

# Sense and Sensibilia

J. L. AUSTIN

RECONSTRUCTED FROM THE MANUSCRIPT  
NOTES BY G. J. WARNOCK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
London    Oxford    New York

## FOREWORD

AUSTIN lectured many times on the problems with which this book is concerned. The first lectures which were substantially in the form here presented were those which he gave in Oxford in Trinity Term, 1947, under the general title 'Problems in Philosophy'. He first used the title 'Sense and Sensibilia' in Trinity Term of the following year, and this was the title that he subsequently retained.

In this case, as in others, Austin repeatedly revised and rewrote his own notes. Some undated and very fragmentary notes survive which are presumably those that he used in 1947. Another set of notes was prepared in 1948, and yet another in 1949. This set, in which Austin made insertions and corrections in 1955, covers the earlier parts of his argument in considerable detail; but the notes for the later lectures are much less full, and are also evidently not complete. A fourth set of notes was written in 1955, and the last in 1958, for the lectures Austin gave in the autumn of that year in the University of California. His lectures on 'Sense and Sensibilia' were given for the last time in Oxford in Hilary Term, 1959. In addition to these more or less continuous drafts, Austin's papers contained a number of separate sheets, of very various dates, on which he had made notes

concerning the same range of problems. The substance of many of these was incorporated in the notes for his lectures, and therefore also in the present book. Some, however, appeared to be merely tentative and provisional; and others, though sometimes very detailed, were clearly made in the course of preparing lectures but not intended to be actually incorporated in them.

All the manuscript material is now in the Bodleian Library, and is available for study there.

The later sets of notes, those of 1955 and 1958, do not cover the topics discussed completely. They consist for the most part of additional material, and for the rest refer back, with minor rearrangements, revisions, and corrections, to the drafts of 1948 and 1949. This additional material is chiefly contained, in the present text, in section VII, the later part of section X, and in section XI. In lecturing at Berkeley Austin also used some of the material contained in his paper 'Unfair to Facts'; but this did not normally form part of his lectures on this subject, and has been omitted here since that paper itself has now appeared in print.

It is necessary to explain in some detail how the present text has been prepared. Austin certainly had it in mind that his work on perception might some day be published, but he himself had never begun to prepare it for publication. Thus his notes throughout were simply such as he needed in lecturing; and it is, from our point of view, a misfortune that he was able to lecture with complete fluency and precision without writing out his

material at all fully. Publication of his notes as they stood was thus out of the question; in that form they would have been unreadable, and indeed scarcely intelligible. It was therefore decided that they should be written out in a continuous form; and it must be carefully borne in mind that the text which follows, while based as closely as possible on Austin's notes, contains hardly any sentence which is a direct transcription from his own manuscript. The version here presented is at its closest to Austin's own notes in sections I-VI, VIII, and IX, in which his argument varied very little from 1947 onwards. In sections VII, X, and XI, though there is no room for serious doubt as to what Austin's argument was, it was considerably less easy to tell from his notes exactly how, and in what order, the argument should be deployed. In these sections, then, the reader should be particularly wary of attaching too much weight to every detail of the presentation; it is here that editorial blunders are most liable to have occurred.

Indeed, it is too much to hope that they have not crept in elsewhere. The present text, in sheer number of words, must have been expanded to five or six times the length of even the most complete set of notes; and although there is no reason to doubt that Austin's views were substantially as they are here presented, it is impossible to be certain that they are nowhere misrepresented in detail. His *exact* meaning—how, for instance, he would have expanded or qualified in lecturing some phrase, or even some single word, appearing in his notes—was

sometimes conjectural; and at some points it is more than possible that a different editor would have favoured a different interpretation. This is doubtless inherent in the unsatisfactory, but in this case unavoidable, procedure of rewriting. The text that follows, then, cannot be read as reproducing, word for word, what Austin actually said in his lectures; nor, of course, does it come close—quite probably it comes nowhere near—to what he would have written, if he had himself prepared a text on this subject for publication. The most that can be claimed—though I venture to claim this with confidence—is that in all points of substance (and in *many* points of phraseology) his *argument* was the argument which this book contains. Indeed, if it had not been possible to make this claim, there could have been no question of publication in this form.

It should be added that the division of the text into sections is not Austin's own, and has been made merely with an eye to distinguishing the successive stages of the discussion. His own division into separate lectures was, of course, inevitably somewhat arbitrary, and also not uniform from time to time, so that it would have been neither desirable nor practicable to adhere to it.

Several of those who attended Austin's lectures, in Oxford or America, were kind enough to send me the notes they made. These were extremely helpful—particularly those of Mr. G. W. Pitcher of Princeton, and of members of the Department of Philosophy at Berkeley, which were almost as full as any of Austin's own. It is

to be feared that those who heard the lectures (as I did myself in 1947) will find in this book a most imperfect approximation to what Austin said. I hope, however, that they will be willing to agree that even this kind of permanent record is better than none.

I should like to express my thanks to Mr. J. O. Urmson, who read the text in typescript and made many useful suggestions for its improvement.

G. J. WARNOCK  
November 1960

## CONTENTS

I	page 1	VII	page 62
II	6	VIII	78
III	20	IX	84
IV	33	X	104
V	44	XI	132
VI	55	Index	143

## I

IN THESE LECTURES I AM GOING TO DISCUSS some current doctrines (perhaps, by now, not so current as they once were) about sense-perception. We shall not, I fear, get so far as to decide about the truth or falsity of these doctrines; but in fact that is a question that really can't be decided, since it turns out that they all bite off more than they can chew. I shall take as chief stalking-horse in the discussion Professor A. J. Ayer's *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*,<sup>1</sup> but I shall mention also Professor H. H. Price's *Perception*,<sup>2</sup> and, later on, G. J. Warnock's book on Berkeley.<sup>3</sup> I find in these texts a good deal to criticize, but I choose them for their merits and not for their deficiencies; they seem to me to provide the best available expositions of the approved reasons for holding theories which are at least as old as Heraclitus—more full, coherent, and termino-logically exact than you find, for example, in Descartes or Berkeley. No doubt the authors of these books no longer hold the theories expounded in them, or at any rate wouldn't now expound them in just the same form. But at least they did hold them not very long ago; and of course very numerous great philosophers have held these

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan, 1940.<sup>2</sup> Methuen, 1932.<sup>3</sup> Penguin Books, 1953.

theories, and have propounded other doctrines resulting from them. The authors I have chosen to discuss may differ from each other over certain refinements, which we shall eventually take note of—they appear to differ, for example, as to whether their central distinction is between two 'languages' or between two classes of entities—but I believe that they agree with each other, and with their predecessors, in all their major (and mostly unnoticed) assumptions.

Ideally, I suppose, a discussion of this sort ought to begin with the very earliest texts; but in this case that course is ruled out by their no longer being extant. The doctrines we shall be discussing—unlike, for example, doctrines about 'universals'—were already quite ancient in Plato's time.

The general doctrine, generally stated, goes like this: we never see or otherwise perceive (or 'sense'), or anyhow we never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, *sensa*, sense-perceptions, percepts, &c).

One might well want to ask how seriously this doctrine is intended, just how strictly and literally the philosophers who propound it mean their words to be taken. But I think we had better not worry about this question for the present. It is, as a matter of fact, not at all easy to answer, for, strange though the doctrine looks, we are sometimes told to take it easy—really it's just what we've all believed all along. (There's the bit where you say it and the bit where you take it back.) In any case it is clear

that the doctrine is thought *worth stating*, and equally there is no doubt that people find it disturbing; so at least we can begin with the assurance that it deserves serious attention.

My general opinion about this doctrine is that it is a typically *scholastic* view, attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are over-simplified, not really understood or carefully studied or correctly described; and second, to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied 'facts'. (I say 'scholastic', but I might just as well have said 'philosophical'; over-simplification, schematization, and constant obsessive repetition of the same small range of jejune 'examples' are not only not peculiar to this case, but far too common to be dismissed as an occasional weakness of philosophers.) The fact is, as I shall try to make clear, that our ordinary words are much subtler in their uses, and mark many more distinctions, than philosophers have realized; and that the facts of perception, as discovered by, for instance, psychologists but also as noted by common mortals, are much more diverse and complicated than has been allowed for. It is essential, here as elsewhere, to abandon old habits of *Gleichschalt-ung*, the deeply ingrained worship of tidy-looking dichotomies.

I am *not*, then—and this is a point to be clear about from the beginning—going to maintain that we ought to be 'realists', to embrace, that is, the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things (or objects). This doctrine would

be no less scholastic and erroneous than its antithesis. The question, do we perceive material things or sense-data, no doubt looks very simple—*too* simple—but is entirely misleading (cp. Thales' similarly vast and over-simple question, what the world is made of). One of the most important points to grasp is that these two terms, 'sense-data' and 'material things', live by taking in each other's washing—what is spurious is not one term of the pair, but the antithesis itself.<sup>1</sup> There is no *one* kind of thing that we 'perceive' but many *different* kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy: pens are in many ways though not in all ways unlike rainbows, which are in many ways though not in all ways unlike after-images, which in turn are in many ways but not in all ways unlike pictures on the cinema-screen—and so on, without assignable limit. So we are *not* to look for an answer to the question, what kind of thing we perceive. What we have above all to do is, negatively, to rid ourselves of such illusions as 'the argument from illusion'—an 'argument' which those (e.g. Berkeley, Hume, Russell, Ayer) who have been most adept at working it, most fully masters of a certain special, happy style of blinkering philosophical English, have all themselves felt to be somehow spurious. There is no simple way of doing this—partly because, as we shall see, there is no simple 'argument'. It is a matter of unpicking,

<sup>1</sup> The case of 'universal' and 'particular', or 'individual', is similar in some respects though of course not in all. In philosophy it is often good policy, where one member of a putative pair falls under suspicion, to view the more innocent-seeming party suspiciously as well.

one by one, a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies, of exposing a wide variety of concealed motives—an operation which leaves us, in a sense, just where we began. In a sense—but actually we may hope to learn something positive in the way of a technique for dissolving philosophical worries (*some* kinds of philosophical worry, not the whole of philosophy); and also something about the meanings of some English words ('reality', 'seems', 'looks', &c.) which, besides being philosophically very slippery, are in their own right interesting. Besides, there is nothing so plain boring as the constant repetition of assertions that are not true, and sometimes not even faintly sensible; if we can reduce this a bit, it will be all to the good.

