CHAPTER- V
CONCLUSION

In our thesis we have made a comparative and critical study of Locke’s causal theory of perception and A.J. Ayer’s phenomenalism. We have done so in the light of what a philosopher claims to be saying and what he actually does. We have historically traced the development of Locke’s causal theory of perception from Cartesian dualism and have attempted to show that Locke has accepted Cartesian dualism with some of its basic assumptions. We have tried to prove that Ayer’s phenomenalism is a further continuation of Locke’s mental side of Cartesian dualism in a linguistic grab by tracing its development from the philosophical systems of Berkeley and Hume, which, in turn, is the further continuation of Lockean philosophy.

According to Locke, what we directly know are ideas which obviously are mental, as opposed to material objects. The material substance is not known. It implies the accommodation of mysticism in his epistemology. Though he is an empiricist, he places intuitive and demonstrative knowledge higher than sensitive knowledge. For Locke, science is an activity concerned with the sensible world. His insistence of the view that the object of knowledge consists of our own ideas limits the
sphere of possible knowledge and denies that scientific knowledge could penetrate to the substance of things. Hence, for Locke, science deals with the agreement or disagreement of our ideas. In our view scientific knowledge does not deal with externally related isolated discrete ideas as it has been advocated by Locke but it embodies internally related laws of development of nature and social reality. Knowledge consists of the practical activity of man by understanding the objective reality which is causally connected. Locke commits mistake by taking sensation in abstraction as the only source of knowledge. Knowledge is not simply a theoretical reality but both its source and criterion of truth depends upon the practical activity of social man. 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. 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 ontological and epistemological content. Moreover, Ayer takes for granted as if language is a ready-made thing without taking its development into considerations. He does not accept the fact that language is a social product through the practical activity of man.
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. We have tried to show that his position is pluralistic. Like his world view, the conception of language in Ayer is equally an abstraction. In this way Ayer’s phenomenalism is not a theory which explains world in its interconnections. This analysis of Ayer deprives philosophy of any cognitive activity of real objective material world, and confines it to the subjective analysis of language.

Though Ayer does not accept explicitly, he advocates a specific ontology and epistemology. He conceives sense-data as the ultimate constituent of reality and assigns them an ontological status. Ayer, through his phenomenalism, tries to interpret material things in terms of actual and possible sense data. Therefore the whole purpose of phenomenalism seems to be the denial of the material substance. Not only this, Ayer also denies the mental substance. Ayer’s denial of material things and consequently his phenomenalist analysis of the material things into the actual and possible sense-data or sense-contents denies the category of substance which results in the 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. Thus, in his phenomenalism, the denial
of material substance and the assertion of sense-contents makes Ayer a subjective-idealistic pluralist philosopher.

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 a person and his surroundings. 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, 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’. Ayer can not escape from solipsism and scepticism because of his ontological and epistemological frame work. Even though he claims to deny an ontology, his analysis itself is based on certain ontological pre-suppositions.

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 the 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 a manner 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 persons in cooperation that is the social result of their joint activity.