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determine synonymity, one has to depend upon empirical facts. As a result he holds that the distinction between the analytic and synthetic is very ‘superficial’ in scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{107}

Michale Williams considers this distinction to be metaphysically loaded. In ‘Fact, Science and Morality’ he writes: “Ayer’s version of the distinction connected as it is with the analytic/synthetic distinction and the linguistic theory of necessary truth is clearly metaphysically loaded. The supposed elimination of metaphysics in favor of analysis seems as though it may well depend on substantial metaphysical commitments.”\textsuperscript{108}

Outside the realm of analytic philosophy, Prof. Suman Gupta also disagrees with this distinction. She writes: “... the water tight distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition is not a valid one.”\textsuperscript{109} According to her “knowledge is a synthesis of the linguistic-conceptual apparatus and experience. And experience both the theoretical and the practical aspects of knowledge. Thus language and logic can not be divorced from reality.”\textsuperscript{110} As opposed to Ayer and other ‘logical

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 310.
positivists’, she holds that validity of mathematics and logic ‘lies in the applicability to the objective world’ and ‘to grasp the dynamic reality’. In scientific knowledge the distinction between analytic and synthetic is equally invalid because: “experience includes both the theoretical and practical aspects of knowledge. The language and logic can not be divorced from reality. The validity of mathematics lies in its applicability to the objective world. Similarly, logic through its laws grasps the dynamic reality. In fact knowledge, logic and reality, theory and practice, abstract and concrete, form and content, deductive and inductive, universal and particular are all directly interrelated.”

Let us now assess Ayer’s verification principle. As we have seen, Ayer uses the weak sense of verifiability in his epistemology. It has been objected by the philosophers that this sense of the term tends to make all the propositions as meaningful, irrespective of their status. Ayer claims to solve this problem by introducing the term ‘observation statements’ in place of experimental proposition and by providing a recursive definition of verifiability. According to this definition, he holds, “a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation statement or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation statement, it entails at least one observation statement which is not deducible from these premises and ....

111 Ibid., p. 310.
statement is indirectly verifiable if it satisfies the following conditions:- first, that in conjunction with certain other premises, it entails one or more directly verifiable statements which are not deducible from these other premises alone: and secondly, that these other premises do not include any statement that is not either analytic or directly verifiable, or capable of being independently established as indirectly verifiable. And I can now reformulate the principle of verification as requiring of a literally meaningful statement, which is not analytic, that it should be either directly or indirectly verifiable in the forgoing sense."  

Ayer's verification principle of meaning has been interpreted as 'metaphysical' by Michael Williams. He writes in this context: "The most serious objection is that, in itself, the principle of verification is utterly vacuous. To say that a sentence is significant only if it is verifiable is to say nothing whatever until we spell out what we understand by verification. The principle thus derives all its critical force from the radical empiricism Ayer reads into it and in his radical empiricism that pushes him into metaphysics."  

John Wisdom also questions the status of the verification principle; whether it is an empirical proposition or a tautology? He holds that the verification principle has been formulated in such a way that its purpose and nature is not clear. It is neither empirically verifiable nor a tautology. Thus he concludes that it is one of the metaphysical utterances. He writes: "Well, shall we accept the verification principle? What is it to accept it? When people bring out with a dashing air of the words, the meaning of the statement is.....the method of verification, like one who says the value of a thing is ...its power of exchange, in what sort of way are they using words? What is the general nature of their theory? The answer is- it is a metaphysical theory."¹¹⁴