## II

LET US HAVE A LOOK, THEN, AT THE VERY BE-ginning of Ayer's *Foundations*—the bottom, one might perhaps call it, of the garden path. In f these paragraphs<sup>1</sup> we already seem to see the plain man, here under the implausible aspect of Ayer himself, dribbling briskly into position in front of his own goal, and squaring up to encompass his own destruction.

It does not normally occur to us that there is any need for us to justify our belief in the existence of material things. At the present moment, for example, I have no doubt whatsoever that I really am perceiving the familiar objects, the chairs and table, the pictures and books and flowers with which my room is furnished; and I am therefore satisfied that they exist. I recognize indeed that people are sometimes deceived by their senses, but this does not lead me to suspect that my own sense-perceptions cannot in general be trusted, or even that they may be deceiving me now. And this is not, I believe, an exceptional attitude. I believe that, in practice, most people agree with John Locke that 'the certainty of things existing *in rerum natura*, when we have the testimony of our senses for it, is not only as great as our frame can attain to, but as our condition needs'.

When, however, one turns to the writings of those philosophers who have recently concerned themselves with the subject of perception, one may begin to wonder whether this

matter is quite so simple. It is true that they do, in general, allow that our belief in the existence of material things is well founded; some of them, indeed, would say that there were occasions on which we knew for certain the truth of such propositions as 'this is a cigarette' or 'this is a pen'. But even so they are not, for the most part, prepared to admit that such objects as pens or cigarettes are ever directly perceived. What, in their opinion, we directly perceive is always an object of a different kind from these; one to which it is now customary to give the name of 'sense-datum'.

Now in this passage some sort of contrast is drawn between what we (or the ordinary man) believe (or believe), and what philosophers, at least 'for the most part', believe or are 'prepared to admit'. We must look at both sides of this contrast, and with particular care at what is assumed in, and implied by, what is actually said. The ordinary man's side, then, first.

1. It is clearly implied, first of all, that the ordinary man believes that he perceives material things. Now this, at least if it is taken to mean that he would *say* that he perceives material things, is surely wrong straight off; for 'material thing' is not an expression which the ordinary man would use—nor, probably, is 'perceive'. Presumably, though, the expression 'material thing' is here put forward, not as what the ordinary man would *say*, but as designating in a general way the *class* of things of which the ordinary man both believes and from time to time says that he perceives particular instances. But then we have to ask, of course, what this class comprises. We are given, as examples, 'familiar objects'—chairs, tables,

<sup>1</sup> Ayer, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

pictures, books, flowers, pens, cigarettes; the expression 'material thing' is not here (or anywhere else in Ayer's text) further defined.<sup>1</sup> But *does* the ordinary man believe that what he perceives is (always) something like furniture, or like these other 'familiar objects'—moderate-sized specimens of dry goods? We may think, for instance, of people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls, vapours, gases—all of which people say that they see or (in some cases) hear or smell, i.e. 'perceive'. Are these all 'material things'? If not, exactly which are not, and exactly why? No answer is vouchsafed. The trouble is that the expression 'material thing' is functioning *already*, from the very beginning, simply as a foil for 'sense-datum'; it is not here given, and is never given, any other role to play, and apart from this consideration it would surely never have occurred to anybody to try to represent as some single *kind of things* the things which the ordinary man says that he 'perceives'.

2. Further, it seems to be also implied (*a*) that when the ordinary man believes that he is not perceiving material things, he believes he is being deceived by his senses; and (*b*) that when he believes he is being deceived by his senses, he believes that he is not perceiving material things. But both of these are wrong. An ordinary man who saw, for example, a rainbow would not, if persuaded

<sup>1</sup> Compare Price's list on p. i of *Perception*—'chairs and tables, cats and rocks'—though he complicates matters by adding 'water' and 'the earth'. See also p. 280, on 'physical objects', 'visuo-tactual solids'.

that a rainbow is not a material thing, at once conclude that his senses were deceiving him; nor, when for instance he knows that the ship at sea on a clear day is much farther away than it looks, does he conclude that he is not seeing a material thing (still less that he *is* seeing an immaterial ship). That is to say, there is no more a simple contrast between what the ordinary man believes when all is well (that he is 'perceiving material things') and when something is amiss (that his 'senses are deceiving him' and he is *not* 'perceiving material things') than there is between what he believes that he perceives ('material things') and what philosophers for their part are prepared to admit, whatever that may be. The ground is already being prepared for *two* bogus dichotomies.

3. Next, is it not rather delicately hinted in this passage that the plain man is really a bit naive?<sup>1</sup> It 'does not normally occur' to him that his belief in 'the existence of material things' needs justifying—but perhaps it *ought* to occur to him. He has 'no doubt whatsoever' that he really perceives chairs and tables—but perhaps he ought to have a doubt or two and not be so easily 'satisfied'. That people are sometimes deceived by their senses 'does not lead him to suspect' that all may not be well—but perhaps a more reflective person *would* be led to suspect. Though ostensibly the plain man's position is here just being described, a little quiet undermining is already being effected by these turns of phrase.

<sup>1</sup> Price, *op. cit.*, p. 26, says that he *is* naive, though it is not, it seems, certain that he is actually a Naïve Realist.



4. But, perhaps more importantly, it is also implied, even taken for granted, that there is *room* for doubt and suspicion, whether or not the plain man feels any. The quotation from Locke, with which most people are said to agree, in fact contains a strong *suggestio falsi*. It suggests that when, for instance, I look at a chair a few yards in front of me in broad daylight, my view is that I have (*only*) as much certainty as I need and can get that there is a chair and that I see it. But in fact the plain man would regard doubt in such a case, not as far-fetched or over-refined or somehow unpractical, but as plain *nonsense*; he would say, quite correctly, 'Well, if that's not seeing a real chair then *I don't know what is*.' Moreover, though the plain man's alleged belief that his 'sense-perceptions' can 'in general' or 'now' be trusted is implicitly contrasted with the philosophers' view, it turns out that the philosophers' view is not just that his sense-perceptions *can't* be trusted 'now', or 'in general', or as often as he thinks; for apparently philosophers 'for the most part' really maintain that what the plain man believes to be the case is really *never* the case—'what, in their opinion, we directly perceive is *always* an object of a different kind'. The philosopher is not really going to argue that things go wrong more often than the unwary plain man supposes, but that in some sense or some way he is wrong all the time. So it is misleading to hint, not only that there is always room for doubt, but that the philosophers' dissent from the plain man is just a matter of degree; it is really not *that* kind of disagreement at all.

5. Consider next what is said here about deception. We recognize, it is said, that 'people are sometimes deceived by their senses', though we think that, in general, our 'sense-perceptions' can 'be trusted'.

Now first, though the phrase 'deceived by our senses' is a common metaphor, it *is* a metaphor; and this is worth noting, for in what follows the same metaphor is frequently taken up by the expression 'veridical' and taken very seriously. In fact, of course, our senses are dumb—though Descartes and others speak of 'the testimony of the senses', our senses do not *tell* us anything, true or false. The case is made much worse here by the unexplained introduction of a quite new creation, our 'sense-perceptions'. These entities, which of course don't really figure at all in the plain man's language or among his beliefs, are brought in with the implication that whenever we 'perceive' there is an *intermediate* entity *always* present and *informing* us about something *else*—the question is, can we or can't we trust what it says? Is it 'veridical'? But of course to state the case in this way is simply to soften up the plain man's alleged views for the subsequent treatment; it is preparing the way for, by practically attributing to *him*, the so-called philosophers' view.

Next, it is important to remember that talk of deception only *makes sense* against a background of general non-deception. (You can't fool all of the people all of the time.) It must be possible to *recognize* a case of deception by checking the odd case against more normal ones. If I

say, 'Our petrol-gauge sometimes deceives us', I am understood : though usually what it indicates squares with what we have in the tank, sometimes it doesn't—it sometimes points to two gallons when the tank turns out to be nearly empty. But suppose I say, 'Our crystal ball sometimes deceives us': this is puzzling, because really we haven't the least idea what the 'normal' case—*not* being deceived by our crystal ball—would actually be.

The cases, again, in which a plain man might say he was 'deceived by his senses' are not at all common. In particular, he would *not* say this when confronted with ordinary cases of perspective, with ordinary mirror-images, or with dreams; in fact, when he dreams, looks down the long straight road, or at his face in the mirror, he is not, or at least is hardly ever, *deceived* at all. This is worth remembering in view of another strong *suggestio falsi*—namely, that when the philosopher cites as cases of 'illusion' all these and many other very common phenomena, he is either simply mentioning cases which the plain man already concedes as cases of 'deception by the senses', or at any rate is only extending a bit what he would readily concede. In fact this is very far indeed from being the case.

