In our present thesis, we will attempt to discuss the theories of perception of G.E.Moore (1873-1958) and A.J.Ayer (1910-1989) taking into account their ontological and epistemological moorings. Our study will be based on the premise that there is a distinction between what a philosopher claims to be doing and what he is actually doing. Here we will highlight this point in the background of the fact that the question of perception is intertwined with the concepts of reality and knowledge, since it is part of a wider concept, i.e. the theory of knowledge. In epistemology or the theory of knowledge the two main and rival theories are empiricism and rationalism. While rationalism is the view that all our knowledge comes from reason; empiricism considers sense-experience to be the only reliable source of knowledge.

Thus, the problem of perception is the main preoccupation of the philosophers in the empiricist tradition to which both G.E.Moore and A.J.Ayer belong. A Companion to Epistemology defines empiricism thus: "An epistemological movement according to which (1) nothing around us..."
can be known to be real unless its existence is revealed in or inferable from information we gain directly in sense-experience or in introspection of our subjective states, or later recall, and (2) genuine, intelligible differences in our claims about this world must express these differences in experience.  

The above-stated definition of empiricism also clearly brings out the relation between epistemology and ontology. As is stated above, in order to have perception there must be something which is perceived. And also, there must be a subject who perceives it. We are using the word 'must' in the logical sense of necessity and not in the empirical sense. Thus, perception logically evolves a subject and an object of perception. Any philosopher who deals with the problem of perception assumes a certain nature of the subject and a certain nature of the object. These assumptions are the ontological presuppositions of any theory of perception, as we will find out when we study the theories of perception of G.E.Moore and A.J.Ayer. But from this we are not assuming that the philosopher explicitly states these assumptions. For instance in the case of A.J.Ayer, we find, he always claims that he is dealing with a linguistic question whenever he is talking of the problem of perception. In the course of our analysis of perception in this thesis we will attempt to bring out the epistemological and ontological assumptions of both G.E.Moore and A.J.Ayer implicitly.

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involved in their theories of perception. We will attempt to trace their ontological and epistemological presuppositions from Cartesian dualism in the process of development of their ideas through ‘the negation of negation’. We are using here, the concept of ‘the negation of negation’ only in a partial sense where some presuppositions and ideas of the preceding philosophers are negated while others are taken for granted and assimilated into their systems by the succeeding philosophers. Thus, in the process of our analysis we will attempt to show that though Locke is an empiricist, and Descartes is a rationalist, yet Locke took for granted some of the logical presuppositions of Cartesian dualism. According to Suman Gupta, the three basic assumptions of Cartesian dualism are as follows: ³

(1) that mind and body are two independent substances.

(2) that mind and body cannot have direct causal interconnections.

(3) that mind is logically prior to matter.

Similarly, though Berkeley denied certain aspects of Locke’s philosophy, yet he incorporated certain other aspects in his philosophy. The same holds true, as we will see later, in the case of Hume.

Here it is important to note that though Ayer is an empiricist and claims to be concerned only with linguistic analysis asserting the aim of

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philosophy is only clarification of thought; yet he too takes for granted the mental side of Cartesian dualism on the lines of Berkeley and Hume. Thus while he explicitly takes an empiricist stand, the view that mind can only be directly acquainted with its own ideas remains implicit in his philosophy. In a similar way Moore takes an empiricist stand while asserting that knowing through sense-perception is the "most primitive way" of knowing. He too accepts the mind-body dualism of Descartes and follows the British empiricists in accepting that the mind can be directly acquainted only with sense-data in perception and not with the physical object. We will try to show that whereas Ayer claims to have espoused empiricism in order to, in his own words, "eschew metaphysics," and in effect reduces all reality to sense-data; Moore, implicitly accepting the Cartesian dualism in a substantial way and assigning an independent substantial existence to material objects tries to incorporate them as part of his view of reality. And thus Moore’s empiricism is explicitly close to his view on reality.

Despite some of the similarities pointed out above, these two philosophers take a different stand on the question of the nature of perception and related issues. The problem of perception for them is most

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importantly a question about the relation between the material object and the sense-data. On the other hand, we will try to show that whereas Ayer takes a subjective idealist stand on the lines of Hume, Moore’s position is similar to Locke as he assigns an independent objective existence to the material object.

The first modern empiricist Locke takes Cartesian dualism for granted. As already stated Descartes makes clear-cut distinction between thinking mind and extended body. According to him, mind is a substance “whose whole essence or nature is simply to think”. Being a rationalist, he holds that all our knowledge of the external world comes through clear and distinct ideas. Descartes holds that we have “a clear and distinct perception” of extended matter.

