SOME COMMENTS ON LOCKE

" ..... an objective perception is knowledge "

Immanuel Kant.

Locke's revolt against scholasticism took the form of denying the possibility of innate knowledge and showing how we come to have knowledge by the observation of particulars in experience. In fact he undertook to show that we can explain all that we can claim to know, not by presuming any native legacy either from a source independent of any experience or from the evolutionary process of the development of human race, but by the patient analysis of what we gain from experience and how we gain it. In doing this he was impressed and influenced by the development of the physical science of his time. And we have every reason to presume that he was well versed in the scientific developments of his day. He was convinced that the basic materials of knowledge is derived from experience, and, in his opinion, nothing more than this was required to build up the total edifice of knowledge So an appeal to experience was the basic foundation of his system of knowledge. In the cource of delineating this development of knowledge from experience Locke made use of some of the ideas which were prevalent in his time. And it seems that despite the difficulties that his critics have found formidable in these ideas, Locke seems to think that either these difficulties do not matter or that they are not, as a matter of fact, so formidable as they are made out to be. It is in a sense inevitable that Locke suscribed to the prevalent scientific opinion in his time. The physical science had made spectacular progress in his time and this progress of physical science was the result of the methods of observation and experiment of which Galileo can be taken as the initiator in modern scienee. At least one reason of Locke's dissatisfaction with the scholasticism is that for the scholastics, as he understood them, knowledge was based on the authority of reason unaided by observation and experiment. Their method was that of ratiocination and verbal disputation and this method, by dividing the things into genera, and species, gave us, in their opinion, the knowledge of the essential nature of things. But in practice this had the effect of justifying dogmatisms

and credulity. So devastating was this effect that the respectable done of Pisa would rather not believe their own senses when they were subjected by Galileo to his experiment of dropping two bodies of unequal weights from the tower of Pisa to witness that they reached the ground exactly at the same time. Also the eventual persecution of Galileo speaks volumes for the hold of the dogmatism and credulity.

As against this Locke saw great hopes in the methods of observation and experiment on which the contemporary scicence was based but he restricted himself to this only. Some contemporary scientists were already beginning to employ the hypothetico-deductive method but Locke was too preoccupied with the scholastics to take enough notice of this. For Locke authoritative knowledge can be based only on the observation of particulars. So convinced he seems to be of this that he decided to show how knowledge is possible only on the basis of an appeal to, and an examination of what is contained in, experience. No innate knowledge, as innate, could ever be authoritative.

Locke believed in the existence of the external world and he also believed that the nature of this reality is essentially knowable. The problem was to explain how we know about it though the problem of what we can claim to know could not be kept much separated from this. So restrictions on what we can claim to know were inevitable In explaining how we come to know anything Locke made use of certain prevalent theories, namely, the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities and also what is called the representative thery of perception. It is true that Locke was not the author of the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities. He took it from the 'corpuscularian philosophy' of Boyle. But he made use of this distinction to explain what we can claim to know and possibly how. Also, the representative theory of perception was something that Locke found in the air so to speak and he used it to put across his distinction of primary and secondary qualities. This distinction is not based strictly on the representative theory of perception, though Locke as a matter of fact developed it in such a way as to give the impression that the two stand or fall together. Though Galileo can be credited to be the originator of the distinction between primary and secondary

qualities, Locke borrowed it from Boyle's philosophy. Similarly, some form of representative theory of perception was inevitable for Locke to accept because he made a distinction between what the mind perceives immediately or directly and what we come to know mediately through what is perceived immediately or directly. Berkeley in particular was very critical of the distinction between what is immediately preceived and what is not and, convinced that this is the same as the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities, proceeded to show that everything that is perceived is perceived directly or immediately by the mind and in effect to show that there is no valid distinction between primary and secondary qualities. But, for Locke, the two distinctions do not coincide and, moreover, he does not develop independently the representative theory of perception nor does he defend it. He simply made use of it to put across his distinction between primary and secondary qualities. However, the major source of the confusion is the inconsistent and careless manner in which Locke uses the term ' idea '. He was concerned throughout to show that the materials of knowledge were derived from experience only and thus our knowledge of the external reality was composed of nothing but this material. Yet the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities and some form of representative theory of perception form an integral part of his system and they connot be removed from his doctrines without requiring serious amendments in it and even rewriting it.