And even so—even though the plain man certainly does not accept anything like so *many* cases as cases of being 'deceived by his senses' as philosophers seem to—it would certainly be quite wrong to suggest that he regards all the cases he *does* accept as being of just the same kind. The battle is, in fact, half lost already if this suggestion

is tolerated. Sometimes the plain man would prefer to say that his senses were deceived rather than that he was deceived by his senses—the quickness of the hand deceives the eye, &c. But there is actually a great multiplicity of cases here, at least at the edges of which it is no doubt uncertain (and it would be typically scholastic to try to decide) just which are and which are not cases where the metaphor of being 'deceived by the senses' would naturally be employed. But surely even the plainest of men would want to distinguish (a) cases where the *sense-organ* is deranged or abnormal or in some way or other not functioning properly; (b) cases where the *medium*—or more generally, the conditions—of perception are in some way abnormal or off-colour; and (c) cases where a wrong inference is made or a wrong construction is put on things, e.g. on some sound that he hears. (Of course these cases do not exclude each other.) And then again there are the quite common cases of mis-readings, mishearings, Freudian over-sights, &c, which don't seem to belong properly under any of these headings. That is to say, once again there is no neat and simple dichotomy between things going right and things going wrong; things may go wrong, as we really all know quite well, in lots of *different* ways—which don't have to be, and must not be assumed to be, classifiable in any general fashion.

Finally, to repeat here a point we've already mentioned, of course the plain man does *not* suppose that all the cases in which he is 'deceived by his senses' are alike in

the particular respect that, in those cases, he is not 'perceiving material things', or *is* perceiving something not real or not material. Looking at the Müller-Lyer diagram (in which, of two lines of equal length, one looks longer than the other), or at a distant village on a very clear day across a valley, is a very different kettle of fish from seeing a ghost or from having D.T.s and seeing pink rats. And when the plain man sees on the stage the Headless Woman, what he sees (and this *is* what he sees, whether he knows it or not) is not something 'unreal' or 'immaterial', but a woman against a dark background with her head in a black bag. If the trick is well done, he doesn't (because it's deliberately made very difficult for him) properly size up what he sees, or see *what* it is; but to say this is far from concluding that he sees something *else*. In conclusion, then, there is less than no reason to swallow the suggestions *either* that what the plain man believes that he perceives most of the time constitutes a *kind* of things (sc. 'material objects'), *or* that he can be said to recognize any other single *kind* of cases in which he is 'deceived'.<sup>1</sup> Now let us consider what it is that is said about philosophers.

Philosophers, it is said, 'are not, for the most part, prepared to admit that such objects as pens or cigarettes

<sup>1</sup> I am not denying that cases in which things go wrong *could be* lumped together under some single name. A single name might in itself be innocent enough, provided its use was not taken to imply either (a) that the cases were all alike, or (b) that they were all in certain ways alike. What matters is that the facts should not be prejudged and (therefore) neglected.

are ever directly perceived'. Now of course what brings us up short here is the word 'directly'—a great favourite among philosophers, but actually one of the less conspicuous snakes in the linguistic grass. We have here, in fact, a typical case of a word, which already has a very special use, being gradually stretched, without caution or definition or any limit, until it becomes, first perhaps obscurely metaphorical, but ultimately meaningless. One can't abuse ordinary language without paying for it.<sup>1</sup>

1. First of all, it is essential to realize that here the notion of perceiving directly wears the trousers—'directly' takes whatever sense it has from the contrast with its opposite :<sup>2</sup> while 'indirectly' itself (a) has a use only in special cases, and also {b} has *different* uses in different cases—though that doesn't mean, of course, that there is not a good reason why we should use the same word. We might, for example, contrast the man who saw the procession directly with the man who saw it *through a periscope*, or we might contrast the place from which you can watch the door directly with the place from which you can see it only *in the mirror*. *Perhaps* we might contrast

<sup>1</sup> Especially if one abuses it without realizing what one is doing. Consider the trouble caused by unwitting stretching of the word 'sign', so as to yield—apparently—the conclusion that, when the cheese is in front of our noses, we see *signs* of cheese.

<sup>2</sup> Compare, in this respect, 'real', 'proper', 'free', and plenty of others. 'It's real'—what exactly are you saying it isn't ? 'I wish we had a proper stair-carpet'—what are you complaining of in the one you've got ? (That it's improper ?) 'Is he free ?'—well, what have you in mind that he might be instead ? In prison ? Tied up in prison ? Committed to a prior engagement?

seeing you directly with seeing, say, your shadow on the blind; and *perhaps* we might contrast hearing the music directly with hearing it relayed outside the concert-hall. However, these last two cases suggest two further points.

2. The first of these points is that the notion of not perceiving 'directly' seems most at home where, as with the periscope and the mirror, it retains its link with the notion of a kink in *direction*. It seems that we must not be looking *straight at* the object in question. For this reason seeing your shadow on the blind is a doubtful case; and seeing you, for instance, through binoculars or spectacles is certainly not a case of seeing you *indirectly* at all. For such cases as these last we have quite distinct contrasts and different expressions—'with the naked eye' as opposed to 'with a telescope', 'with unaided vision' as opposed to 'with glasses on'. (These expressions, in fact, are much more firmly established in ordinary use than 'directly' is.)

3. And the other point is that, partly no doubt for the above reason, the notion of indirect perception is not naturally at home with senses other than sight. With the other senses there is nothing quite analogous with the 'line of vision'. The most natural sense of 'hearing indirectly', of course, is that of being *told* something by an intermediary—a quite different matter. But do I hear a shout indirectly, when I hear the echo? If I touch you with a barge-pole, do I touch you indirectly? Or if you offer me a pig in a poke, might I feel the pig indirectly—

*through* the poke? And what smelling indirectly might be I have simply no idea. For this reason alone there seems to be something badly wrong with the question, 'Do we perceive things directly or not?', where perceiving is evidently intended to cover the employment of *any* of the senses.

4. But it is, of course, for other reasons too extremely doubtful how far the notion of perceiving indirectly could or should be extended. Does it, or should it, cover the telephone, for instance? Or television? Or radar? Have we moved too far in these cases from the original metaphor? They at any rate satisfy what seems to be a necessary condition—namely, concurrent existence and concomitant variation as between what is perceived in the straightforward way (the sounds in the receiver, the picture and the blips on the screen) and the candidate for what we might be prepared to describe as being perceived indirectly. And this condition fairly clearly rules out as cases of indirect perception seeing photographs (which statically record scenes from the past) and seeing films (which, though not static, are not seen contemporaneously with the events thus recorded). Certainly, there *is* a line to be drawn somewhere. It is certain, for instance, that we should not be prepared to speak of indirect perception in *every* case in which we see something from which the existence (or occurrence) of something else can be inferred; we should *not* say we see the guns indirectly, if we see in the distance only the flashes of guns.

5. Rather differently, if we are to be seriously inclined to speak of something as being perceived indirectly, it seems that it has to be the kind of thing which we (sometimes at least) just perceive, or could perceive, or which—like the backs of our own heads—others could perceive. For otherwise we don't want to say that we perceive the thing *at all*, even indirectly. No doubt there are complications here (raised, perhaps, by the electron microscope, for example, about which I know little or nothing). But it seems clear that, in general, we should want to distinguish between seeing indirectly, e.g. in a mirror, what we might have just *seen*, and seeing signs (or effects), e.g. in a Wilson cloud-chamber, of something not itself perceptible at all. It would at least not come naturally to speak of the latter as a case of perceiving something indirectly.

6. And one final point. For reasons not very obscure, we always prefer in practice what might be called the *cash-value* expression to the 'indirect' metaphor. If I were to report that I see enemy ships indirectly, I should merely provoke the question what exactly I mean. 'I mean that I can see these blips on the radar screen'—'Well, why didn't you say so then?' (Compare 'I can see an unreal duck.'—'What on earth do you mean?' 'It's a decoy duck.'—'Ah, I see. Why didn't you say so at once?') That is, there is seldom if ever any particular point in actually saying 'indirectly' (or 'unreal'); the expression can cover too many rather different cases to *be just* what is wanted in any particular case.

Thus, it is quite plain that the philosophers' use of 'directly perceive', whatever it may be, is not the ordinary, or any familiar, use; for in *that* use it is not only false but simply absurd to say that such objects as pens or cigarettes are never perceived directly. But we are given no explanation or definition of this new use<sup>1</sup>—on the contrary, it is glibly trotted out as if we were all quite familiar with it already. It is clear, too, that the philosophers' use, whatever it may be, offends against several of the canons just mentioned above—no restrictions whatever seem to be envisaged to any special circumstances or to any of the senses in particular, and moreover it seems that what we are to be said to perceive indirectly is *never*—is not the kind of thing which ever *could* be—perceived directly.

All this lends poignancy to the question Ayer himself asks, a few lines below the passage we have been considering: 'Why may we not say that we are directly aware of material things?' The answer, he says, is provided 'by what is known as the argument from illusion'; and this is what we must next consider. Just possibly the answer may help us to understand the question.

<sup>1</sup> Ayer takes note of this, rather belatedly, on pp. 60-61.

### III

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE argument from illusion is to induce people to accept 'sense-data' as the proper and correct answer to the question what they perceive on certain *abnormal*, *exceptional* occasions; but in fact it is usually followed up with another bit of argument intended to establish that they *always* perceive sense-data. Well, what is the argument?

In Ayer's statement<sup>1</sup> it runs as follows. It is 'based on the fact that material things may present different appearances to different observers, or to the same observer in different conditions, and that the character of these appearances is to some extent causally determined by the state of the conditions and the observer'. As illustrations of this alleged fact Ayer proceeds to cite perspective ('a coin which looks circular from one point of view may look elliptical from another'); refraction ('a stick which normally appears straight looks bent when it is seen in water'); changes in colour-vision produced by drugs ('such as mescal'); mirror-images; double vision; hallucination; apparent variations in tastes; variations in felt warmth ('according as the hand that is feeling it is itself

<sup>1</sup> Ayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5.

hot or cold'); variations in felt bulk ('a coin seems larger when it is placed on the tongue than when it is held in the palm of the hand'); and the oft-cited fact that 'people who have had limbs amputated may still continue to feel pain in them'.