John Wisdom further interprets the criterion of literal significance as 'imposing a very stringent criterion of significance on assertive discourse'. He refers to Ayer's criterion as a 'factual significance' and writes: "It assumes that a person's evaluation of his observational evidence is always rational. It assumes that some one has actually verified (or falsified) a proposition if his observation lead him to accept or reject it. And this assumption is clearly false."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 465.
On the other hand Anthony Quinton's arguments are directed against the view that the statements about sense-data are basic, since they are directly given in experience; whereas the statements about material objects are inferred or constructed from sense-datum statements. He argues that to describe a material object statement to be certain will depend largely upon the conditions in which it is presented to our senses and what is known about it. The familiarity and stability of an object, holds Quinton, will determine whether a description of that particular experience is certain or not. Quinton, thus, arrives at a conclusion that one can not be said to perceive anything unless one is in a position to describe it. Nevertheless, Quinton contends, one may commit a mistake in describing a particular experience because of loose correlation of language and the object in question, on account of unfavorable conditions of observation, but this source of mistake does not substantiate a theory of acquaintance and to show that one category is logically superior to another. Quinton argues that the relationship between objects and experience (sense-experience) is not logical but causal. In this connection he writes: "Our beliefs about objects are based on experience in such a way that requires not justification but explanation. Experiences are not my reason for my beliefs about objects- to have an experience is to know or believe anything

which could be a reason in this sense—though they may be the reasons for my believing what I do from the point of view of psychologist.”117

In this context, outside the realm of analytic philosophy, Prof. Suman Gupta brings out the ‘solipsistic content’ in the verification principle and writes that “The above account of verifiability implies that words in our language can not refer to anything but the content of our sensory experience”118 On the other hand she claims that “knowledge is always the knowledge of objective reality and ‘sensing our sensation’ being an abstraction, is not possible.”119

Thus she concludes that the Verification Principle of meaning is based upon the ‘misinterpretation of such concepts as knowledge, sense experience and verification and that logical positivists interpret these concepts from a solipsistic point of view.”120

In ‘Replies’ in ‘Perception and Identity’ Ayer writes: “We failed to make it clear, even to ourselves, whether the method of verification had to lie within the resources of the person who was interpreting the proposition

117 Ibid., p. 83.
119 Ibid., p. 311.
120 Ibid., p. 311.
or to speak more accurately, the sentence which was designed to express it....could be constructed in a more impersonal and therefore liberal fashion."\[121\]

The misinterpretation of the concept of verification is also pointed out by Maurice Cornforth. He writes: "...they assumed that what verifies a proposition is not the activity or the whole process of verification but simply the sense data which result from it."\[122\]

These are some of the grave objections which the principle of verification can not meet. Besides these objections, it appears to us that the principle of verification also dismisses the statements of social activity as meaningless. Apart from sensory experience, verification also includes practical activity which involves interaction between an person and his surroundings. It seems to us that a person verifying a proposition equally performs an action or a series of actions. For example, when a scientist performs as experiment, he does not limit himself to mere sense experience. His experimentation also involves reasoning, observation, practical activity and formation of hypothesis. Thus the scientist goes beyond the sensations and the appearances. But for Ayer and the logical positivists, verification


means only to have certain sort of sensations which can not go beyond appearances. Thus principle of verification as propounded by Ayer seems to misinterpret the concept of knowledge, experience etc. Knowledge for Ayer consists in sensing one's own sensations. Ayer's position thus appears to be 'solipsistic'.

Thus we find that the verification principle of Ayer is the result of an abstraction from the totality of human activities. Verification in the first place is a practical activity, i.e. it involves some interaction between a person and his surroundings, in which man consciously alters his environment in some way. When any proposition is verified, and is put to the test of experience, the method of verification always involves that the person who is verifying the proposition, performs some action, or a series of actions, in which he arranges and alters things, in order to test the validity of the proposition he is interested in. Thus the man verifies his ideas about the world, not by observation but by acting upon it. We verify whether our ideas about the world are right or wrong by changing the world in accordance with our ideas of it. Verification is, therefore, a practical activity usually carried on by a number of people in cooperation that is the social result of their joint activity.
In our view, verification is concerned with testing our knowledge of the objects and properties of the world. But for Ayer, to verify means to have some sort of sensation. The principle of verification of Ayer misinterprets the concepts such as knowledge and experience. According to Ayer, knowledge is acquired through sensing our own sensations. This position of Ayer leads to solipsism. Apart from this, in the last analysis, the verification principle of Ayer rests on the process to which all sense given objects are related. This shows that knowledge for Ayer is restricted to appearances of the things and objects.