Locke made the term ' idea ' do a number of jobs. As such there is quite an obvious inconsistency in his use of this term. Broadly speaking he used the term ' idea ' to mean whatever we directly perceive or what we are immediately aware of when we claim to see anything and also to mean ' the modifications of matter ' that caused such perceptions in us. He expressly defines an ' idea ' as ' whatsoever is the *object* of the understanding when a man thinks ' and obviously this is too wide. But relevant to our purpose at the moment is the distinction he makes between ' perceptions in our mind ' and ' the modifications of matter in the bodies that cause such perceptions in us.' While introducing the distinction between primary and secondary qualities he proposes to call only the perceptions in our minds ' as the ideas but he does not stick to

this as he proceeds. In this sense the ideas are what we are directly aware of when we perceive an object and it is through ideas so understood that we become aware of the thing that produces those ideas in us. Ideas thus acquaint us with the external reality or external objects. At the same time he seems to maintain that the mind can be directly aware of nothing but its own ideas. In this sense, the external objects or external reality is known only indirectly through the ideas it produces in us. We know the external reality or objects because our ideas conform to the external reality or objects.

Locke introduces the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities by examples. So the primary qualities are such qualities as shape, size, position, motion or rest, and number; he throws in solidity also but it has caused him some difficulties and constant modification of his views about it. Secondary qualities are such qualities as the colours that we see, the sounds that we hear, the smells that we smell, the heat and cold that we feel and so on. The primary qualities belong intrinstically to the material object while the secondary qualities do not belong intrinsically to the material objects. The secondary qualities are 'powers' in the objects 'to produce various sensations in us'; they are nothing in the objects except this. As Mackie points out, the manner in which this distinction is drawn and described gave rise to the opinion, prevalent to this day, that the secondary qualities are in the mind i. e. they exist in the mind, whereas it only means that they are mind-dependent.

It is significant that the primary qualities are countable, i.e. they admit of measurement whereas the secondary qualities are not. The progress of the physical science has, in large measure, been to the use of mathematical methods, and as such the physical sciences have developed and progressed as a result of concentrating on the characteristics which are counable. But the physical science as such does not tell us that the qualities alone are intrinsic to the material objects. This is the step taken by philosophy. So to show that physical science has progressed as a result of the its concentrating on the primary qualities will not be an argument in favour of this distinction. Moreover, philosophers also do not treat this distinction as finally tenable. Russell, for one,

calls it a mistaken distinction albeit one which physicsl science has found useful and thrived on. But, following Mackie's suggestion, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities can be shown to be justifiable in the following manner. The ideas of both the primary and secondary qualities are in the mind. But the ideas of the primary qualities resemble those qualities in the bodies. But the ideas of secondary qualities are powers of material thing to produce those ideas in us. So the ideas of secondary qualities are totally different from not only these powers to produce them but also from the grounds of these powers in the material objects. So the colours, as we see them, are not literally in the things themselves nor the sounds as we hear them They cannot be even the determinates of the categories of the medium through which the objects affect us. But the primary qualities are the determinates of the same determinables of which ' the shapes as we see ' and ' the sizes as we see ' are determinates. As such, the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities looks quite plausible. Yet, in spite of the independent support that the distinction can derive from Aristotle's distinction between common and special sensibles which almost coincides with it, the stronger justification can come from showing the initial plausibility of the representative theory of perception.

Locke himself did not specially develop or defend the representative theory of perception. He simply made use of it to serve his main purpose of showing that the material of knowledge derived entirely from the experience and from no other source. This is also called ' the picture-original theory '. In whatever form it is enunciated the representative theory is open to the basic criticism, namely, ' how shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with the things themselves ? ". Locke was awere of this as is clear from his own arguments against the similar theory of Malebranche. But, as Mackie poits out, Locke is not disturbed by this criticism because, unlike Malebranche, Locke assumed a causal theory of perception. So according to Locke, what for Malebranche are insoluble difficulties are not so formidable or insoluble for himself on the basis of his causal theory of perception. ' Simple ideas are ..... the natural and regular productions of things without us ".