The dualism of Descartes is taken for granted by John Locke, who, being an empiricist, bases all knowledge on sense-experience. Thus for him, perception is “the first operation of all our intellectual faculties, and the inlet of all knowledge into our minds”. Perception is thus, “employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of


our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves...”9 And it is this “which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking.”10 Cartesian dualism is thus retained with ‘matter and its primary qualities’ and ‘mind and its ideas’.

Here, as pointed out by Suman Gupta, “Locke takes for granted Descartes’ presupposition that the mind can be directly acquainted only with its own ideas but he, being an empiricist who regards sense-experience to be the only source of knowledge, fails to justify the knowledge of material substance.”11

Berkeley too holds an empiricist position like Locke, but he refutes the distinction made by Locke between primary and secondary qualities and argues that primary qualities too are ideas in our minds and they are also subjective like secondary qualities. He also holds that all our knowledge comes through the ideas and that mind can know only its own ideas. He thus infers that there is no need to assume the existence of any material substance behind these ideas. Berkeley reduces all existence to perception and thus is considered to be the precursor of phenomenalism. A.J.Ayer takes a sympathetic view of Berkeley’s subjective idealism. He

10 Ibid.
says approvingly of Berkeley that Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities “...is not a distinction between those perceived qualities that are unaffected by the conditions of observation and those that are affected. Since all are affected, there is no such distinction, as Berkeley realized.”

Hume takes Berkeleyian empiricism to its extreme and reduces the whole reality to ‘impressions’ which are discrete, unconnected and mental. For him, all perception is either impressions or ideas. Impressions are those perceptions “which enter with most force and violence”. Ideas are “the faint images of these ...” Suman Gupta points out that Hume “not only denies the existence of material substance but equally denies the existence of spiritual substance”, for the whole world is constituted out of discrete and unconnected impressions. Hume’s view can thus be characterized as subjective idealist and pluralist. His view is ‘idealist’ since the ultimate reality is mental and discrete impressions. It is subjective since, ideas depend on the perceiving subject for their existence. It is a pluralist view

14 Ibid., p. 109.
16 Refer to various books and articles by Suman Gupta: The Origin and Theories of Linguistic Philosophy (1983); Twentieth Century Philosophy(1991); “Reflections of Idealism, Mechanical Materialism and Marxism—A Probe into Their Ontological and Epistemological Roots”, Journal of the School of Languages(JNU), 1991.
since reality is not one or two; it is reduced to numerous discrete and momentary impressions. We will attempt to show that Ayer's position can be traced to Hume's pluralistic and subjective idealist stance. As Ayer himself admits: Like Hume, I divide all genuine propositions into two classes: Those which in his terminology concern 'Relations of ideas' and those which concern 'Matters of fact'. This division, we will try to show, is applied by Ayer to his phenomenalism through his division between categorical and hypothetical statements.

We hold that the theories of perception can be broadly divided into those that take a subjective idealist stand and those that take a realist stand. It is a question about the nature of the object of perception. While for both Moore and Ayer, the source of knowledge remains the same, both being empiricists; their stand on the nature of the object of perception differs. Those taking a realist stand assign an independent status to the object of perception, i.e. the object of perception is independent of the perceiving mind. Moore introduces sense-data also as something existing. Those taking a subjective idealist stand, however, make the objects of perception mind-dependent. Thus we will try to show that while Ayer takes a subjective idealist stand on the lines of Berkeley and Hume, Moore takes a realist stand in holding that the physical objects are not mind-independent.

Apart from tracing their views from the British empiricist philosophers, we will try to indicate that importance of the concept of substance in understanding the problem of perception. We will try to show first that Moore’s inability to give ‘the correct analysis’ of material object is basically a conceptual difficulty since sense-data remain confined to appearances and never reach the essence. This presents a difficulty for Moore in defining the nature of substance. As an isolated tool of knowledge perception can only give appearances. It cannot explain continuity amidst changes. Also, it leaves unsolved the problem of personal identity. Thus, Ayer is not able to resolve the problem of personal identity as he denies substance like Berkeley and Hume. It is relevant to understand the nature of substance in any study of perception. Therefore we will briefly dwell on the subject at this point.

