The Theories of Perception in G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer: A Comparative Account

In the present chapter, we propose to compare the views of G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer on the problem of perception. As we have indicated earlier, this analysis will pertain to their views on perception as related to their epistemology and ontology.

The main rationale behind our taking up these two philosophers is that both belong to the British empiricist tradition of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. And we have tried to show that the problem of perception has its important roots in the philosophies of these three philosophers. And here we are also inclined to believe that 'sense-data' are the “twentieth century successors”\(^1\) of the empiricist ‘ideas’. Another point is that both are sense-data philosophers, and also, the problem of perception occupies a central place in the philosophies of both these thinkers. Also both are analytical philosophers and have a preoccupation with language. But there are important differences between them, which can be understood in the background of these above-mentioned similarities.

Both G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer belong to the British empiricist

---

tradition of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Being empiricists both hold that experience is the only source of knowledge. Apart from sense-experience they both recognize memory. On this point they both agree. However while Moore recognises testimony of other persons; Ayer apart from memory, only recognises past experiences. We will try to analyse the ‘why’ of this distinction at the end of this section.

For now we will concentrate on the ‘why’ of empiricism in case of the two philosophers. Whereas for Moore, as his claims, this affiliation brings some kind of objectivity for the sense-data. For he introduces sense-data as something really existing and remarks in one of his early writings that this is a way to get out of the circle of one’s own ideas. For Ayer, as he claims, empiricism is a way to avoid metaphysics. Thus we find, though both hold an empiricist epistemology, empiricism serves different purposes in their cases. While in Moore it supports his realist stand, given his distinction between act and object of experience; in the case of Ayer it helps to support his pluralist and subjective idealist ontology since he defines sense-data as contents of individual sense-experience.

We have already pointed out that the British empiricist Locke accepts the Cartesian dualism; while Berkeley and Hume take for granted the mental side of Cartesian dualism. Sense-data belong to this way of thinking that has its beginnings in the acceptance of Cartesian ideas as the primary material of knowledge. However, while ‘ideas’ are the units of
knowledge, sense-data, as pure empiricist invention, are the units of perception. The reason is that for the empiricists the only reliable source of knowledge is sense-experience or sense-perception.

Though Moore and Ayer may not share a similar attitude towards the issue of perception, their philosophies have a similar origin in the empiricist bedrock. We must point out here that we do not mean to say that any one philosopher can be singled out while discussing the influences on these two philosophers. In fact, we hold that these two philosophers namely, G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer are a product of the British empiricist tradition that started from Locke onwards and was carried to its logical limits by Hume. We must emphasize here that when we are drawing similarities in this way we do not mean to say that there are any such clear-cut parallels. There cannot be. Because these philosophers are speaking in different contexts, notwithstanding their similar presuppositions. While Locke, Berkeley and Hume talk in terms of definite ontological systems which involved particular views about knowledge and truth; Moore and Ayer, belonging as they do to the analytical tradition, have an explicit preoccupation with language; and concern themselves more with the question of the meaning of concepts and propositions. Since we distinguish between what a philosopher claims to be doing and what he is actually doing, we would emphasize that though Moore claims that he is defending common sense and Ayer claims that sense-data are only a
linguistic expedient, both of them take for granted some of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of the mental side of Cartesian dualism and, therefore, even if they do not explicitly accept it, at least their epistemology logically leads to a kind of ontology that is subjective and pluralistic.

As we have already tried to show in our earlier chapters, the views of both Moore and Ayer have important moorings in the British empiricism. And the problem of perception, which remains central to the philosophies of both these thinkers, has a clear origin in Locke's philosophy. Locke takes for granted two important Cartesian presuppositions. They are, as we have already stated, the substantial reality of mind and matter, and, the supposition that mind can be immediately aware of its own ideas. This, as we have indicated, gives rise to the 'veil of appearance' problem.

