

INTRODUCTION

I

Meaning of Empiricism and the Empiricists

In the introductory chapter we shall try first of all to make clear what is meant by empiricism according to which experience is the only source of knowledge. Otherwise, we may be confused as to the nature of our problem. Very plainly speaking, a man is called an empiricist who believes in experience as the source, the method and as the criterion of the validity of knowledge. It is a much abetting question what empiricism is, for the sake of which a precise and proper relation between knowledge and experience has not been properly attended to. Philosophical empiricism is a theory which holds that all our knowledge of what Hume would call 'matters of fact' and real existence (i.e. whatever it may be, whether it is a fact or an event or a state-of affairs) must be based upon and vindicated by reference to experience.

It is commonly agreed to that there is no clear-cut meaning of empiricism. A man is called an empiricist when he encounters with objects of the world through the senses. The condition of being an empiricist is that he must have to believe in what we perceive and how we perceive. Philosophical empiricism is not about the origin of concepts, but about how we use them; it is a theory about the conditions of significance and

verifiability' of statements in relation to experience. But to deal with empiricism in this way is more damaging and is to give much more misunderstanding; that is why, the three British empiricists use the word, idea. They say, all the ideas we have come from experience. The use of the word, idea was patent in the 17th and the 18th century to include all experiences, but there made a distinction between impression and idea, although these two both belong to our experience. Therefore, it is said, meaning of empiricism is more obscure. Empiricism, in my opinion, if analysed properly is not a theory, but a concept which has been explained and re-explained according to the needs the traditional and the recent philosophers of the analytical group had realised. Empiricism, a general theory, stresses that sense-experience is the only source of knowledge and 'affirms that all knowledge is founded on experience and is obtained through experience', (This means that sense-experience may be of facts, states-of-affairs, things etc, as in Locke). This is a general idea of experience. We welcome what comes through sense-experience to us. 'Material empiricism' holds that the objective outer world is the source of sense-experience (Locke). But another theory of empiricism called 'modern theory of empiricism' also called 'consistent empiricism' holds that our sense-experience is limited to the experience of the sum-total of sensations denying the objective world underlying experience. This is a recent trend in developing sciences. This may be called empiricism of the Idealist type.

simply it is in conformity with that we experience as a piece-meal. According to this theory, empiricism cannot know any necessary and general meaning. Again to elaborate empiricism, experience in the traditional empirical sense means sensuous empirical reflection of the external world; it merely grasps the outward, superficial side of phenomena of the objective world. Thus Locke had the gradual attainment of empirical knowledge in none than one sense. Locke has remarkably pointed out what he meant by experience. Experience, for him, is the form of objectivity. To say that there is something which is in consciousness means that it has an objective form in that consciousness and consciousness experiences it. Experience, properly speaking, means immediate knowledge, perception. Next the question arises, what do we experience? The answer is a very ready reply - we experience ideas. Now again, the question arises, ideas of what? In answer to this, there is also a stock reply - what is given in sensation. Whether it is an object or a state of affairs or a fact, there is something given in our sensation which we cannot deny. In any case, we experience ideas and experience by itself is objective and our ideas or thought have got an objective existence which the empiricists emphasize again and again. Experience is ultimately the genuine source of ideas. Locke had made an empirical investigation into the workings of the human mind, at least in its cognitive activities, extent and certainty of human knowledge and its relation to experience.

At least, empiricists do not deny what is given in

sensation. Our perception must have some basis and it cannot be based upon something unreal. Generally speaking, the advocates of empiricism believe in a type of realistic ontology. Again the question is, do all the empiricists believe in objects extramental? Is Locke an empiricist in this sense exclusively? The answer is very clear that realists believe in objects external to the mind but not all empiricists. Hence in the strictest sense, an empiricist may not be an epistemological realist; for example, Hume is not an epistemological realist in this above sense. Even has Locke defined a thing which is a substance in his case unconditionally? Does he unconditionally say about the existence of extra-mental things? Locke, on the other hand, considers a substance as 'we know not what'. But he believes in the sensible qualities of things. R.I. Aaron has rightly estimated Locke's position as an empiricist in the following way :

