Conclusion

In our study we have traced the theories of perception of G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer from the philosophies of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. In accordance with our methodology we have traced their views on perception as parts of their epistemology and ontology, both when given as explicit principles and also as something tacitly implied in their views. Our main concern here has been to study the problem of perception as a question of the relation between sense-data and material things. And we have tried to show the significance of the concept of substance in understanding this question.

We have attempted to show in our study that Moore’s view has affinity with the philosophies of Descartes and Locke while Ayer’s philosophy has roots in Berkeley and Hume. As we have explained earlier, though there certainly are gaps and breaks and the logical development of thought from Descartes to Hume cannot have a ready parallel in Moore and Ayer; yet the philosophical presuppositions and arguments of these two philosophers can perhaps be seen to move in that order. Specially Moore’s method of analysis and his arguments for common sense point to such affiliation. In case of Ayer, his linguistic claim is supported in the end by the arguments developed by Berkeley and Hume. We have incidentally
brought in Russell while discussing Ayer’s phenomenalism and have attempted to show Ayer’s similarities with him especially during former’s phenomenalist phase.

Moore’s stand seems to be realist since he accepts the independent existence of material things, and introduces sense-data as something really existing. Ayer on the other hand takes a subjective idealist stand on the lines of Berkeley and Hume. The main point of similarity here between the two philosophers is the element of subjectivity that lurks behind the private nature of sense-data.

In case of Moore we have tried to show that his common sense position and his empiricist background are central to understanding his problem of perception. And we have tried to trace his hesitancy about the correct analysis of perception, i.e. his keeping open the three options regarding the relation between sense-data and material things, to his affiliation to these two beliefs, i.e. common sense that demand a naive realistic interpretation of perception and, the empiricist legacy of ‘idea’. Again, we have tried to show that he himself does not follow those criteria of common sense that he prescribes. Second, his argument many a times hinges on circularity as we have pointed out while discussing his views on perception, common sense, truth etc. Another important point is that Moore’s tacit acceptance of Cartesian dualism and Lockean empiricism makes him consider sense-data
to be the natural objects of perception. In fact because of his presuppositions he never questions the validity of introducing sense-data as something directly apprehended. This we find takes him away from common sense.

We have tried to understand Ayer's view on perception within his general epistemological position. Though he does not totally give up his phenomenalism, in his philosophical development we find there is a change of emphasis. That is, the strict linguistic framework of logical positivism gives way to epistemological concern against the sceptic's challenge. We have tried to show that Ayer put forward his thesis of verificationism when he already accepted the Berkeleyian and Human premises about the possibility of knowledge and also their concept of 'substance'. The problem remains thus insuperable for him since both, the sceptic and Ayer, are talking in the same language and accepting the same categories. Sceptic's challenge as it is, is also confined within the circle of ideas that empiricists created. The non-distinction of veridical and delusive perceptions in the case of sense-data leaves the question of perceptual error unexplained in Ayer. And we find that both Moore and Ayer though trying to silence the sceptic by claiming to uphold common sense and science respectively, remain as far away from the solution to the problem of perception as their adversaries are.
We conclude with the remark that the problem of perception becomes a 'problem' only when we abstract appearances from essence and ignore the notion of continuity while explaining changes. Any theory of perception that ignores or is unable to explain the substantial nature of reality, cannot explain the facts. This is why Ayer's theory fails and Moore remains forever hesitant.