Another contributing factor to the classical problem of perception as raised by the empiricists, is the bifurcation of the realms of appearance and reality. In Locke's case this originated in the 'divide' as perceived by him, between science and common sense. Locke, as we have already indicated, has been considered to be one who upholds common sense, even if in the limited sense of a belief in the reality of external material world and in the efficacy of senses in providing knowledge. On the other hand, influenced by the contemporary developments in science, he makes of distinction
between the primary and secondary qualities and holds the corpuscular theory of matter. Dr Suman Gupta points out: "The real explanation of Locke's distinction between the primary and the secondary qualities lies in the fact that Locke tried to retain as objective these material elements which constitute the basis of mechanical materialism, viz. solidity, figure, motion, volume, etc. And all other properties of matter that could not be explained by means of mechanics were declared by him to be secondary, definable only by subjects' mental state having no objective existence."\(^2\)

How does this affiliation to science on the one hand and common-sense on the other contribute to the problem of perception? We would like to explain this first. Common sense, in Locke's case meant a belief in knowledge through sense-experience. It is opposed to the Cartesian view that senses sometimes deceive us and therefore they are unreliable source of knowledge. But when Locke goes on to analyse the knowledge through sensation and reflection, he ultimately returns to the concept of Cartesian 'cogito' and explains sense-experience in terms of simple ideas backed with the Cartesian presupposition that mind can know only its own ideas. This view is then accepted alongwith a mechanist explanation of matter, that matter and its qualities belong to a different realm, even after the possibility of mind-body interaction. That is, in the words of Locke, we

---

must divide the two realms: “These are two very different things, and carefully to be distinguished: it being one thing to perceive and know the idea of white or black, and quite another to examine what kinds of particles they must be and how ranged in the superficies to make any object appear white or black.”

Thus, though Locke, unlike Descartes, believes in the interaction between mind and body; there is an implicit assumption that ‘mind with its ideas’ and ‘matter with its primary qualities’ are two separate realms. This view has the implication that the mind with its ideas can only know the appearances and not the reality. And this lies at the origin of the traditional problem of perception.

Another factor in the philosophy of Locke that has contributed to this problem, is, we find his concept of ‘substance’. As we have already stated in the first and second chapters, the notion of substance is crucial in understanding this problem. And as we have indicated the definition of substance that is relevant here is that it is something that continues to exist amidst changes, i.e. as a link between appearance and reality, a matrix of their dynamic interrelations. In case of Locke, we find the substance remains the ‘unknown and the unknowable’ substratum of primary qualities. Thus the question of perception becomes problematic for him.

The causal theory is marred by the unknowability of the cause of our ideas. Moore, like Locke, accepts the substantial reality of ‘bodies’ and

---

‘consciousness’, within his analytical framework the problem narrows down to finding the correct analysis of the propositions about material things. And as we have pointed out, since any ‘correct analysis’ will have to be in terms of sense-data, and the sense-data are the objects of immediate awareness, it is evident we are faced here with the same Lockean problem with analytical strings attached.

As we have tried to point out in the course of our discussion, Ayer’s affiliation is more to Berkeley and Hume. It will be relevant here to mention how the arguments of these two philosophers are linked to that of Locke. We find that the ‘veil of appearance’ problem has its origins in Locke’s philosophy. Berkeley’s arguments begin with a criticism of the notion of ‘abstract idea’ and a refutation of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, in order to ultimately refute the notion of material substance as the substratum of primary qualities and as an abstract idea. In fact, Berkeley, as we have attempted to show, sets the stage for the particularistic atomistic ontology of Hume.

Berkeley is seen as the precursor of phenomenalism since he brought in God in his system to explain the continued existence of things when no one perceives them. Ayer’s possible sense-data and Russell’s sensibilia are nothing but an analytic remake of Berkeleyian phenomenalism. Hume denies both mental as well as material substance and reduces all reality to discrete impressions. Ayer’s sense-data are
nothing but what Berkeley calls ‘ideas’ and Hume calls ‘impressions’.

Ayer, on the lines of Berkeley and Hume, denies substance and causality; and is thus, in the end, unable to answer the sceptic. We might recall that Ayer considers the notion of substance to be a “primitive superstition”. Talking in a formal mode, Ayer says that such superstition has its origin in the belief that “to every word or phrase that can be the grammatical subject of a sentence, there must somewhere be a real entity corresponding.” When we talk only in terms of unconnected appearances, and not in terms of substantial reality, the notion of distinction between veridical and delusive perception loses all meaning, as happens in the case of Ayer. Moore on the other hand holds that there are in the Universe “enormous numbers of material objects, of one kind or another.” Also, there are certain phenomena quite different from material things, i.e. we have minds or we can say “we perform certain mental acts or acts of consciousness.”