"Knowledge of the real needs an intermediary object between the knowing mind and the ultimate object. The immediate object when I look at this table is no physical entity but an idea which represents the table".¹

Thus Locke is not a consistent empiricist in one sense (i.e. if we follow the meaning of the epithet, 'experience', that one has to believe in the reality of external objects. So we

1 Aaron, R.I., John Locke, pp.101-102.

must take into consideration the objective character of thought - the thought which is representative of something given in our perception. In short, an empiricist would signify to believe in that existence which is given to us by experience or which is given to us in sensation. In this sense, all empiricists do not necessarily have to be realists in the strict sense that they have to believe in the direct experience of material things. Accordingly the aim and scope of ontology is "the systematic investigation of objective intelligibility which the mind comes to discover in reality itself". In this sense empiricists believe in the cognitive character of knowledge. Empiricists believe in something given. Whatever may be the nature of the given. The given usually means what is given to us in our experience. It may be a fact or an object or a state-of-affairs etc. But the given something is not possible without an element of thought involved in it. Whenever we experience an object, we equally feel the existence of thought.

And probably Schlick, one of the leading logical analysts also means by empiricism what we have already stated above. According to Schlick, realism and positivism do not seem inconsistent with each other. That is why, Schlick sometimes calls his positivism, consistent empiricism what he means to say is that we cannot deny the 'given'*. On the other hand, Schlick

* The concept of the given is a much more controversial problem in modern times. The problem really starts from Hume. We may summarise the points as follows : First, it is, indeed, true that something is given in

does not deny the reality of the external world.²

In modern investigation, reductionism has been made possible from sense-experience and thought to merely formalised statements without much metaphysical loading. The recent empiricists make it a point that they emphasize only structure minus the content of experience. They are not ready to say that experience has any content. This substituting is due to much

our experience. But immediately the question is, to whom is it given? Naturally in Hume we find that "perception is anything 'which appears to mind'". Hume rejects that material objects do continue to exist when unperceived. It, therefore, follows that material objects do not continue to exist when unperceived. The suppressed premise is, there is no perception without a perceiver. It is further supported by Bason's treatment of Hume as it is clear from the following remark: "the mind or self 'is not anyone's impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference'" (pp. 126, 127 Bason's Hume). Probably Ayer shares with Hume the concept of the given in this sense. Ayer does not believe in an independent existence of objects which are given to the senses, as he bridges over a gap between Hume's notion of continued existence of objects and his sense-data notion of things (Ref. The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge, Chapter V (Cl.23)). But a more rigid view is upheld by Hume in regard to the given when he says that 'the mind perceives itself amongst other things'. Identity does not belong to perceptions. The mind is nothing more than 'a bundle or collection of different perceptions'. The mind is a series of discrete sensations. In this way, he speaks of distinct and separate existences without any real connection. The recent empirical realists have accepted Hume's given in this second sense. But in modern investigation the 'given' is manipulated in such a way that it means only formalised statements. Meaning, therefore, means only structural meaning. But in our analysis of empirical meaning we shall see that anything given, even if it is a case of statement, is referred to by something that is determined by the content of experience. In this connection,

2 Cf. Schlick, Moritz, "Positivism and Realism" in Logical Positivism edited by A.J. Ayer.

emphasis upon the verifiability principle. In another place Schlick does not hesitate to say that the 'given' stands for the occurrence of sensations, as it will be clear from his own remark in his famous essay, 'Positivism and Realism' :

"What is correct is only that propositions concerning bodies are transformable into equivalent propositions concerning the occurrence of sensations in accordance with laws....."³

At least, all recent empiricists whom we call logical positivists believe in the given which we get in experience. They did not discard the given totally, but the shift from thought and objects to merely formalised statements is noticeable. The subject-object distinction is obliterated. There is experience, but there is no experiencer which is an absurd conclusion. We cannot take experience purely in its impersonal sense. No experience can neither be taken in an impersonal sense, nor can it be taken in the sense of external objects; but that which is given in an existing situation - whether it be an event or a fact or a state-of-affairs in our sense-experience and also what is in principle derivable from experience.