There are various kind of substances in the world like iron, water, wood, etc. They undergo changes and they have qualities. They remain the same amidst these changes. For example, water has the quality of cooling, it will not burn, it boils at a particular temperature, it cleans, it turns into ice if it is cooled below a point, etc. Thus the substance water remains the same in the middle of various changes and also has different qualities. Some of the qualities are known to us and some are known subsequently with the advancement of knowledge.
The term ‘substance’ has been used in several senses. One such definition “makes use of the logical notions of subject and predicate; regarded in this way, S is a substance if S is a subject of predicates, but cannot be predicated in turn of any other subject.”\(^{18}\) Again, a substance has been defined to be one that has an independent existence. Thus for Aristotle a substance is something that exists in itself and is conceived through itself. For example, a particular man is a substance. This definition of Aristotle has been taken by Descartes and Spinoza. For instance Descartes has defined substance thus: “By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.”\(^ {19}\) For Spinoza, in this sense, god is the only substance. Another definition of substance involves reference to time. In this sense a substance is something that remains the same amidst changes. Yet another way of looking at substance is in terms of appearance and essence, i.e., what the substance really is apart from its appearances. This definition also includes a reference to continuity amidst changes. Substance seen as such is relevant for our study of perception. For all our perception will be confined to appearances and changes if we ignore the concept of substance which explains, first, the essence of a thing beyond appearance.


and, second, the question of personal identity, i.e. continuity amidst changes.

Among the British empiricists, Locke defines substance as the "...unknown support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist...without something to support them..." Berkeley denies the existence of material substance and reduces all reality to mind and its ideas. Hume asserts that the idea of substance "is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by imagination and have a particular name assigned to them, by which we are able to recall either to ourselves or others, that collection." J.S. Mill (1806-1873) defines material substance as the permanent possibility of sensations.

The sense-data philosophers, following their empiricist predecessors take into account only appearances and ignore the essence. We will attempt to show that while Moore gives room to material substance in his system, Ayer, speaking in 'formal mode' simply does away with the concept of substance. This is clear from his remark in Language, Truth and Logic: "It happens to be the case that we cannot, in our language, refer to the sensible properties of a thing without introducing a word or phrase which appears to stand for the thing itself as opposed to anything which may be said about it.

And as a result of this, those who are infected by the primitive superstition that to every name a single real entity must correspond assume that it is necessary to distinguish logically between the thing itself and any, or all, of its sensible properties. And so they employ the term ‘substance’ to refer to the thing itself. But from the fact that we happen to employ a single word to refer to a thing, and make that word the grammatical subject of the sentences in which we refer to the sensible appearances of the thing, it does not by any means follow that the thing itself is a ‘simple entity’, or that it cannot be defined in terms of its appearances”.  

Thus by denying substance, Ayer, like Berkeley and Hume, confines all reality to sense-data or appearances. Moore, in his private notes, while talking about philosophers who deny the existence of material things, comments: “Philosophers who deny it almost all make props. about the proper use of words” and says that any such assertions by these philosophers involves the use of ‘we’, which implies existence of material things. This makes it quite clear that while Ayer talks in a formal mode of speech, Moore talks in a material mode of speech. Language distinguishes between formal and material modes of speech; the latter having reference to empirical facts.

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Thus in our study we will try to show that perception will remain a fleeting stream of appearances if the existence of a permanent substance is denied. Further this denial leads to the problem of personal identity since no change is possible in the absence of continuity.

We will attempt to show that though Ayer claims to confine himself to linguistic analysis his view logically leads to the denial of both mental and material substance and a reduction of all reality to sense-data. In Moore, however, there is an acceptance of both material and mental substance, but he too takes for granted the Cartesian dualism and accepts the view that mind can directly apprehend only sense-data and not the material object. This conclusion may sound strange in view of the fact that Moore always claims to hold that there certainly are material objects in the Universe and it is something acceptable to common sense. However, we find that as soon as he accepts the concept of sense-data as the immediate objects of perception, it becomes logically impossible to go beyond the circle of sense-data. Thus we will endeavour to show in our analysis of Moore’s perception that his common sense position on the one hand, and his empiricism on the other are central to understanding his view on perception. While we have broadly divided the theories of perception into realist and subjective realist theories, we find it convenient to discuss the three heads under which they have been studied.
(1) According to the realist theories there is a direct relation between the observer and the material object which exists independently of him. (That sense-data are “literally parts of the surfaces of objects”, especially in case of sight and touch).

(2) According to representative theories “perception is a three-term relation between the observer, his sense-data and the material objects which he perceives”.

(3) According to the phenomenalist theories “material objects are simply ordered collections or ‘families’ of sense-data and that the relation of perceiving is a two-term relation between the observer and his sense-data. Material objects, for the phenomenalist, have either no independent existence or are no more than, in Mill’s phrase, ‘permanent possibilities of sensation’.”