He then selects three of these instances for detailed treatment. First, refraction—the stick which normally 'appears straight' but 'looks bent' when seen in water. He makes the 'assumptions' (*a*) that the stick does not *really change its shape* when it is placed in water, and (*b*) that it *cannot be* both crooked and straight.<sup>1</sup> He then concludes ('it follows') that 'at least one of the *visual appearances* of the stick is *delusive*'. Nevertheless, even when 'what we see is not the *real quality* of a *material thing*, it is supposed that we are still seeing something'—and this something is to be called a 'sense-datum'. A sense-datum is to be 'the object of which we are *directly* aware, in perception, if it is not *part of any material thing*'. (The italics are mine throughout this and the next two paragraphs.)

Next, mirages. A man who sees a mirage, he says, is 'not perceiving any material thing; for the oasis which he thinks he is perceiving *does not exist*'. But 'his *experience* is not an experience of nothing'; thus 'it is said that he is experiencing sense-data, which are similar in character to what he would be experiencing if he were seeing a real oasis, but are delusive in the sense that *the*

<sup>1</sup> It is not only strange, but also important, that Ayer calls these 'assumptions'. Later on he is going to take seriously the notion of denying at least one of them, which he could hardly do if he had recognized them here as the plain and incontestable facts that they are.

*material thing which they appear to present is not really there'.*

Lastly, reflections. When I look at myself in a mirror 'my body *appears to be* some distance behind the glass'; but it cannot actually be in two places at once; thus, my perceptions in this case 'cannot all be *veridical*'. But I do see *something*; and if 'there really is no such material thing as my body in the place where it appears to be, what is it that I am seeing?' Answer—a sense-datum. Ayer adds that 'the same conclusion may be reached by taking any other of my examples'.

Now I want to call attention, first of all, to the name of this argument—the 'argument from *illusion*', and to the fact that it is produced as establishing the conclusion that some at least of our 'perceptions' are *delusive*. For in this there are two clear implications—(a) that all the cases cited in the argument are cases of *illusions*; and (b) that *illusion* and *delusion* are the same thing. But both of these implications, of course, are quite wrong; and it is by no means unimportant to point this out, for, as we shall see, the argument trades on confusion at just this point.

What, then, would be some genuine examples of illusion? (The fact is that hardly any of the cases cited by Ayer is, at any rate without stretching things, a case of illusion at all.) Well, first, there are some quite clear cases of *optical* illusion—for instance the case we mentioned earlier in which, of two lines of equal length, one is made to look longer than the other. Then again there are illusions produced by professional 'illusionists', conjurors

—for instance the Headless Woman on the stage, who is made to look headless, or the ventriloquist's dummy which is made to appear to be talking. Rather different—not (usually) produced on purpose—is the case where wheels rotating rapidly enough in one direction may look as if they were rotating quite slowly in the opposite direction. Delusions, on the other hand, are something altogether different from this. Typical cases would be delusions of persecution, delusions of grandeur. These are primarily a matter of grossly disordered beliefs (and so, probably, behaviour) and may well have nothing in particular to do with perception.<sup>1</sup> But I think we might also say that the patient who sees pink rats has (suffers from) delusions—particularly, no doubt, if, as would probably be the case, he is not clearly aware that his pink rats aren't real rats.<sup>2</sup> The most important differences here are that the term 'an illusion' (in a perceptual context) does not suggest that something totally unreal is *conjured up*—on the contrary, there just is the arrangement of lines and arrows on the page, the woman on the stage with her head in a black bag, the rotating wheels; whereas the term 'delusion' *does* suggest something totally unreal, not really there at all. (The convictions of the man who has delusions of persecution can be *completely* without foundation.) For this reason delusions are a much more serious matter—something is really wrong, and what's more,

<sup>1</sup> The latter point holds, of course, for *some* uses of 'illusion' too; there are the illusions which some people (are said to) lose as they grow older and wiser.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. the white rabbit in the play called *Harvey*.

wrong *with* the person who has them. But when I see an optical illusion, however well it comes off, there is nothing wrong with me personally, the illusion is not a little (or a large) peculiarity or idiosyncrasy of my own; it is quite public, anyone can see it, and in many cases standard procedures can be laid down for producing it. Furthermore, if we are not actually to be taken in, we need to be *on our guard*; but it is no use to tell the sufferer from delusions to be on his guard. He needs to be cured.

Why is it that we tend—if we do—to confuse illusions with delusions? Well, partly, no doubt the terms are often used loosely. But there is also the point that people may have, without making this explicit, different views or theories about the facts of some cases. Take the case of seeing a ghost, for example. It is not generally known, or agreed, what seeing ghosts *is*. Some people think of seeing ghosts as a case of something being conjured up, perhaps by the disordered nervous system of the victim; so in their view seeing ghosts is a case of delusion. But other people have the idea that what is called seeing ghosts is a case of being taken in by shadows, perhaps, or reflections, or a trick of the light—that is, they assimilate the case in their minds to illusion. In this way, seeing ghosts, for example, may come to be labelled sometimes as 'delusion', sometimes as 'illusion'; and it may not be noticed that it makes a difference which label we use. Rather, similarly, there seem to be different doctrines in the field as to what mirages are. Some seem to

take a mirage to be a vision conjured up by the crazed brain of the thirsty and exhausted traveller (delusion), while in other accounts it is a case of atmospheric refraction, whereby something below the horizon is made to appear above it (illusion). (Ayer, you may remember, takes the delusion view, although he cites it along with the rest as a case of illusion. He says not that the oasis appears to be where it is not, but roundly that 'it does not exist'.)

The way in which the 'argument from illusion' positively trades on not distinguishing illusions from delusions is, I think, this. So long as it is being suggested that the cases paraded for our attention are cases of *illusion*, there is the implication (from the ordinary use of the word) that there really is something there that we perceive. But then, when these cases begin to be quietly called delusive, there comes in the very different suggestion of something being conjured up, something unreal or at any rate 'immaterial'. These two implications taken together may then subtly insinuate that in the cases cited there really is something that we are perceiving, but that this is an immaterial something; and this insinuation, even if not conclusive by itself, is certainly well calculated to edge us a little closer towards just the position where the sense-datum theorist wants to have us.

So much, then—though certainly there could be a good deal more—about the differences between illusions and delusions and the reasons for not obscuring them. Now let us look briefly at some of the other cases Ayer



lists. **Reflections, for instance.** No doubt you *can* produce illusions with mirrors, suitably disposed. But is just *any* case of seeing something in a mirror an illusion, as he implies ? Quite obviously not. For seeing things in mirrors is a perfectly *normal* occurrence, completely familiar, and there is usually no question of anyone being taken in. No doubt, if you're an infant or an aborigine and have never come across a mirror before, you may be pretty baffled, and even visibly perturbed, when you do. But is that a reason why the rest of us should speak of illusion here ? And just the same goes for the phenomena of perspective—again, one *can* play tricks with perspective, but in the ordinary case there is no question of illusion. That a round coin should 'look elliptical' (in one sense) from some points of view is exactly what we expect and what we normally find; indeed, we should be badly put out if we ever found this not to be so. **Refraction** again—the stick that looks bent in water—is far too familiar a case to be properly called a case of illusion. We may perhaps be prepared to agree that the stick looks bent; but then we can see that it's partly submerged in water, so that is exactly how we should expect it to look.

It is important to realize here how familiarity, so to speak, takes the edge off illusion. Is the cinema a case of illusion ? Well, just possibly the first man who ever saw moving pictures may have felt inclined to say that here was a case of illusion. But in fact it's pretty unlikely that even he, even momentarily, was actually taken in; and by now the whole thing is so ordinary a part of our lives

that it never occurs to us even to raise the question. One might as well ask whether producing a photograph is producing an illusion—which would plainly be just silly.

Then we must not overlook, in all this talk about illusions and delusions, that there are plenty of more or less **unusual cases**, not yet mentioned, which certainly aren't either. Suppose that a proof-reader makes a mistake—he fails to notice that what ought to be 'causal' is printed as 'casual'; does he have a delusion ? Or is there an illusion before him? Neither, of course; he simply *misreads*. Seeing after-images, too, though not a particularly frequent occurrence and not just an ordinary case of seeing, is neither seeing illusions nor having delusions. And what about dreams ? Does the dreamer see illusions ? Does he have delusions? Neither; dreams are *dreams*.

Let us turn for a moment to what Price has to say about illusions. He produces,<sup>1</sup> by way of saying 'what the term "illusion" means', the following 'provisional definition': 'An illusory sense-datum of sight or touch is a sense-datum which is such that we tend to take it to be part of the surface of a material object, but if we take it so we are wrong.' It is by no means clear, of course, what this dictum itself means; but still, it seems fairly clear that the definition doesn't actually fit all the cases of illusion. Consider the two lines again. Is there anything here which we tend to take, wrongly, to be part of the surface of a material object ? It doesn't seem so. We just see the two lines, we don't think or even tend to think that we

<sup>1</sup> *Perception*, p. 27.

see anything else, we aren't even raising the question whether anything is or isn't 'part of the surface' of—what, anyway ? the lines ? the page ?—the trouble is just that one line looks longer than the other, though it isn't. Nor surely, in the case of the Headless Woman, is it a question whether anything is or isn't part of her surface; the trouble is just that she looks as if she had no head.

It is noteworthy, of course, that, before he even begins to consider the 'argument from illusion', Price has already incorporated in this 'definition' the idea that in such cases there is something to be *seen in addition to the ordinary things—which is part of what the argument is commonly used*, and not uncommonly taken, to *prove*. But this idea surely has no place in an attempt to say what 'illusion' *means*. It comes in again, improperly I think, in his account of perspective (which incidentally he also cites as a species of illusion)—'a distant hillside which is full of protuberances, and slopes upwards at quite a gentle angle, will appear flat and vertical.... This means that the sense-datum, the colour-expanse which we sense, actually *is* flat and vertical.' But why should we accept this account of the matter ? Why should we say that there is *anything* we see which *is* flat and vertical, though not 'part of the surface' of any material object ? To speak thus is to assimilate all such cases to cases of delusion, where there *is* something not 'part of any material thing'. But we have already discussed the undesirability of this assimilation.