we should note that Wittgenstein, for the sake of the logical development of empiricism, remains chiefly the positivist of the linguistic generation. We are tempted to refer to him for the simple reason that discussions on empirical philosophy have actually started in a logical fashion after Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein has undoubtedly a shapping influence on the recent empiricists especially like Ayer, Schlick, Russell and a host of thinkers who subscribe to the view of the given which is nothing more than its logical implication as it is clear from Wittgenstein's own remark, "The world is all that is the case" (No.1 - 1st Paper back Edition of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus by L.Wittgenstein). But in the course of our discussion we shall see that this is unwarrantable.

3 Schlick, Moritz, "Positivism and Realism" in Logical Positivism, ed. by A.J.Ayer, p.107.

II

In the second and last part of the introductory Chapter of the present dissertation we try to show how the empiricists, both traditional and modern have committed themselves to using the word, "meaning" in relation to truth and experience and as a consequence we shall try to furnish our own solutions of the problem concerned. We feel that we must mention in the present connection that the meaning-problem has been made somewhat too much of by most writers, yet the meaning-problem remains. Therefore, we see a raging controversy on the problem of meaning amongst those who try to solve the problem of meaning in a strictly empirical way. The simple reason for this acrid controversy is that the whole problem has centred round the determination of meaning in an empirical way. The empiricists have the scientific outlook of dealing with experience objectively. But the objective side is best solved when we find a relation between the subject and the object. Our thought objective in nature is related to the subject's own conscious experience and indicates a possible connection with others' experience on the same level of enquiry. Unless thought is involved in the individual consciousness, we cannot explain the things of the world objectively. We may read here the following lines in Urmán's own words :

"....we accept that the raw data of experience by themselves yield nothing until they are interpreted or 'synthesized', by the knowing mind. We accept also that the principles according to which the data are

synthesized have their origin in the nature of our minds, and not that (or not wholly that) of the world outside".⁴

An object is not a mere object seen in the external world, but when our consciousness views it as an object, our intentional act of cognition means a possible connection between an object and our consciousness who cognizes this object of perception and thus an inter-subjective understanding is constituted on the subjective level of communication. Thus subjectivism plays a vital role in an analysis of knowledge from the empirical view-point. Our intentionality of perception is involved meaning which one has to communicate to some other person. Thus intentionality is 'intentions of minds' both of the speaker and the hearer. In this way, intentionality overcomes the difficulties of the immediately given and thus means an over-individual content of one's own subjective experience. Therefore, mere objectivism does not play a vital role in assessing knowledge as inter-subjectively shared and communicated.

The epithet, 'Empiricism' in the context of the problem of meaning has been used in a rather wider sense to mean the great empirical tradition in the sense of Locke, Berkeley and Hume as well as of the most recent trend culminating in what we call recent empiricism or what Schlick has called 'Logical Empiricism

4 Unwin, H. "Beyond Truth : Towards a new conception of Knowledge and Communication", Mind, Vol. LXVI, No. 282, p. 312.

of 'consistent Empiricism', (Schlick has called himself a 'Consistent Empiricist' as he believes in the reality of that which is given in our experience, but the logical conclusion has been a must for him which we have shown in our analysis on Schlick in this dissertation), but the noticeable difference or differences, ultimately traced, between the two trends, both new and old, in epistemology concerning meaning and experience on the one hand, and meaning and truth on the other are significant and, therefore, worth-mentioning. The term, experience, has been primarily taken both by the traditional empiricists and the modern empiricists to mean sense-experience of things or facts, events, states-of-affairs etc. In adhering to experience, we already pointed out in the first part of the introductory Chapter that what one means by experience and to become an empiricist one need not be a realist in the strict sense. Probably in this sense, Russell prefers sense-data terminology. But he believes in the reality of sensory qualities both with an empirical character and a realistic fervour in his philosophy. Even the traditional empiricists are not given to using experience in the sense as noted in the early section. Even Locke prefers to use idea or sense-data as being representative of things. Ideas are the ideas of sense and we cannot think of sense-data without being sensible. Besides, the moot point is that all empiricists believe, in a sense, in the causal theory of perception. Seeing something or cognizing something is not possible without something which it is the basis of that something. As empiricists believe in an empirical method