Ayer's thesis of phenomenalism has been criticized by Isaiah Berlin. He says that phenomenalism makes 'actualities depend upon possibilities'. As a result, Berlin claims, any analysis of a material object statement would be long and therefore can not be carried out in principle. He further holds that it is logically impossible to reduce the categorical statements about material objects to the hypothetical statements about sense data. He writes: "A categorical existential material object sentence as 'the table is next door' or 'there is a table next door' is used at the very least to describe something which is occurring or being characterized.....and being characterized or occurring, unless the contrary is specifically stated or implied, not intermittently but continuously: for to say something is
Berlin holds that the phenomenalistic analysis of unperceived material objects in terms of sense data results in a series of hypothetical statements. He claims that even if the two sets of statements entail each other, they are not identical in meaning. Thus he concludes that phenomenalistic analysis of material object statement can not be carried out.

Outside the framework of linguistic philosophy, Ayer's position has been interpreted as a subjective-idealistic and pluralist one. In this context of phenomenalism Prof. Suman Gupta writes: "We find that the denial of material substance and the assertion of sense contents, entails a subjective-idealist position. And furthermore, since the sense contents, for Ayer, are discrete and transitory, his position also embodies pluralism. In short, ontologically speaking, Ayer's position is subjective-idealist pluralism."124 In this context she brings out the contradiction between what Ayer claims to be doing and what he actually does. She writes: "...here we find that contrary to claims of Ayer that philosophy is concerned with the analysis of

language, through his philosophical analysis, he propounded a 'subjective idealist pluralist world view.'

Similarly Michael Williams says: "Whatever Ayer says, phenomenalism makes of subjective idealism. Neutral monism is just an uneasy attempt to gloss over the awkwardness this creates." He criticizes phenomenalism as the 'Central Metaphysical Doctrine' of 'Language, Truth and Logic'. In this context he writes: "Indeed, it is ironic that at a distance of 50 years, 'Language, Truth and Logic' reads like a paradigm metaphysical tract...phenomenalism being its central metaphysical doctrine."

The above discussion of Ayer's verification principle of meaning as well as his phenomenalism seems to imply that the sense-data or the sense-contents are the ultimate units of Ayer's philosophy. On the basis of the above discussion, it seems that Ayer advocates phenomenalism in order to deny the category of substance which induces a denial of both the material objects and the self and consequently to arrive at the 'observational ontology' of sense-contents or sense-data. This is precisely because his verification principle which constitutes his epistemology, is restricted to

\[125\] Ibid., p. 304.
\[127\] Ibid., p. 12.
appearances alone. Ayer calls his approach to be scientific. Science, for him, seems to be setting a standard for cognitive significance. Therefore whatever can not be assimilated as science, Ayer tends to reject it as metaphysics.

But Prof. Suman Gupta says that Ayer’s claim that his approach is scientific is really anti-scientific. Her interpretations are based on Ayer’s denial of the category of substance. She writes: “The denial of substance, both in terms of mental and material entities, logically implies the denial of the whole gamut of scientific knowledge.”128 This is because, according to her, scientific knowledge makes the following assumptions:

1. There is an objective reality, natural and social, which exists independently of human consciousness.
2. There are necessary causal connections in the objective reality.
3. Man gains knowledge of the causal connections through his practical activity.
4. Through this knowledge, man acquires the ability to effectively intervene in the objective reality by transforming it or by controlling it.”129

129 Ibid., p. 47.
She holds that denial of substance implies the denial all the above stated four assumptions. She maintains that for logical positivists, scientific knowledge consists only of a series of sense-contents or sense-data.

Ayer’s phenomenalism "separated theory from practice, language from thought and form from content. Undoubtedly we need language to express our thoughts and to communicate objective reality. But this in no way implies that language can be studied independently of thought and reality. The attempt to do this on the part of Ayer is an intentional distortion of reality."\textsuperscript{130}