Next, let us have a look at the account Ayer himself

gives of some at least of the cases he cites. (In fairness we must remember here that Ayer has a number of quite substantial reservations of his own about the merits and efficacy of the argument from illusion, so that it is not easy to tell just how seriously he intends his exposition of it to be taken; but this is a point we shall come back to.) First, then, the familiar case of the stick in water. Of this case Ayer says (a) that since the stick looks bent but is straight, 'at least one of the visual appearances of the stick is *delusive*'; and (b) that 'what we see [directly anyway] is not the real quality of [a few lines later, not part of] a material thing'. Well now: does the stick 'look bent' to begin with ? I think we can agree that it does, we have no better way of describing it. *But of course it does not look exactly like a bent stick, a bent stick out of water—at most, it may be said to look rather like a bent stick partly immersed in water.* After all, we can't help seeing the water the stick is partly immersed in. So exactly what in this case is supposed to be *delusive* ? What is wrong, what is even faintly surprising, in the idea of a stick's being straight but looking bent sometimes ? Does anyone suppose that if something is straight, then it jolly well has to *look* straight at all times and in all circumstances? Obviously no one seriously supposes this. So what mess are we supposed to get into here, what is the difficulty ? For of course it has to be suggested that there is a difficulty—a difficulty, furthermore, which calls for a pretty radical solution, the introduction of sense-data. But what is the problem we are invited to solve in this way ?

Well, we are told, in this case you are seeing something; and what is this something 'if it is not part of any material thing' ? But this question is, really, completely mad. The straight part of the stick, the bit not under water, is presumably part of a material thing; don't we see that ? And what about the bit *under* water ?—we can see that too. We can see, come to that, the water itself. In fact what we see is *a stick partly immersed in water*; and it is particularly extraordinary that this should appear to be called in question—that a question should be raised about *what* we are seeing—since this, after all, is simply the description of the situation with which we started. It was, that is to say, agreed at the start that we were looking at a stick, a 'material thing', part of which was under water. If, to take a rather different case, a church were cunningly camouflaged so that it looked like a barn, how could any serious question be raised about what we see when we look at it ? We see, of course, *a church* that now *looks like a barn*. We do *not* see an immaterial barn, an immaterial church, or an immaterial anything else. And what in this case could seriously tempt us to say that we do ?

Notice, incidentally, that in Ayer's description of the stick-in-water case, which is supposed to be prior to the drawing of any philosophical conclusions, there has already crept in the unheralded but important expression 'visual appearances'—it is, of course, ultimately to be suggested that all we *ever* get when we see is a visual appearance (whatever that may be).

Consider next the case of my reflection in a mirror.

My body, Ayer says, 'appears to be some distance behind the glass'; but as it's in front, it can't really be behind the glass. So what am I seeing ? A sense-datum. What about this? Well, once again, although there is no objection to saying that my body 'appears to be some distance behind the glass', in saying this we must remember what sort of situation we are dealing with. It does not 'appear to be' there in a way which might tempt me (though it might tempt a baby or a savage) to go round the back and look for it, and be astonished when this enterprise proved a failure. (To say that A is *in* B doesn't always mean that if you open B you will find A, just as to say that A is *on* B doesn't always mean that you could pick it off—consider 'I saw my face in the mirror', 'There's a pain in my toe', 'I heard him on the radio', 'I saw the image on the screen', &c. Seeing something in a mirror is not like seeing a bun in a shop-window.) But does it follow that, since my body is not actually located behind the mirror, I am not seeing a material thing ? Plainly not. For one thing, I can see the mirror (nearly always anyway). I can see my own body 'indirectly', *sc.* in the mirror. I can also see the reflection of my own body or, as some would say, a mirror-image. And a mirror-image (if we choose this answer) is not a 'sense-datum'; it can be photographed, seen by any number of people, and so on. (Of course there is no question here of either illusion or delusion.) And if the question is pressed, what actually *is* some distance, five feet say, behind the mirror, the answer is, not a sense-datum, but some region of the adjoining room.

The mirage case—at least if we take the view, as Ayer does, that the oasis the traveller thinks he can see 'does not exist'—is significantly more amenable to the treatment it is given. For here we are supposing the man to be genuinely deluded, he is *not* 'seeing a material thing'.<sup>1</sup> We don't actually have to say, however, even here that he is 'experiencing sense-data'; for though, as Ayer says above, 'it is convenient to give a name' to what he is experiencing, the fact is that it already has a name—a *mirage*. Again, we should be wise not to accept too readily the statement that what he is experiencing is '*similar in character*' to what he would be experiencing if he were seeing a real oasis'. For is it at all likely, really, to be very similar? And, looking ahead, if we were to concede this point we should find the concession being used against us at a later stage—namely, at the stage where we shall be invited to agree that we see sense-data always, in normal cases too.

<sup>1</sup> Not even 'indirectly', no such thing is 'presented'. Doesn't this seem to make the case, though more amenable, a good deal less useful to the philosopher? It's hard to see how normal cases could be said to be *very like* this.

## IV

IN DUE COURSE WE SHALL HAVE TO CONSIDER Ayer's own 'evaluation' of the argument from illusion, what in his opinion it establishes and why. But for the present I should like to direct attention to another feature of his exposition of the argument—a feature which in fact seems to be common to the expositions of most philosophers. In the course of setting out the cases on which the argument is based, Ayer makes pretty free use of the expressions 'look', 'appear', and 'seem'—apparently, in the manner of most other philosophers, attaching no great importance to the question which expression is used where, and indeed implying by the speed of his philosophical flight that they could be used interchangeably, that there is nothing much to choose between them. But this is not so; the expressions in question actually have quite different uses, and it often makes a great difference which one you use. Not always, certainly—there are cases, as we shall see, in which they come down to much the same, contexts in which they really are more or less interchangeable. But it would be just a mistake to conclude that, because there are such cases, there isn't any particular difference in the uses of the words; there is, and there are plenty of contexts and constructions which show this.<sup>1</sup> The only thing to do

<sup>1</sup> Compare the expressions 'right', 'ought', 'duty', 'obligation'—here

here, by way of avoiding misguided assimilations, is to consider numerous examples of uses of these expressions, until in the end we get the feel of the thing.

First, then, 'looks'. Here we have at least the following kinds of cases and constructions:

1. (a) It looks blue (round, angular, &c).

(b) He looks a gentleman (a tramp, a sport, a typical Englishman). She looks *chic* (a fright, a regular frump).

Here we have the verb directly followed by an adjective or adjectival phrase.

2. (a) It [a colour] looks like blue [the colour].

It looks like a recorder.

(b) He looks like a gentleman (a sailor, a horse).

Here we have 'looks like' (cp. 'sounds like') followed by a noun.

3. (a) It looks as if {it is | it were } raining (empty, hollow).

(b) He looks as if {he is | he were } 60 (going to faint).

4. (a) It looks as though we shan't be able to get in.

(b) He looks as though he's worried about something.

too, there are contexts in which *any* of these words could be used, but large and important differences all the same in the uses of each. And here too these differences have been generally neglected by philosophers.

Now let's try 'appears':

1. (a) It appears blue (upside down, elongated, &c).

(b) He appears a gentleman.

2. (a) It appears like blue.

(b) He appears like a gentleman.

(It is very doubtful, though, whether this construction with 'appears' is really defensible; it certainly rings very dubiously to my ear.)

3 (and 4). (a) It appears as if (as though)...

(b) He appears as if (as though)...

5. (a) It appears to expand.

It appears to be a forgery.

(b) He appears to like her (to have recovered his temper).

He appears to be an Egyptian.

6. (a) It appears as a dark speck on the horizon.

(b) He appears as a man of good character (*sc.* from this narrative. We can also say of an actor that he 'appeared as Napoleon'.)

7. It appears that they've all been eaten.

Notice particularly that here we have constructions (*viz.* 5-7) which do *not* occur with 'looks'.<sup>1</sup> These are in some ways the most important cases to attend to.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps some of them do occur, in colloquial speech. Well, if they do, they do. But colloquial speech is often a bit *loose*, and we know—or some of us do—when this is so. We don't, of course, if we don't know the language very well, or if we're anyway rather insensitive about such matters.

Of 'seems' we can say briefly that it shares the constructions of 'appears'—though with fewer doubts about the propriety of (2). ('It seems like old times', 'It all seems like a nightmare')—*except* that 'seems' shows no construction analogous with (6), an important divergence.

Now how are we to tell the differences between these different words in these different constructions? Well, one difference certainly leaps to the eye: 'looks' is, to put it very roughly, restricted to the general sphere of *vision*, whereas the use of 'appears' or 'seems' does *not* require, or imply, the employment of any one of the senses in particular.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there is also a number of words analogous with 'looks', viz. 'sounds', 'smells', 'tastes', 'feels', each of which does for its own particular sense (nearly enough) just what 'looks' does for the sense of sight.

But we must look, of course, for the minuter differences; and here we must look again at some more examples, asking ourselves in just what circumstances we would say which, and why.

Consider, then: (1) He looks guilty.

(2) He appears guilty.

(3) He seems guilty.

We would say the first of these things simply by way of commenting on his *looks*—he has the look of a guilty

<sup>1</sup> No doubt we often enough use 'looks' where we don't mean, simply or literally, 'looks to the eye'; naturally enough, though, for we stretch the use of 'see' in just the same way.

man.<sup>1</sup> The second, I suggest, would typically be used with reference to certain *special circumstances*—'I quite agree that, when he's prevaricating over all those searching questions about what he did with the money, he appears guilty, but most of the time his demeanour [not just 'his looks'] is innocence itself.' And the third, fairly clearly, makes an implicit reference to certain *evidence*—evidence bearing, of course, on the question whether he *is* guilty, though not such as to settle that question conclusively—'On the evidence we've heard so far, he certainly seems guilty.'