and a kind of realistic ontology, they, as a general body, believe in something that is given in our experience. So it is better to note that empiricism believes in the reality of that which is given in our experience in addition to the fact that they believe in an external world. Whether it is a thing or a fact or an event that is given in our experience, it does not matter. This we have already pointed out in the first part of our introduction. We need not clarify this point further beyond mentioning after Hospers that in both the cases the "cash-value" of their hypothesis (either in the realist's case or in the empiricist's case is to be found in their empirically observable consequences.⁵ (my italics). Therefore, the only sufficient ground of experience is that it is sensible as Prof. C.D.K. Hundle has also stressed.

Empiricism has been shaped and reshaped amidst many changes. Sometimes renovations in empiricism have divested empiricism of its true character and sometimes empiricism was brought to a logical conclusion which means nothing but formalisation. In the hey-day of British empiricism the illustrious Locke, Berkeley and Hume had used experience to reach a kind of certainty. The traditional orientation of experience is that it is valid, certain and is the only source

5 Hospers, J., An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, Indian Reprint, p.555.

of knowledge. This is equally true of other empirical philosophers too when they take up experience. We have no objection to using experience in this ordinary way. Experience was taken by them to mean the objective character of thought. Frankly speaking, they had emphasized the objective side of experience. And, therefore, meaning was used in the sense of direct cognition of experienced objects. Meaning is restricted to what we experience. They wanted to make meaning a direct fruit of experience. Even, Locke, for example, immediately raised the question of the valid reference of non-sensible ideas to experience. Berkeley and Hume also claim to have shared this view of Locke. That is why, Berkeley advanced a step further and outright eliminated the universal. He restricted thought or idea to what we perceive. Thus meaning for him is objective thought.

That is why, Locke, Berkeley and Hume try to solve the problem of meaning in an empirical fashion emphasizing the cognitive character of our experience and thus the objectivity of thought has been emphasized in and through experience. So, meaning is characterized by the determinandum - only what is presented as thought. As empiricists they are of the objective view. Therefore, experience is objective. The objective character of experience has been initially shared by Schlick and Russell.

Let us see, now, how Locke uses experience. Locke, an empiricist, committing himself to experience believes in the correspondence theory of truth and, therefore, the determination

of truth in an empirical way is present in Locke's philosophy. As a realist and as an empiricist, he believes in the correspondence. In support of this statement, we can confidently say that according to Locke, as O'Connor maintains, our experience consists in a series of particular events. In other words, Locke by experience means experience of this thing or that thing. All existences are particular according to him. Yet to determine meaning and truth in an empirical way is a problem to philosophers, if one tries to determine the area of experience objectively. And the empiricists have all been victims to this obscure treatment of experience. Our meaning-situation is hardly secure if one attempts at explaining things as piece-meal treatment of knowledge. Meaning, it is true indeed, in any empirical philosophy and in the epistemic criterion of meaning, is determined by experience and yet one feels diffident to determine meaning if one uses experience in a particular way. Ayer suggests that if the principle of verification is to be seriously considered, it should be interpreted in such a way as to admit statements that are not strongly verifiable. Therefore, Ayer says that experience construed in a particular way cannot give us a notion of Universality. Had this been the case, then, experience could not have been used to include the wider significance of universal statements, and generality and truth as objective communicable factors in knowledge. Yet we know very clearly that truth to become a whole concept and, therefore, to become an objective communicable truth, must be inter-subjectively experienced, so that both the hearer and the speaker must have the same idea of

truth on a communicable level of knowledge. The purpose of communication is not subserved if communication is made on an objective level (i.e. to produce articulate sounds only), as Locke does. Yet, communication becomes actually objective if the content or subject-matter of communication is inter-subjectively recognized.