Though acceptance of empiricism is a common point between these two philosophers, as soon as we go into the details of their views on perception, we find that while Moore is concerning himself with a real

---

5 Ibid., p.43.
7 Ibid., p.4.
empirical question, Ayer claims to consider these questions as linguistic question; and it is only in his later writings that he directly takes up the epistemological issues. One important reason behind this difference is the difference in their views about the nature and aim of philosophy. Ayer claims that the subject-matter of philosophy is language and the aim of philosophy is clarification of thought. On the other hand, for Moore the subject-matter of philosophy is the conceptual analysis of philosophical propositions and the aim of philosophy is "to give a general description of the whole of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we know to be in it..."  

An important difference between Moore and Ayer is Moore's bold assertion that we can know some of the things with certainty, a view having its basis in Moore's idea of the function of philosophy in providing a world view. Findlay points out that the most important element in Hume is his gnosis. That is, in Moore there is a positive acceptance that we can know things, an acceptance that stands in contrast to such theories of meaning as verification principle. Findlay remarks in this context that such theories display "grave lack of a regulative gnosis." He further points out about Ayer's behaviouristic analysis that "...the kind of thought which at

---

one stage teaches us that we cannot talk about our friends’ experiences without talking about the possible movements of their bodies...obviously lacks all gnostic regulation.”

Now that we have discussed the epistemological and ontological roots of these two philosophers, we can see in this context the place of perception in their philosophies. Both being empiricists, for them sense perception is the primary source of knowledge. Other subsidiary sources like memory, testimony, past experience are based on this primary source. Before going into the detail of their views in this regard, we would like to answer why Ayer does not recognize the testimony of other persons as a reliable source of knowledge, as Moore does. This position of Ayer has roots in his solipsistic ontology wherein the self can only be aware of its own sense-data and the existence of other people is explained only behaviouristically. It is obvious then, that testimony cannot be a reliable source for Ayer for it is directly related to the implicit denial of the other selves in Ayer’s philosophy.

In case of both G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer perception is by way of sense-data. Thus we are directly acquainted with sense-data alone. However, while in the case of Moore there is an indirect apprehension of material things in the sense that whenever we see sense-data, we know that

---

there is 'something' other than these sense-data which we directly apprehend. At least one point Moore says a similar thing about perception. In his “some Judgments of perception”, he remarks that it would be ‘rash’ to totally exclude the element of inference from perception. Moore, holding a common sense position keeps the knowledge of material things prior to his empiricism. However his empiricism, owing to its Lockean legacy, is unable to penetrate the veil of sense-data. This gnostic element, as we have said earlier, is important in Moore’s philosophy. Though it gives rise to inconsistencies yet it makes philosophizing a meaningful exercise. Ayer, on the other hand, holds that though sense-data are parts of our sense-experience, and the question does not arise of going beyond them; still there is some kind of an unconscious inference that there are material things. As is evident from Moore’s view such judgments of perception as ‘this is a coin’, ‘that is a table can be taken to be judgments whose truth involves the existence of material things.

In Ayer’s case verification principle is central to his philosophy. And according to Ayer our knowledge of the matters of fact must be empirically verifiable, even if weakly. But we find that with the narrow tools of sense-data, Ayer is unable to verify the empirical facts. Also, his insistence that the question of perception is basically a question of translatability of material-object statements into sense-data statements has no meaningful consequence. This does not bring him the clarity which he
is so eagerly seeking in language. Here we may point out that though sense-data, according to these philosophers are units of perception they have epistemological and ontological roots in the empiricist ideas.