Consider too: (1) 'The hill looks steep'—it has the look of a steep hill; (2) 'The hill appears steep'—when you look at it from down here; (3) 'The hill seems steep'—to judge by the fact that we've had to change gear twice. Also

(1) 'She looks *chic*'—straightforward enough;

(2) 'She seems (to be) *chic*'—from these photographs, from what they've told me about her, &c.;

(3) 'She appears (to be) *chic*'—(there is, in fact, something pretty dubious about this locution, but *perhaps* she 'appears to be *chic*' in unsophisticated, provincial circles).

Plainly enough, then, even without going into much detail, the root ideas behind the uses of 'looks', 'appears', and 'seems' are not the same; and very often, where we

<sup>1</sup> Note the difference between 'not liking his looks' and 'not liking his appearance'; and note that we may wish to 'keep up appearances' for many different reasons, *one* of which might be just 'for the look of the thing'.

could use one word we couldn't use another. A man who seems to be guilty may quite well not *look* guilty. However, it is easy enough to see that in suitable contexts they may come very close together: for example, that somebody looks ill may *be* the evidence on which we could also remark that he seems to be ill; or again our comment on the way something looks may *be* a comment on the way it appears when viewed in particular circumstances. But naturally this will not be so *either* when the way something looks is wholly inadequate evidence (it would be rash to say that her jewellery seems to be genuine just because it looks genuine); *or* when the way something looks is wholly conclusive (what more must she do to *be chic* than to *look chic* ?); or, for that matter, when something's really being such-and-such is not in question at all ('He looks like his father'—but no one is going to say that he seems to *be* his father). Then again, there are certain special cases in which how something looks (feels, &c.) is either all we can get to know about it in the nature of the case, or all that we normally have any interest in; we don't normally bother to make any distinction between 'The sun feels hot' and 'The sun is hot', 'The sky is blue' and 'The sky looks blue'.

That we say 'seems' when, in general, we have some but not conclusive evidence carries with it that 'seems' is compatible with 'may be' and 'may not be': 'He may be guilty; he certainly seems guilty', 'He certainly seems to be guilty, but he may not be'. 'Seems' *may* also occur in conjunction with 'is' or 'is not'; but this will usually be

found to involve a shift in the evidence implicitly referred to. If I were to say, 'He certainly seems to be guilty, but he isn't', I would not usually mean that the *very same evidence* on which he seems to be guilty establishes that he is not, but that while, say, on the evidence presented *so far* (or publicly available) he seems to be guilty, there is (or I *have*) *further* evidence which shows that he is not. Of course I *might* assert or deny his guilt in the teeth of all the evidence there is; but this is not, and could not be, the normal case.

The construction 'seems like', however, calls for special treatment. Its function seems to be that of conveying the *general impression* which something makes; and though this sometimes comes close to 'seems to be' ('It seemed { like | to be } a serious inquiry'), often it does not. The general impression, that is, *may* be taken as evidence; but often it will not be. 'The next three days seemed like one long nightmare' does not mean that they really seemed *to be*, that I was inclined to think they *were*, an actual nightmare. If anything, it means that that is what they *were* like—in such a context there is little to choose between 'seems' and 'is'.

There is, of course, no *general* answer at all to the question how 'looks' or 'looks like' is related to 'is'; it depends on the full circumstances of particular cases. Clearly, if I say that petrol looks like water, I am simply commenting on the way petrol looks; I am under no temptation to think, nor do I imply, that perhaps petrol *is*

water. Similarly with 'A recorder sounds like a flute'. But 'This looks like water' ('That sounds like a flute') may be a different matter; if I don't already know what 'this' is, then I *may* be taking the fact that it looks like water as a ground for thinking it *is* water. But also I may not be. In saying, 'That sounds like a flute' all I am *saying* is that the sound is of a certain character; this may or may not be, and may or may not be intended and taken as, evidence of what the instrument is, what is making the sound. How it *is* intended and taken will depend on further facts about the occasion of utterance; the words themselves imply nothing either way.

Then there are differences of another kind in the ways in which 'looks like' may be meant and may be taken. We are about to watch, from seats high up at the back of the stadium, a football match in which one of the teams is Japanese. One of the teams comes running into the arena. I might say,

- (1) 'They look like ants'; or
- (2) 'They look like Europeans'.

Now it is plain enough that, in saying (1), I do *not* mean either that I am inclined to think some ants have come on to the field, or that the players, on inspection, would be found to look exactly, or even rather, like ants. (I may know quite well, and even be able to see, that for instance they haven't got that very striking sort of nipped-in waist.) I mean, of course, that people seen from this vast distance look (rather) like ants seen from the sort of

distance at which one normally sees ants—say about six feet. Whereas, in saying (2), I *may* mean that the team now taking the field is composed of Europeans, or at least that going by their looks I think so; or I may mean that (though I know this team to be the Japanese one) the players, to my surprise perhaps, look like Europeans, are like Europeans to look at. Compare 'The moon looks no bigger than a sixpence'—it doesn't look as if it *is* no bigger than a sixpence, or as a sixpence would look if it were as far away as the moon; it looks, of course, somewhat as a sixpence looks if you look at it at about arm's length.

Some of these complications are attributable to, or at least are also found with, the word 'like' itself, and not specially with 'looks like'. Consider, 'That cloud is like a horse' and 'That animal is like a horse'. In the case of the cloud, even if we had said it was *exactly* like a horse, we should not have meant that one might easily mistake it for a horse, succumb to the temptation to try to ride it, &c. But if an *animal* is said to be like a horse, then probably it might in some circumstances be mistaken for a horse, someone might think of trying to ride it, &c.<sup>1</sup> Here too, then, it is not enough simply to examine the words themselves; just what is meant and what can be inferred (if anything) can be decided only by examining the full circumstances in which the words are used. We

<sup>1</sup> Note that, contrary to what some philosophical theories seem to imply, the notion of *being* a so-and-so must be prior to that of being *like* a so-and-so. 'Well may the animal be called a pig for it certainly eats like one'—how many things are wrong with that remark?



have already mentioned the point that, when we say of the stick partly immersed in water that it 'looks bent', it has to be remembered what sort of situation we are dealing with; it certainly can't be assumed that, when we use that expression in that situation, we mean that the stick really looks exactly like, might well be mistaken for, a stick that was actually bent. And we might add here that descriptions of dreams, for example, plainly can't be taken to have exactly the same force and implications as the same words would have, if used in the description of ordinary waking experiences. In fact, it is just because we all know that dreams are *throughout unlike* waking experiences that we can safely use ordinary expressions in the narration of them; the peculiarity of the dream-context is sufficiently well known for nobody to be misled by the fact that we speak in ordinary terms.

Two final points. First, it is worth emphasizing, in view of what many philosophers have said, that descriptions of looks are neither 'incorrigible' nor 'subjective'. Of course, with very familiar words such as 'red', it is no doubt pretty unlikely that we should make mistakes (though what about marginal cases ?). But certainly someone might say, 'It looks heliotrope', and then have doubts *either* as to whether 'heliotrope' is right for the colour this thing looks, *or* (taking another look) as to whether this thing really looks heliotrope. There is certainly nothing *in principle* final, conclusive, irrefutable about anyone's statement that so-and-so looks such-and-such. And even if I say, '... looks ... *to me now*' I may, on

being pressed, or after looking at the thing more attentively, wish to retract my statement or at least amend it. To rule out other people and other times is not to rule out uncertainty altogether, or *every* possibility of being challenged and perhaps proved wrong. It is perhaps even clearer that the way things look is, in general, just as much a fact about the world, just as open to public confirmation or challenge, as the way things are. I am not disclosing a fact about *myself*, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water.

Lastly, a point about 'seems'. It is significant that we can preface a judgement or expression of opinion by the phrases 'To judge from its looks ...' or 'Going by appearances ...'; but we can't say, 'To judge by the *seemings* ...' — no such substantive exists. Why not? Is it not that, whereas looks and appearances provide us *with facts* on which a judgement may be based, to speak of how things seem is *already* to express a judgement ? This is, in fact, highly indicative of the special, peculiar function of 'seems'.

## V

I WANT NOW TO TAKE UP AGAIN THE philosophical argument as it is set out in the texts we are discussing. As I mentioned earlier, the argument from illusion is intended primarily to persuade us that, in certain exceptional, abnormal situations, what we perceive—directly anyway—is a sense-datum; but then there comes a second stage, in which we are to be brought to agree that what we (directly) perceive is always a sense-datum, even in the normal, unexceptional case. It is this second stage of the argument that we must now examine.

Ayer expounds the argument thus.<sup>1</sup> There is, he says, 'no intrinsic difference in kind between those of our perceptions that are veridical in their presentation of material things and those that are delusive. When I look at a straight stick, which is refracted in water and so appears crooked, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were looking at a stick that really was crooked....' If, however, 'when our perceptions were delusive, we were always perceiving something of a different kind from what we perceived when they were veridical, we should expect our experience to be qualitatively different in the two cases. We should expect to be able to tell from the

<sup>1</sup> Ayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-9.

intrinsic character of a perception whether it was a perception of a sense-datum or of a material thing. But this is not possible...'.<sup>1</sup> Price's exposition of this point,<sup>1</sup> to which Ayer refers us, is in fact not perfectly analogous; for Price has already somehow reached the conclusion that we are always aware of sense-data, and here is trying to establish only that we cannot distinguish *normal* sense-data, as 'parts of the surfaces of material things', from *abnormal* ones, not 'parts of the surfaces of material things'. However, the argument used is much the same: 'the abnormal crooked sense-datum of a straight stick standing in water is qualitatively indistinguishable from a normal sense-datum of a crooked stick'; but 'is it not incredible that two entities so similar in all these qualities should really be so utterly different: that the one should be a real constituent of a material object, wholly independent of the observer's mind and organism, while the other is merely the fleeting product of his cerebral processes?'