Therefore, Locke wanted to waive the problem of experience and of meaning by using ideas in a general way. He says, ideas become general by concerning them with certain signs used in a general way. Thus he wanted to free himself from the problem of experience used in an objective way. But the difficulty lies in Locke's use of the word, idea in a second sense. Locke, first, restricted the use of idea to what we perceive. Berkeley and Hume also used idea in the same sense. But unlike Locke, they did not use idea in the second sense, i.e., in the sense of abstract ideas. Thus, ideas have their double role in Locke's philosophy. But on a closer view it can be found that Locke's ideas are not the ideas of experience. It is, therefore, unnecessary to account for these abstract ideas. Thus ideas which are not ultimately derivable from experience are denied any general significance. Yet, Locke is led to a conception of ideas which is totally intellectual in nature. Locke calls these ideas non-sensible. Of course, we do not share with this view of Locke. Probably Locke could not investigate into the proper area and determine the proper meaning of experience. That Locke is

inclined to treat experience comprehensively is undeniable. Yet his analysis of experience could not retain the spirit of a true empirical philosophy. Locke's philosophy being developed, it is revealed, has become a conglomeration of both the experiential thesis and the theory of ideas. Therefore, Locke calls ideas sometimes 'internal conceptions'. If the ideas are in the mind they are far from being empirical. One should think that Locke has slipped away from experience in both the senses. His ideas are logically and intellectually abstracted in and from experience. Thus ideas in the later development of his philosophy lead to abstraction. We could have no objection if the universal had been considered as a product of experiential findings which could be termed inter-subjective experiences. Therefore, on a subsequent occasion we find that the universal is the work of individual minds. Modern realists do not find favour with this view of the universal. What we are acquainted with are only sensory qualities in particular. Locke speaks of abstraction, but not of a general significance of ideas. But he speaks of the general use and, therefore, the general significance of ideas which are made possible only through the general use of language. Our ideas become general by being associated with certain signs for their communication. Here his translation theory of meaning is in evidence. To speak more explicitly, Locke speaks of linguistic communication, as if the words themselves stand for ideas. So, secondly, according to Locke, communication means the communication of inter-personal noises. Thus his second phase of communication is shut up within

the language scheme of communication. So he switches over from experience to language. Here one might have shown some sort of affinity with the Wittgensteinian view of the world of experience which hardly means the 'state of things'. Yet we are not committed to a logical interpretation of experience. Our proper object is to disclose meanings in the light of experience alone. Furthermore, we are led to show a historical development from the traditional to the modern trend of empiricism. Historically speaking, we are to show a link between the two trends of empiricism. Only in modern terminology, we can say that even though the recent empiricists speak of structural communication, we do not speak of linguistic/structural communication. In the epistemic criterion of meaning our main problem is with experience. We obviously know not language but experience. So only we need mention that in Locke as well as in Berkeley and Hume, communication is objective in both the senses. Both Locke and Hume were obviously denying communication in the sense of inter-perceptual communication of ideas. But most of our experiences, although subjective, are inter-personally communicated, otherwise, a general demand for knowledge is not possible. So what do we communicate? Do we communicate only language or only a structure minus something given in our experience? In the epistemic criterion of meaning experience, meaning, truth and communication are related problems. If experience be the basis of meaning and truth, it is definitely sure that both meaning and truth are made the meaning and truth of this or that and the prognostic view of communication is that

it is structural. We are not, of course, harping upon a new explanation of the philosophies of the traditional empiricists, but in any case, a new and logical conclusion following from experience, although unduly followed, has been a 'must'. But the problem is that when we claim to have communicated the object of knowledge in general, we no longer accept the view that we know only structure. But structure cannot of itself give us any knowledge of content which is nothing but matter. So a structure to have any content, must presuppose some phenomena, which are empirical, general, psychological and a priori factors. Any structure must inhibit all these factors. Structure cannot of itself constitute knowledge. So in the sequel, we shall invite the view that intersubjectivity is not a problem for us but, on the other hand, due to our subjective experience, our knowledge-system actually makes our knowledge objective, equally acceptable and communicable.

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