Locke's theory essentially come to this that certain of our ideas ' conform ' to things without us This clearly shows that the ideas of primary qualities conform to the patterns of material objects whereas secondary qualities do not so conform Mackie introduces here what he calls intentional objects : what I see is necessarily as it looks to me, independently or whether what I see exists or not. This sense of intentional objects nearly coincides with Locke's ideas in the sense of ' perceptions in our minds '. Thus the resemblance of an idea with object would mean that ' the objects are in this respect exactly ' as they look in the strictly sensory sense of look '. The normal function of our perception is to inform us about external things and compensations enter automatically in ways that help it to perform this function efficiently. This is verified by the experience of those who use the numbered glasses for the first time. This is also supported by the ' unconscious automatic interpretation ' in normal adult perception, in virtue of which the visually coloured surfaces are rightly seen as objects of their respective kinds.

All this may not succeed in making good the claim that we have direct awareness of the existence of external objects because what we directly perceive are nothing but ' ideas in our mind '. The main butt of the argument against the causal theory of perception is that we cannot rightfully claim to know the external objects to be the causes of the ' ideas in the mind ' as their effects because we cannot argue from the observed effects to their unobserved causes, unless at least on some occasions the effect is seen to follow the cause. But, as Mackie points out, modern physics seems to do exactly this, namely, that it explains the behaviour of large-scale things as being caused by atoms and sub-atomic particles. But the latter are not observed at all, they are inferred from the behaviour of those large-scale objects which they are suppposed to cause and explain. Mackie's explanation here is that both the causes and the causal laws that connect them with the effects are introduced here as parts of a system of an explanatory hypothesis. Such an hypothesis can explain, in regard to the external reality, the continuous existence of things and gradual changes where appearances are dis-continuous. And it can do this much better than the phenomenalistic hypothesis. Especially, phenomenalism cannot

rightfully explain the sudden springing into existence, repeatedly, of remarkably similar appearances. Similarly, direct realism does not recognise percepts i.e. ' the things as they appear to us ' and as such realism is not disturbed much by such problems, especially not in, the form in which it confronts the representative theory of perception based on the causal theory of perception, with its distinction between the primary and secondary qualities. Even so a radical sceptic may still question our very right to infer the existence of external reality on the basis of the distinction between appearances and reality. Here we can make the argument look plausible even against a radical sceptic by insisting with Mackie on the essential simplicity of, what he calls as, the explanatory hypothesis which in Mackie's opinion gives initial plausibility to realism. This simplicity consists in its ' elimination of unexplained coincidences '. This, Mackie explains as what the supeiority of Copernican to Ptolemic hypothesis mainly consists in, namely, that the separate but coincident epicyscles of 365 days in a Ptolemic account of motion of the planets disappear, in the Copernican hypothesis, into the single revolution of the earth round the sun. This is akin to the simplicity of a scientific hypothesis and recommends itself on very similar grounds.

So Locke's distinction between the primary and secondary qualities and the representative theory of perception are plausible accounts of justifying the reception of the materials of knowledge of the external world. No mention is made here, for want of space, of Locke s justification for postulating ideas as the immediate objects of perception nor of his explanations regarding illusions affecting the primary and secondary qualities. Only it remains to mention in passing that once it is recognised that the ideas or the appearances are understood as just how the objects look and that, as Mackie tries to show, that ' real ' and ' outside us ' do not add any additional features or predicates to the objects, the bridge between the appearances and reality would look quite plausibly enough to be built.

Locke's endeavour to clear the ground in order to give a solid foundation for the edifice of knowledge consisted in his tirade against innate knowledge of ideas and principles. No knowledge