It is argued further, both by Ayer and Price, that 'even in the case of veridical perceptions we are not directly aware of material things' [or *apud* Price, that our sense-data are not parts of the surfaces of material things] for the reason that 'veridical and delusive perceptions may form a continuous series. Thus, if I gradually approach an object from a distance I may begin by having a series of perceptions which are delusive in the sense that the object appears to be smaller than it really is. Let us

<sup>1</sup> *Perception*, p. 31.

assume that this series terminates in a veridical perception.<sup>1</sup> Then the difference in quality between this perception and its immediate predecessor will be of the same order as the difference between any two delusive perceptions that are next to one another in the series. . . . But 'these are differences of degree and not of kind. But this, it is argued, is not what we should expect if the veridical perception were a perception of an object of a different sort, a material thing as opposed to a sense-datum. Does not the fact that veridical and delusive perceptions shade into one another in the way that is indicated by these examples show that the objects that are perceived in either case are generically the same ? And from this it would follow, if it was acknowledged that the delusive perceptions were perceptions of sense-data, that what we directly experienced was always a sense-datum and never a material thing.' As Price puts it, 'it seems most extraordinary that there should be a total difference of nature where there is only an infinitesimal difference of quality'.<sup>2</sup>

Well, what are we to make of the arguments thus set before us ?

1. It is pretty obvious, for a start, that the terms in

<sup>1</sup> But what, we may ask, does this assumption amount to ? From what distance *does* an object, a cricket-ball say, 'look the size that it really is' ? Six feet ? Twenty feet ?

<sup>2</sup> I omit from consideration a further argument cited by both Price and Ayer, which makes play with the 'causal dependence' of our 'perceptions' upon the conditions of observation and our own 'physiological and psychological states'.

which the argument is stated by Ayer are grossly tendentious. Price, you remember, is not producing the argument as a proof that we are always aware of sense-data; in his view that question has already been settled, and he conceives himself to be faced here only with the question whether any sense-data are 'parts of the surfaces of material objects'. But in Ayer's exposition the argument *is* put forward as a ground for the conclusion that what we are (directly) aware of in perception is always a sense-datum; and if so, it seems a rather serious defect that this conclusion is practically assumed from the very first sentence of the statement of the argument itself. In that sentence Ayer uses, not indeed for the first time, the term 'perceptions' (which incidentally has never been defined or explained), and takes it for granted, here and throughout, that there is at any rate some kind of entities of which we are aware in absolutely all cases—namely, 'perceptions', delusive or veridical. But of course, if one has already been induced to swallow the idea that every case, whether 'delusive' or 'veridical', supplies us with 'perceptions', one is only too easily going to be made to feel that it would be straining at a gnat not to swallow sense-data in an equally comprehensive style. But in fact one has not even been told what 'perceptions' *are*; and the assumption of their ubiquity has been slipped in without any explanation or argument whatever. But if those to whom the argument is ostensibly addressed were not thus made to concede the essential point from the beginning, would the statement of the argument be quite such plain sailing ?

2. Of course we shall also want to enter a protest against the argument's bland assumption of a simple dichotomy between 'veridical and delusive experiences'. There is, as we have already seen, *no* justification at all *either* for lumping all so-called 'delusive' experiences together, *or* for lumping together all so-called 'veridical' experiences. But again, could the argument run quite so smoothly without this assumption ? It would certainly—and this, incidentally, would be all to the good—take rather longer to state.

3. But now let us look at what the argument actually says. It begins, you will remember, with an alleged statement of fact—namely, that 'there is no intrinsic difference in kind between those of our perceptions that are veridical in their presentation of material things and those that are delusive' (Ayer), that 'there is no qualitative difference between normal sense-data as such and abnormal sense-data as such' (Price). Now, waiving so far as possible the numerous obscurities in and objections to this manner of speaking, let us ask whether what is being alleged here is actually true. Is it the case that 'delusive and veridical experiences' are not 'qualitatively different'? Well, at least it seems perfectly extraordinary to say so in this sweeping way. Consider a few examples. I may have the experience (dubbed 'delusive' presumably) of dreaming that I am being presented to the Pope. Could it be seriously suggested that having this dream is 'qualitatively indistinguishable' from *actually being* presented to the Pope ? Quite obviously not. After all, we have the phrase

'a dream-like quality'; some waking experiences are said to have this dream-like quality, and some artists and writers occasionally try to impart it, usually with scant success, to their works. But of course, if the fact here alleged *were* a fact, the phrase would be perfectly meaningless, because applicable to everything. If dreams were not 'qualitatively' different from waking experiences, then *every* waking experience would be like a dream; the dream-like quality would be, not difficult to capture, but impossible to avoid.<sup>1</sup> It is true, to repeat, that dreams are *narrated* in the same terms as waking experiences: these terms, after all, are the best terms we have; but it would be wildly wrong to conclude from this that what is narrated in the two cases is *exactly alike*. When we are hit on the head we sometimes say that we 'see stars'; but for all that, seeing stars when you are hit on the head is *not* 'qualitatively' indistinguishable from seeing stars when you look at the sky.

Again, it is simply not true to say that seeing a bright green after-image against a white wall is exactly like seeing a bright green patch actually on the wall; or that seeing a white wall through blue spectacles is exactly like seeing a blue wall; or that seeing pink rats in D.T.s is exactly like really seeing pink rats; or (once again) that seeing a stick refracted in water is exactly like seeing a bent stick. In all these cases we may *say* the same things ('It looks blue', 'It looks bent', &c), but this is no reason

<sup>1</sup> This is part, no doubt *only* part, of the absurdity in Descartes' toying with the notion that the whole of our experience might be a dream.

at all for denying the obvious fact that the 'experiences' are *different*.

4. Next, one may well wish at least to ask for the credentials of a curious general principle on which both Ayer and Price seem to rely,<sup>1</sup> to the effect that, if two things are not 'generically the same', the same 'in nature', then they can't be alike, or even very nearly alike. If it were true, Ayer says, that from time to time we perceived things of two different kinds, then 'we should expect' them to be qualitatively different. But why on earth should we?—particularly if, as he suggests would be the case, we never actually found such a thing to be true. It is not at all easy to discuss this point sensibly, because of the initial absurdity in the hypothesis that we perceive just *two* kinds of things. But if, for example, I had never seen a mirror, but were told (*a*) that in mirrors one sees reflections of things, and (*b*) that reflections of things are not 'generically the same' as things, is there any reason why I should forthwith *expect* there to be some whacking big 'qualitative' difference between seeing things and seeing their reflections? Plainly not; if I were prudent, I should simply wait and see what seeing reflections was like. If I am told that a lemon is generically different from a piece of soap, do I 'expect' that no piece of soap could look just like a lemon? Why should I?

(It is worth noting that Price helps the argument along at this point by a bold stroke of rhetoric: how could two entities be 'qualitatively indistinguishable', he asks, if I Ayer in fact expresses qualms later: see p. 12.

one is a 'real constituent of a material object', the other '*a fleeting product of his cerebral processes*'? But how in fact are we supposed to have been persuaded that sense-data are ever fleeting products of cerebral processes? Does this colourful description fit, for instance, the reflection of my face in a mirror?)

5. Another erroneous principle which the argument here seems to rely on is this: that it *must* be the case that 'delusive and veridical experiences' are not (as such) 'qualitatively' or 'intrinsically' distinguishable—for if they were distinguishable, we should never be 'deluded'. But of course this is not so. From the fact that I am sometimes 'deluded', mistaken, taken in through failing to distinguish A from B, it does not follow at all that A and B must be *indistinguishable*. Perhaps I should have noticed the difference if I had been more careful or attentive; perhaps I am just bad at distinguishing things of this sort (e.g. vintages); perhaps, again, I have never learned to discriminate between them, or haven't had much practice at it. As Ayer observes, probably truly, 'a child who had not learned that refraction was a means of distortion would naturally believe that the stick really was crooked as he saw it'; but how is the fact that an uninstructed child probably would not discriminate between *being refracted* and *being crooked* supposed to establish the allegation that there *is* no 'qualitative' difference between the two cases? What sort of reception would I be likely to get from a professional tea-taster, if I were to say to him, 'But there can't be any difference between the flavours of these two

brands of tea, for I regularly fail to distinguish between them' ? Again, when 'the quickness of the hand deceives the eye', it is not that what the hand is really doing is *exactly like* what we are tricked into thinking it is doing, but simply that it is *impossible to tell* what it is really doing. In this case it may be true that we can't distinguish, and not merely that we don't; but even this doesn't mean that the two cases are exactly alike.

I do not, of course, wish to deny that there may be cases in which 'delusive and veridical experiences' really are 'qualitatively indistinguishable'; but I certainly do wish to deny (a) that such cases are anything like as *common* as both Ayer and Price seem to suppose, and (b) that there *have* to be such cases to accommodate the undoubted fact that we are sometimes 'deceived by our senses'. We are not, after all, quasi-infallible beings, who can be taken in only where the avoidance of mistake is completely impossible. But if we are prepared to admit that there may be, even that there are, *some* cases in which 'delusive and veridical perceptions' really are indistinguishable, does this admission require us to drag in, or even to let in, sense-data ? No. For even if we were to make the prior admission (which we have so far found no reason to make) that in the 'abnormal' cases we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the 'normal' cases too. For why on earth should it *not* be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another ?