While Ayer talks in terms of actual and possible sense-data, Moore does not accept the validity of possible sense-data. Ayer’s possible sense-data, or for that matter, Russell’s sensibilia have a common origin in Berkeleyian philosophy which, as we have already pointed out, is a precursor of the phenomenalist theory. Moore, on the other hand introduces sense-data as something really existing, as something that continues to exist even when one does not perceive it. As we have already indicated, Moore is hesitant in taking any definite stand on the nature of perception. And it will be wrong to ascribe to him any one theory of perception among the three choices that he keeps open. The reason is Moore has examined all these options and has concluded that he is not able to reach a decision. As we have tried to show, this hesitancy has roots in Moore’s acceptance of a common sense position which demanded a naive realistic interoperation of perception on the one hand, and on the other hand his unquestioned inclusion of the Lockean ideas in his treatment of perception. The latter thesis made it impossible to penetrate the veil of appearance and to know the real material thing outside the circle of one’s own ideas.

A very important point of difference between these two philosophers is the issue of the act-object analysis of perception. This
analysis has its origins in the debate going on between Locke on the one hand and Berkeley and Hume on the other. As we have illustrated already, Berkeley questioned this distinction between the act of sensation and the object of sensation. Ayer supports the Berkeleyian argument and says that such view leads to 'metaphysical' suppositions. He says: "This definition of sense-data as the objects of direct awareness is often associated with a particular view about the analysis of sensations which it does not logically entail. This view is that it is possible to discriminate in any sensation at least two distinct factors, one of them being the act of sensing and the other the object sensed." Referring to Moore's distinction between 'blue' and 'consciousness of blue' in "The Refutation of Idealism", Ayer says that this does not entail that "this common element of consciousness is a distinct, individual factor in any sensation." Ayer, here interpreting sense-data in terms of discrete Humean impressions, says that such experience of sense-data does not involve any conception of substance. As we have pointed out earlier (ch.1), at the root of the problem of perception is the conception of substance. Since Ayer explains perception in terms of discrete unconnected sense-data he rules out the possibility of the conception of substance.

12 Ibid., p.62.
Ayer propounds the thesis that the distinction between veridical and delusive perception does not apply to sense-data. We would like to point out that by denying this distinction in the case of sense-data Ayer is using the term in a very special introspective sense. Ayer, however claims that his view does not lead to idealism, since he is not using the term sense-data in the sense that they exist in the mind. “To say that a colour or a sound or any other sense datum exists only when it is experienced does not by any means entail saying that it is a state of mind.”¹³ Here we would like to point out that this contention of Ayer may sound logical; yet his own treatment of sense-data as something to which the distinction of veridical and delusive perception does not apply, logically leads to a subjective idealist view. Let us consider the familiar example of ‘speckled hen’. From a distance the hen looks a shade of gray and on closer approach it looks a background of white spotted with black dots. Now in Ayer’s sense, we have two sense-data, one of gray and another of white with black spots. Of these one is veridical as we come to know by looking at the hen closely and another is delusive. Now seen from Ayer’s view point, it does not matter even if neither of these two sense-data is veridical and perhaps a third sense-data (in Ayer’s sense a possible sense-data) is the veridical one. But all these sense-data being particular appearances have nothing to do

with the real nature of things. Thus Ayer’s data are introspective and incapable of ‘assuring the unconscious inference’ (FEK, p.60) of material things. Thus Ayer’s sense-data are the linguistic remake of Hume’s impressions in being discrete, subjective particulars. As is evident from the following assertion of Hume: "For since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us while consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear."\(^\text{14}\) Thus Ayer’s sense-data, like Hume’s impressions are “internal and perishing existences...”\(^\text{15}\) —they cannot be subject to perceptual error, since they are mental occurrences, having nothing to do with the perception of external things.

Let us first have a glimpse of Moore’s affiliation. As we have tried to show Descartes’ guidelines for making philosophical inquiries with an emphasis on clarity and meticulousness have been accepted by Moore within his empiricist framework of concretes. Thus in his case Cartesian clarity boils down to conceptual clarity. He also accepts the Cartesian Mind-Body dualism implicitly, that is, he justifies it within his common sense position. Thus the obvious conclusion for him is that it is a common sense certainty, and it has been accepted universally, that there are consciousness and there are bodies. Now this acceptance, as we have tried


\(^{15}\) Ibid., p.194.
to show, has close affinity with Lockean acceptance of mind-body dualism. Locke, unlike Descartes, accepts that interaction is possible between mind and body, and unlike Descartes he is an empiricist. Thus, this dualism is supported by sense-experience. And an external relation is accepted by both Locke and Moore in the sense that mind is in the same place where body is.