worth the name could be authoritative wothout empirical support. This is in fact the core of Locke'a empiricism. True, he maintains, that:' Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything ' and he defines knowledge as ' the perception of connexions and agreement, or disagreement and repugnance, of ideas '. But the emphasis throughout is on the ideas through which basic materials of knowledge are received by the mind. Locke also speaks of the ' ideas of reflection ' through which we become aware of the operations of our mind. So the mind becomes aware of its own activities such as comparing the ideas with one another, calling up ideas from the memory, separating simple components of complex ideas and combining them together to form new combinations, associating ideas with one another and with words and using them both to represent other ideas, preceiving relations between different ideas and forming chains of reasoning out of such perceived relations. It is important to remember that Locke was responsible for building the school of associationist psychology, known as brick and mortar psychology. So Locke claims to be introspectively aware of such operations of the mind as mentioned above. He forcefully denied the possibility of innate knowledge of ideas and principles by showing that what was claimed in his time as innate was, as a matter of fact, not innate at all. That his attack was very hard hitting and had gone home is amply borne by the type and amount of criticism that he had to face. And there is reason to believe at least that no one after Locke has tried to justify what in fact he has criticised as not being innate. But Locke is sometimes stated to have anticipated the critical philosophy of Kant though Kant himself criticises Locke's empiricism and his use of ideas and shows how Locke failed rationally to account for the pure concepts of understanding on the basis of his empiricism. Yet in so far as Locke admits certain propensities of the mind, he can be conrstrued in this sense to have anticipated Kant's critical philosophy. Locke allows the mind to have an innate capacity to know and he has presumed that the external reality is essentially knowable. A redical sceptic like, say, Peter Unger, may challenge even this. But Unger in effect has claimed to know this much at least and has presented us with a book-length defence of his position of scepticism. I think, barring such radical sceptics, Locke's claim to know will not be seriously

challenged. But Locke, in making this claim does not assume any built-in preference for some beliefs rather than others. The mind is in this sense a clean slate and what we know depends entirely on what experience supplies. Moreover, Locke allows, as Mackie points out, possible innate propensities to see things relistically, to interpret impressions as impressions of persisting things or of rapeated processes rather than to accept disorder as ulitmate, to reason incuctively i.e. to learn from past experience and to make the sort of projections that contribute to our concept of causation. Mackie further points out that, if Chomsky is correct, then the general form of grammar is also innate. It is certainly not Locke's fault that he chronologically preceded Hume and as such could not anticipate the force of Hume's argument against some of the positions that we have found implicit in Locke's philosophy. The so-called force of such later criticisms of Locke is attributable to the tendency to see Locke's positions through Berkeleian spectacles and using them simply for ' target practice '. Again, the classification of philosophers into the Empiricists (namely, Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and the Rationalists (namely, Descartes, Spinoza and Leipniz) which is irrational albeit convenient for teaching purposes, has been mainly responsible for taking Hume's philosophical positions as the *reductio ad absurdum* of Locke's empiricism. The dominant trend in the history of philosophy together with the resultant disinclination to pay proper attention to what Locke in fact has said is, in my opinion, responsible for distorting the main thrust of his doctrines and his new way of ideas. Only recently Locke's philosophy is being treated on its own merits as is evident from the recent studies which have been published in various journals and also as independent works. And much of the force of Hume's arguments derives from the weightage that one is prepared to give to the starting point of Hume's empiricism, namely, the impressions and ideas. Some may like to maintain that Hume'e initial position that we receive nothing but particular impressions from experience and that all inference about matters of fact must ultimately be reducible to the associations between them and explicable in terms of these only is itself an assumption for which Hume gives no support except rhetorical challenges to go to your mind and find anything else if you can. Confronted with such challenges as these

Locke or a Lockean may maintain that he is introspectively aware of some of the positions we have attributed to Locke. And Kant points out as against Hume that necessity derives from the concepts of understanding and experience can only illustrate this necessity but cannot be its original source. Kant was the first to appreciate the real import of Hume's reduction of causation to constancy and conjunction as is evident from Kant's strictures on Hume's criticism at the beginning of his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. It was Hume's criticism of causation that on his own admission, awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumbers. Without going into the problem whether Kant has or has not answered Hume, it can be pointed out that, as against Hume's assumption that there is no necessity between particulars and matters of fact, there is contrary assumption, perhaps going back to Aristotle that there is such a thing as natural necessity and Locke seems to subscribe to this view when he talks of resemblances or common characteristics of things. At least in this sense, things in themselves have general or universal aspects, and if assumptions are to be matched by other contrary assumptions, then the latter have in their favour greater explanatory powers.

Bombay **D. N. Govilkar**