PREFACE

We, in our thesis, propose to conduct a comparative and critical study of John Locke's (1632-1704) causal theory of perception and A.J. Ayer's (1910-1989) phenomenalism. Both these philosophers hail from England. John Locke is a trend setting philosopher of classical British empiricism, who opposed rationalism and advocated empiricism. Precisely speaking, he is one of the few philosopher who tried to investigate into the origin, limits and extent of knowledge. He tried to validate the scientific and technological knowledge. This he did by accepting the material substance along with its primary qualities. The acceptance of causal theory of perception, i.e. our ideas are caused by external material reality, is a prerequisite for paving the way for the scientific and technological development.

We propose to say that Locke, in his causal theory of perception, has accepted Cartesian dualism with some of its basic assumptions. Locke's successors Berkeley and Hume continue this tradition by accepting the mental side of Cartesian dualism, interpreting the reality in terms of 'ideas' and 'impressions'.
Almost three hundred years after Locke, Ayer accepted some of the premises of Locke. Ayer belongs to the school of logical positivism and propounds phenomenalism, i.e. ultimate reality can be translated into meaningful sentences without residue. He believed that the role of philosophy is to clarify our thoughts; that it's role is confined to the analysis of the language only. Here it may be noted that though Ayer claims that he is concerned with linguistic analysis only, yet, we will try to show that Ayer also takes for granted the mental side of Cartesian dualism which is a continuation of the philosophies of Berkeley and Hume, and advocates a pluralistic, subjective-idealistic position. The important difference between Locke and Ayer lies in the fact that whereas Locke assigns a separate independent status to material substance, Ayer, by denying material substance confines all reality to sense-data.

For Locke, philosophy is concerned with reality, i.e. the origin, extent and limits of knowledge etc. whereas for Ayer its aim is analysis of the language, clarification of thought, to clear concepts in our daily language and science. For Locke it is concerned with the ontology and epistemology but Ayer says it is not concerned with ontology at all. Our point is that Ayer is equally concerned with ontology and epistemology. Though he claims that he is not concerned with it, that it is not the subject
matter of philosophy at all but actually what he does is, is ontology and epistemology.

This is so because Locke is a classical empiricist and Ayer a linguistic empiricist. Locke in his causal theory of perception accepts matter, though unknown and unknowable whereas Ayer does not accept matter at all. He says that all the material things can be reduced in sense-contents without residue. Locke also says that what we are immediately aware of is idea only and not the things themselves. They can not be known. Similarity Ayer says that we can have only sense contents, not the material things. So, there is a very close relationship between Locke and Ayer on many aspects. In our thesis we propose to adopt a methodology which draws “a distinction between what a philosopher claims to be doing and what he is actually doing”.¹

In the first chapter, i.e. Introduction, we have given a short account of perception. In this chapter, we have tried to trace the influence of Descartes on Locke’s causal theory of perception. We have also discussed certain claims of Berkeley and Hume because it is they form whom Ayer derives his phenomenalism. Here, while discussing Descartes, Berkeley

and Hume, we have taken up only those issues which are relevant to our study.

In the second chapter of our thesis, we have discussed John Locke’s causal theory of perception. We have tried to prove that like Descartes, Locke is also a dualist, and that the contradictions in his causal theory of perception are due to his acceptance of Cartesian dualism on the one hand and empiricism on the other. We have also made an attempt to look into the social conditions which shaped Locke’s philosophical system.

In the third chapter, we have discussed A.J. Ayer’s phenomenalism. We have tried to show that claiming to stand for ‘logical’ and ‘scientific’ foundations of knowledge, Ayer misinterprets the whole content of science in various ways. They stand in glaring contradictions to active scientific proofs. We have attempted to show that though Ayer claims to confine his philosophy to the analysis of language, he actually forwards “a subjective, idealistic and pluralistic approach”.

We have tried to show how he misinterprets the whole function of philosophy by reducing it to a mere analysis of logic of language. While discussing the principle of verification, which constitutes the core of Ayer’s phenomenalism, we have tried to show how Ayer misused the concepts such as experience and knowledge; and that the cleavage between analytic and synthetic is invalid. Our point is that by putting forward the so called ‘argument from illusion’ Ayer denies the existence of material objects and arrives at the conclusion that the ultimate constituents of reality are ‘sense-data’ or ‘sense-contents’.

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We have also discussed knowledge of other minds and statements about the past in the light of his phenomenalism.

In the forth chapter of our thesis, we have tried to make a comparison between Locke's causal theory of perception and A.J.Ayer's phenomenalism. The fifth and last chapter of our thesis is the conclusion.