So far as the influence of Russell is concerned, we do not think that Moore was influenced by Russell. In fact, Moore was the first to use the term ‘sense-data’ in his lectures of 1910-11 and even before that he used the term sense-contents in 1905-06. Russell used the term in 1912 only in his The Problems of Philosophy. He even accepted Moore’s view that there is a difference between sensation and sense-data—somthing that he was to abandon later. Moore even criticized Russell’s concept of knowledge by acquaintance by pointing out that by ‘acquaintance’ we can only mean perception; it does not amount to knowledge as Russell says. Ayer on the other hand was influenced by Russell’s phenomenalism and neutral monism, as we stated earlier.

Another important difference between the two philosophers is that whereas Ayer claims to be having a scientific approach and calls his method scientific, Moore claims to defend common sense. Ayer claims to
base his method on science and as he claims his so-called "demolition" of metaphysics is a step towards vindicating science and scientific laws. As he asserts: "There is no field of experience which cannot, in principle, be brought under some form of scientific law, and no type of speculative knowledge about the world which it is, in principle, beyond the power of science to give." According to Ayer there is no difference of kind between propositions of science and those of common sense. However he says that "The superiority of the scientific hypothesis consists merely in its being more abstract, more precise, and more fruitful. And although scientific objects such as atoms and electrons seem to be fictitious in a way that chairs and tables are not, here, too, the distinction is only a distinction of degree. For both these kinds of objects are known only by their sensible manifestations and are definable in terms of them." The interesting point is that both draw these distinct inspirations from their espousal of empiricism. In the case of Ayer, his empiricism, as he claims, limits his assertions to no-nonsense factual statements and thus gives him the objectivity conducive to a scientific approach. In the case of Moore, it helps him to draw common-sense conclusions on the basis of concrete empirical instances that seem to be so indubitable. Now, the point is: is Ayer’s approach scientific or Moore’s approach commonsensical? As

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p.49.
Suman Gupta points out: "There is a dialectical relation between the scientific world and the 'common-sense view' of the world, because the existence of an independent material world, with all its multifarious characteristics, constitutes the basis of common-sense throughout human history."\(^{19}\)

Ayer says: "Though Moore himself does not make it explicit, there is an assumption underlying his claims to knowledge. The assumption is that the reasons which we have for holding what he calls our common-sense beliefs are sufficient reasons."\(^{20}\) And the factors constituting the sufficient reasons are according to Ayer, (1) present circumstances, (2) evidence of my senses, (3) the whole course of my experiences, (4) my memory, (5) my subsequent perception, and testimony of other people. Here it will be pertinent to note that Moore is not talking in terms of sufficient reasons when he talks of common sense, rather he is claiming to prove what we in our ordinary lives take for granted and never question. The whole process of reasoning that Ayer bestows on Moore is absent in Moore. To what extent he was able to defend the common sense position is a very different question and has to be addressed within Moorean framework. Ayer, on the other hand, is applying his own categories for acquiring knowledge.


Ayer remarks: "If the propositions of common sense are self-governing, in the way that Moore took them to be, so are the propositions which belong to the formal or natural sciences.... In all these cases there are recognized standards of proof and recognized procedures for determining whether these standards have been met."\(^{21}\) We must point out here that Moore never means to advance common sense criteria as self-governing criteria with standard procedures and proofs. He is more tentative in his approach than Ayer takes him to be and as we have found out Moore's criteria are more intuitive than based on any process of reasoning. They are in the words of Moore indubitable and certain, and we can say, in a way self-evident. Circumstances, sense-based evidence, memory, and testimony of other people, are not the main ingredients of Moor's criteria but supporting factors. However, Ayer on the basis of this reading of Moore, goes on to draw the conclusion: "This argument has serious consequences for philosophy. For what follows from it is that the truth or falsehood of all these propositions is not even a matter for philosophical discussion. It depends upon the satisfaction of the appropriate criteria: and whether the criteria are satisfied is always a matter of empirical or formal fact. What part, then, was there left for philosophy to play? The answer which Moore accepted in practice, and his followers also in theory, was that it could

engage in the activity of analysis.” Ayer here draws a conclusion which does not follow from Moore’s position. Moore never means to say that about matters of common sense. Philosophy has nothing meaningful to say. In this he differs from Ayer.