Though we have made a much broader classification of these theories into realism and subjective idealism, it will be convenient to consider the theories of perception as classified under these three heads.

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26 Ibid., p. 100.
The naive realism is a view that there exists a physical world of objects whether we perceive it or not. Its main beliefs are:

(a) that there exists a world of physical objects;
(b) it exists independently of perception;
(c) statements about physical objects can be known to be true through sense-experience;
(d) with our senses we perceive the world quite as it is and thus our claim to have knowledge of it is justified.

A.J. Bahm adds further that one of the main features of naive realism is also this that objects have qualities or properties which are independent of the knower and that the objects are public, i.e., they can be known by more than one person.

The main argument against realism remains what has come to be known as ‘the argument from illusion’. The main source of this argument, as C.W.K. Mundie rightly points out, is “...in the manner in which Descartes presented his case for doubting the existence of all material things.”

That our beliefs concerning material things are based on the evidence of our senses and our senses might deceive us. On similar lines, it has been pointed out that often we have illusions, i.e. such cases as our not perceiving things as they are. For instance, the straight stick looks bent

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when half immersed in water. Similarly, in the Muller illusion two equal lines appear unequal (illus. i).

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(illus. i)

Often there is an appearance when there is no reality at all\(^3\)\(^1\) e.g., in the case of hallucination. For example, the drunken man sees pink rats where there are none. Or a man feeling pain in his amputated leg. These and similar arguments have been advanced to show that "many of the sensed properties that common sense counts as properties of material objects depend not simply on the nature of the objects concerned but also on a number of other factors."\(^3\)\(^2\) H.H. Price advanced an argument which might be called 'the argument from perspective distortion'.\(^3\)\(^3\) He says that sense-data seen from different viewpoints do not fit together to present the surface of the whole object. It has been argued that naive realism does not take into account the extra-organic and intra-organic conditions of knowing. Again, there are variations in perception among different people.

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Here it will not be out of place to mention in passing that what is considered to be the common sense view of perception is akin to naive realism and this can be suitably adjudged to be one of the two horns of dilemma facing Moore. We will discuss it in detail when we deal with Moore's view on perception since he is considered to be a philosopher of common sense. Certainly, we must point out, there are no clear specifications about the beliefs of common sense. "The content of such beliefs will vary to some degree from age to age and from one civilisation to another. We may take them to be the commonly assumed and unargued assumptions that we all take for granted..."\(^{34}\) And one such unargued assumption is that we directly perceive material things, and not the sense-data. It is in this sense that common sense view of perception is identical with naive realism.

John Locke is considered to be the main exponent of representative realism. According to Locke, the physical objects exist independently of perception; however, they may appear to us in ways different from what they really are. He divides between primary and secondary qualities. The primary qualities are there in the object, e.g., its size, shape, weight. The secondary qualities are not really qualities of objects. The ideas of secondary qualities are produced in the mind by reason of powers of

objects which themselves depend on the primary qualities of the objects. They are, e.g., colour, smell, taste, touch etc. Locke, taking for granted the mental side of Cartesian dualism, defines ‘idea’ as “the immediate object of perception”. The quality of a thing is its “power to produce any idea in our mind.” We will discuss in greater detail Locke’s view on perception as a part of his theory of knowledge in our next chapter. However, it will be relevant to point out that though Locke rejects rationalism, Cartesian dualism finds a safe place in his empiricism as he gives an independent status to material substance and accepts the substantial reality of both mind and body. We will later attempt to show that his unquestioning acceptance of Cartesian ‘idea’ in his system could not take him very far from the Cartesian tradition and thus for him the nature of material substance remains unknown and unknowable. We, in our study, will try to trace Moorean hesitancy about the correct analysis of matter from Locke’s empiricism. We agree with Warnock’s observation that Berkeley’s rejoinder on Locke’s theory of perception led to “a pattern of argument on this subject which has remained central in philosophy right down to the present day.” And we would like to add that the argument moves in a

36 Ibid.
somewhat similar direction from G.E. Moore to A.J. Ayer, notwithstanding the fact that Moore keeps open the three options on perception.

Phenomenalism, in its factual version, maintains that a physical object is no more than a set of actual and possible sense-data. Thus, unlike representative realism which tries to explain perception in terms of minds, sense-data/ideas and physical objects, phenomenalism uses only minds and sense-data.\footnote{D.J. O'Connor, Brian Carr, \textit{Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge}, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1982, p. 106.} It "contradicts three basic beliefs about material objects shared by both forms of realism and by ordinary common sense: (i) that such objects are independent of the observers; (ii) that they are public in being accessible to any number of observers; (iii) that they have causal properties in that they are able to affect other material objects..."\footnote{Ibid.} An important objection against phenomenalism is that "the continuous processes of physical nature sketched by the scientific picture of the world are made intermittent in a way that would destroy their essential properties."\footnote{Ibid., p. 107.} The phenomenalists reply to this objection by positing the possible sense-data as something filling this gap. However, it has been pointed out that the possible sense-data are "nothing but contents of sense experiences..."\footnote{Ibid.} and fare no better than actual sense-data.