Ayer says: “My own view ... is that while it is not necessary to have recourse to anything of the order of sense-data, in order to describe the facts, the introduction of a term, which fulfils this function, is legitimate and advantageous. It makes it easier to show how the common sense view of the physical world operates as a theory worth respect to our sense experiences. This goes, however, only a limited distance towards vindicating Moore’s approach.” We may point out that Moore is no need of such vindication. His problem does not concern the superficial aspects of language and its analysis, it has a deeper epistemological roots, as we have indicated earlier.

Ayer says that Moore “set the problem in a way that made it impossible for him to solve it.” He says that Moore began with the assumption that the material statement like “This is human hand” can be expanded as “There is just one hand that stands in the relation R to this”. By this meaning ‘sense-data’. Thus according to Ayer, Moore’s problem was to find the right value

---

24 Ibid., p. 66.
for R and suggest that the only possible solution to his problem is this: “...that the physical object is an idealization of sense-qualia, and that it is from sense-qualia which we take as typical that the object directly derives its perceptual properties. This is not the sort of analysis that Moore was looking for, but it may be the most that can be achieved from his starting point.”25 Here we may point out that Moore’s starting point was not the problem of finding the right value for R as suggested by Ayer. This problem has roots in accepting Lockean empiricism on the one hand and common sense on the other.

Ayer concludes: “What then remains of Moore’s defence of common sense? Not very much, when we consider that it has nothing to say about the relation of the physical world as we perceive it to the physical world as physicists describe it.”26 He says: “But if we have to wait upon analysis, which emerges as theorizing, to discover what the constituents of the common-sense view of the world really are, our certainty of their existence is less of an acquisition than one might at first suppose.”27 Thus according to Ayer’s reading of Moore, the latter assigns to philosophy, in a way similar to that of Ayer, “what turns out to be a major role of interpretation.”28

26 Ibid., p.67.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p.68.
Ayer raises here a controversial point. It is true as we have indicated. Moore has been interpreted by quite a few philosophers to be at the origins of linguistic philosophy. This insistence on correct analysis and stress on clarity of concepts and propositions led to such views. What Ayer is saying here is that Moore’s philosophy entails the conclusion that the major task of philosophy is interpretation. However, we disagree here. Moore, as we tried to emphasize, has deep roots in British empiricist tradition. This problem relates not to some kind of linguistic analysis; it has bearing on his common-sense stand. And he is more concerned to bring these two, that is analysis and common-sense closer. The problem of perception as faced by Moore has roots in the acceptance of Lockean ideas’ on the one hand and a commonstand on the other. Thus it is not just finding of the right value of ‘R’ that concerns Moore. His inconsistency has real epistemological basis unlike the philosophy of Ayer. Ayer says that Moore “…mistakes the purport of Berkeley’s idealism. Berkeley did not maintain a general connection between ‘being’ and ‘being perceived’ but a specific connection, which he treated as analytic, between being a sensible quality’ and ‘being perceived’. If one wishes to refute Berkeley one has to discredit his assumption that the physical objects common sense are composed of sensible qualities.” 29

Here we may point out that this criticism of Ayer does not hold ground if we consider Berkeley's view about sensible qualities, that is, if we consider the fact that for Berkeley physical object can be equated with sensible qualities, then the difference between 'being a sensible qualities' and 'being a physical object' come to mean the same thing and thus in the case of the former this general connection alone holds. Another point is, what Ayer makes out to be the consequence of Moore's common sense position is only a thesis to vindicate his own position that the function of philosophy should be confined to the analysis of scientific and commonsensical propositions. While Moore puts forward common sense as the criteria for judging philosophical assertions, for Ayer empirical verification is the criterion for judging the meaningfulness of the propositions of both science and common sense. As he says that "the only sort of justification that is necessary or possible for self-consistent empirical propositions is empirical verification. And this applies just as much to the laws of science as to the maxims of common sense."  

Both Moore and Ayer stress on the clarity of thought. Both believe that the ordinary usage have some obvious limitations. However, while this leads Ayer towards a total reduction of material-object statements into sense-data statements with his holding a strict translatability thesis in his *Language, Truth and Logic*. Ayer says "the propositions of philosophy are

---

not factual, but linguistic in character—that is, they do not describe the
behaviour of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions or
the formal consequences of definitions.”  
Ayer says that “It is the
philosopher’s business to test the validity of our scientific hypothesis and
everyday assumptions”  and most that philosophy can do according to
Ayer, is “to show what are the criteria which are used to determine the
truth or falsehood of any given proposition.”  

It will be relevant here to have a glimpse at the notion of truth as
held by these two philosophers. For this has an important relation with
their acceptance of empiricism, and in the case of Moore it is supportive of
his realist stand on perception, whereas in the case of Ayer originating in
his verification principle, it does not lead to any meaningful conclusion.
Ayer says that “to say that a belief, or a statement, or a judgement, is true is
always an elliptical way of ascribing truth to a proposition, which is
believed, or stated, or judged.”  Ayer is here defining the truth of a belief
in terms of the truth of the corresponding proposition. As he advances an
example: "Thus, if I say that the Marxists’ belief that capitalism leads to
war is true, what I am saying is that the proposition, believed by Marxists,

32 Ibid., p.48.
33 Ibid., p.48.
34 Ibid., p.88.
that capitalism leads to war is true."

Ayer says that in the sentence of the form ‘P is true’, the phrase ‘is true’ is "logically superfluous." Thus Ayer says, in the proposition "Queen Anne is dead" is true; "all that one is saying is that Queen Anne is dead." He remarks that "And this indicates that the terms "true" and "false" connote nothing, but function in the sentence simply as marks of assertion and denial." This makes it clear that Ayer is defining empirical proposition in terms of truth function. Moore on the other hand recognises the empirical significance of a question like ‘what is truth?’ for he says: "To say that a belief is true is to say that the fact to which it refers is or has being; while to say that a belief is false is to say that the fact to which it refers is not—that there is no such fact. Or, to put it another way, we might say: every belief has the property of referring to some particular fact, every different belief to a different fact; and the property which a belief has, when it is true—the property which we name when we call it true, is the property which can be expressed by saying that the fact to which it refers is. This is precisely what I propose to submit as a fundamental definition of truth...." In this passage Moore is using the term ‘being’ as equivalent to

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
"being a constituent of the Universe..." Moore then goes on to give correspondence as the criterion of truth as is clear from his assertion: 

"...we can at once assert 'To say that this belief is true is to say that there is in the Universe a fact to which it corresponds; and that to say that it is false is to say that there is not in the Universe any fact to which it corresponds'" Ayer who begins with asserting that the question about truth and falsity is logically superfluous adds in another passage that the truth of an empirical proposition may have a pragmatic criterion and its validity can at the same time be based on 'past experience'. An empirical hypothesis according to Ayer, can be said to fulfil the pragmatic criterion when it "fulfil the function which it is designed to fulfil." He says, since the function of an empirical hypothesis is to "enable us to anticipate experience", therefore, "if an observation to which a given proposition is relevant conforms to our expectations, the truth of that proposition is confirmed." Or as he says, at least its probability has increased.

As we have seen already, Moore's acceptance of the existence of material things has brought him into the category of realists, we find that

---

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
first, his hesitancy about the correct analysis of such propositions, and, second, his acceptance of sense-data, point towards an implicit subjective approach that creates a wide gap between the ‘sensed’ sense-data and ‘perceived’ material objects. However, in Moore, we find a much more progressive philosopher than in Ayer. First, since Moore, though he is an analytical philosopher, always considers the problem of perception to be an empirical question which it really is. Second, while emphasizing his own inability to give a correct analysis of such propositions, he always accepts the existence of material substance and self. Ayer’s claim that he is dealing only with a linguistic question is a false claim as is clear from our analysis of his empiricism.