\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid., p. 107.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
The linguistic variant of phenomenalism, a view associated with A.J.Ayer, holds that all statements about material things are translatable into statements about actual and possible sense-data. However, it is pointed out, this translation is impossible even in case of a simple physical-object statement. Another important objection against this theory is that "solipsism is always lurking in the background..." \(^{42}\) Hospers defines solipsism thus: "Solipsism(myself-alone-ism), in its weaker form, holds that I am the only mind that exists—that there are physical things(including other bodies) apart from myself, but that my mind is the only one there is. In its stronger form, solipsism holds that not even physical objects...exist; they are only sense-experiences of mind, and have no other existence than as the contents of my mind." \(^{43}\) We will try to show that though A.J.Ayer, who adopts linguistic version of phenomenalism, claims that he is not making any factual assertion, yet his avowed position logically entails an ontological position that is subjective and pluralistic and even cannot be solipsism. As O’Connor and Carr rightly point out: "In any case, the linguistic version of the thesis must be parasitic on the factual version. For it is a basic function of language to describe the world....In other words, the


linguistic version cannot be true if the factual version is not. In our thesis we will try to show that the phenomenalism of Ayer can be traced back to the pluralist, subjective-idealistic ontology of Berkeley and Hume. Warnock too dubs phenomenalism as Berkeley's descendant. We will try to show that Ayer's epistemological position logically entails the pluralistic-atomistic ontology of Berkeley and Hume.

Both G.E. Moore and A.J. Ayer are sense-data philosophers and the problem of perception remain one of the focal interests for both of them. The term sense-data in its present sense was used first by G.E. Moore in his lectures of 1910-11, and then by Russell in *The Problem of Philosophy* in 1912. We will try to show in our study that sense-data are none other than the 'idea' of the empiricist philosophers, Locke, Berkeley and Hume who too consider 'idea' to be something with which we are directly acquainted. Moore says: "...I propose to call these things, the colour and size and shape, *sense-data*, things given or presented by the sense-given, in this case by my sense of sight." Russell defines sense-data as "the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardness, roughness, and so on." Ayer defines sense-data both as part of

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an individual’s sense-experience and as linguistic tools. Broad defines sensa or sense-data as something of which we are “directly aware” in sense-perception and all that we “ever come to know about physical objects and their qualities seems to be based upon the qualities of the sensa” that we perceive. H.H.Price defines sense-data as something directly present to the consciousness. “One thing however, I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of color is directly present to my consciousness.... And when I say that it is ‘directly’ present to my consciousness, I mean that my consciousness of it is not reached by inference, nor by any other intellectual process.”

On the question of relation between sense-data and material things, Ayer claims to take a phenomenalist stand; while Moore remains indecisive between what he calls naive realism (the view that sense-data are identical with the parts of the surfaces of material things), some form of representative realism and phenomenalism. As we have pointed out earlier, we will try to show that Moore’s indecision here is basically a conceptual difficulty that arises from the espousal on the one hand, of a common sense

48 Ibid., p. 90.
position, and a tacit acceptance of the empiricist ‘idea’ as the objects of
direct perception, on the other hand. This also has important roots in his
concept of substance. We will attempt to highlight that Moore’s stand is
more progressive than that of Ayer as the former takes cognizance of the
substantial nature of the subject and object of knowledge; whereas the
latter, claiming to tackle a linguistic issue, denies the substantial nature of
the self as well as material substance.

Thus in a nutshell, the major objectives of our thesis are:

(i) Tracing the views of G.E.Moore and A.J.Ayer on perception from
Locke, Berkeley and Hume who took for granted some of the basic
assumptions of Cartesian dualism.

(ii) Tracing the problem of perception from the seeming ‘divide’
between science and common sense. In this context, we will stress
the centrality of Moore’s common sense position in understanding
his view of perception.

(iii) Stressing the importance of the concept of substance in
understanding the issue of perception.

In the light of the above objections we will concentrate on a critical
exposition of the views of Moore and Ayer on perception taking into
account their epistemological and ontological position. We will separately
give a comparative account of their views on perception.