6. There is a further quite general difficulty in assessing

the force of this argument, which we (in common with the authors of our texts) have slurred over so far. The question which Ayer invites us to consider is whether two classes of 'perceptions', the veridical and the delusive, are or are not 'qualitatively different', 'intrinsically different in kind'; but how are we supposed to set about even considering this question, when we are not told what 'a perception' *is* ? In particular, how many of the circumstances of a situation, as these would ordinarily be stated, are supposed to be included in 'the perception' ? For example, to take the stick in water again: it is a feature of this case that part of the stick is under water, and water, of course, is not invisible; is the water, then, part of 'the perception' ? It is difficult to conceive of any grounds for denying that it is; but *if it is*, surely this is a perfectly obvious respect in which 'the perception' differs from, is distinguishable from, the 'perception' we have when we look at a bent stick *not* in water. There is a sense, perhaps, in which the presence or absence of water is not the *main thing* in this case—we are supposed to be addressing ourselves primarily to questions about the stick. But in fact, as a great quantity of psychological investigation has shown, discrimination between one thing and another very frequently depends on such more or less extraneous concomitants of the main thing, even when such concomitants are not consciously taken note of. As I said, we are told nothing of what 'a perception' is; but could any defensible account, if such an account were offered, completely exclude all these

highly significant attendant circumstances ? And if they *were* excluded—in some more or less arbitrary way—how much interest or importance would be left in the contention that 'delusive' and 'veridical' perceptions are indistinguishable? Inevitably, if you rule out the respects in which A and B differ, you may expect to be left with respects in which they are alike.

I conclude, then, that this part of the philosophical argument involves (though not in every case equally essentially) (a) acceptance of a quite bogus dichotomy of all 'perceptions' into two groups, the 'delusive' and the 'veridical'—to say nothing of the unexplained introduction of 'perceptions' themselves; (b) an implicit but grotesque exaggeration of the *frequency* of 'delusive perceptions'; (c) a further grotesque exaggeration of the *similarity* between 'delusive' perceptions and 'veridical' ones; (d) the erroneous suggestion that there *must* be such similarity, or even qualitative *identity*; (e) the acceptance of the pretty gratuitous idea that things 'generically different' could not be qualitatively alike; and (f)—which is really a corollary of (c) and (a)—the gratuitous neglect of those more or less subsidiary features which often make possible the discrimination of situations which, in other *broad* respects, may be roughly alike. These seem to be rather serious deficiencies.

## VI

AYER, OF COURSE, DOES NOT HIMSELF ACCEPT the argument from illusion, or the supporting bit of argument that we have just considered, at face value and without reservations. The arguments he has expounded, he says, need to be 'evaluated', and the evaluation of them is what he next undertakes.<sup>1</sup> We must consider what he says.

Well, first we must regretfully note that Ayer swallows without hesitation a great deal in the argument that is highly objectionable; he accepts, in fact, all the really important blunders on which the argument rests. For example, he is not at all uneasy about the supposed dichotomy between 'sense-data' and 'material things'— he is inclined to argue about what *kind* of dichotomy this is, but that there *is* such a dichotomy he does not question; he does not jib at the unexplained introduction of these allegedly ubiquitous entities, 'perceptions', nor at the further dichotomy of these, with seeming neatness, into two groups, 'veridical' and 'delusive': he accepts, further, without complaint the allegation that members of these two groups are not 'qualitatively distinguishable'. His position as to the merits of our ordinary, unamended, pre-philosophical manner of speaking is somewhat more

<sup>1</sup> Ayer, op. cit., pp. 11-19.

equivocal; on pp. 15-16 he seems to be saying that we really *are* involved in contradictions if certain 'assumptions' are made which certainly (to understate the case) we all do make, but on p. 31 he appears to retract this — there is, he there allows, no contradiction in our ordinary practice of taking some 'perceptions' to be 'veridical' and others not. But however this may be, he is at any rate ultimately persuaded that a 'technical terminology of some kind' is 'desirable'.

If, then, Ayer accepts so much of what the argument from illusion turns on, what exactly are the reservations that he wishes to make? Well, his main point—by now, no doubt, pretty well known—is that the issue raised is *not factual but linguistic*. He expresses, in fact, doubts as to whether the argument really works, even if it is taken to be concerned with a matter of fact; he doubts, at any rate, whether it could be taken as establishing that in fact we *always* perceive sense-data, since he is not clear (rightly enough) why 'perceptions of objects of different types' should *not* be 'qualitatively indistinguishable', or 'capable of being ranged in a continuous series'.<sup>1</sup> But further, he asks, 'Does the argument prove even that there are *any* cases of perception in which such a belief [*sc.* that the objects we directly perceive are material things] would be mistaken?'

It seems pretty odd, of course, to suggest that any argument is needed to prove this belief mistaken; for how in fact could anyone possibly suppose it to be true that

<sup>1</sup> I again omit the argument about 'causal dependence'.

what he perceives is *always* a 'material thing'? However, I think that this crack can be papered over. Ayer here, I think, has merely fallen into one of the traps which his own terminology sets for him, by taking it for granted that the *only alternative* to 'perceiving sense-data' is 'perceiving material things'; thus, in place of the absurdity of seeming to take seriously the idea that we *always* perceive material things, we can plausibly impute to him the more rational intention of raising the question whether we *ever* perceive sense-data. 'We never perceive sense-data' is not, as a matter of fact, equivalent to and interchangeable with 'We always perceive material things'; but Ayer pretty clearly *treats* these as interchangeable, and thus we can safely take it that the question he is now asking is: Does the argument from illusion really prove that, in any situations at all, we perceive sense-data?

His further argument on this point is not at all easy to follow, but it seems to go like this. (1) We have to admit—at least he appears to concede this—that sometimes we perceive 'sense-data which are not parts of any material things', if, but *only* if, we are prepared to allow that 'some perceptions are delusive'. (Of course all this won't really do, but we may let it pass for the moment.) But (2) do we *have* to allow that some perceptions are delusive? It is argued that we do, since otherwise 'we shall have to attribute to material things such mutually incompatible properties as being at the same time both green and yellow, or both elliptical and round'. But (3) such attributions, he says, yield contradictions only if 'certain



assumptions' are made— for example that the 'real shape' of a penny remains the same when I change the point of view from which I look at it, that the temperature of water in a bowl is 'really the same' when I feel it first with a warm and then with a cold hand, or that an oasis 'does not really exist' at a certain place if no one except a crazed wanderer in the desert thinks that he sees one there. These 'assumptions', Ayer would presumably grant, look plausible enough; but why, he now says, shouldn't we just try denying them, all the same ? Why shouldn't we say that material things are much slyer than we've been giving them credit for—constantly busy, from moment to moment, in changing their real shapes, colours, temperatures, sizes, and everything else ? Why shouldn't we say, too, that they are much more numerous than is commonly thought—that, for instance, when I offer you (what we usually call) *a* cigarette, there are really *two* material things (two *cigarettes* ?), one that I see and offer *and* one that you see and accept, if you do? 'I have no doubt', Ayer says, 'that by postulating a greater number of material things and regarding them as being more variable and evanescent than we normally do, it would be possible to deal with all the other cases in a similar way.' Now Ayer seems to be right here—indeed, to be understating the case. If we allow ourselves this degree of *insouciant* latitude, surely we shall be able to deal—in *a way*, of course—with absolutely anything. But is there not something wrong with a solution on these lines ? Well, I must here quote Ayer's own words: 'How then is one who

holds this position to be refuted ? The answer is that so long as we persist in regarding the issue as one concerning a matter of fact it is impossible for us to refute him. We cannot refute him, because, as far as the facts are concerned, there is really no dispute between us. ... Where we say that the real shape of a coin is unchanging, he prefers to say that its shape is really undergoing some cyclical process of change. Where we say that two observers are seeing the same material thing, he prefers to say that they are seeing different things which have, however, some structural properties in common.... If there is here to be any question of truth or falsehood, there must be some disagreement about the nature of the empirical facts. And in this case no such disagreement exists.' Therefore, the question to which the argument from illusion purports to provide an answer is a purely *linguistic* question, not a question of fact: it has to do not with what is the case, but with how we are to talk. With this, Ayer concludes his 'evaluation' of the argument.

The main comment that I want to make on these pretty astonishing propositions concerns in particular the idea Ayer here seems to put forward, that the words 'real', 'really', 'real shape', 'real colour', &c, can perfectly well be used to mean *whatever you like*; and I shall also discuss what he says about what they do mean. But first I should like to point out the highly interesting fact that his way of 'proving' that the whole issue is purely verbal actually shows (what I am sure in any case is quite true) that he does not regard it as really verbal at all—his real

view is that *in fact* we perceive only sense-data. This can quite easily be seen. One might at first sight be inclined to say that, if Ayer were right here, then absolutely every dispute would be purely verbal. For if, when one person says whatever it may be, another person may simply 'prefer to say' something else, they will *always* be arguing only about words, about what terminology is to be preferred. How could *anything* be a question of truth or falsehood, if anyone can always say whatever he likes ? But here, of course, Ayer answers that, sometimes at least, there *is* real 'disagreement about the nature of the empirical facts'. But what kind of disagreement can this be? It is not, he says, (surprising as this may seem) a question of fact whether a penny, or any other 'material thing', does or does not constantly change its shape, its colour, its size, its location—here indeed we *can* say whatever we please. Where then are 'empirical facts' to be found? And Ayer's answer is quite clear—they are *facts about sense-data*, or as he also puts it, 'about the nature of the sensible appearances', 'the phenomena'; this is where we really encounter 'the empirical evidence'. There are in his view—his *real* view—no other 'empirical facts' at all. The hard fact is that there are sense-data; these entities really exist and are what they are; what other entities we may care to *speak as if* there were is a pure matter of verbal convenience, but 'the facts to which these expressions are intended to refer' will always be the same, facts about sense-data.

It thus becomes clear, not very surprisingly perhaps,

that the apparent sophistication of Ayer's 'linguistic' doctrine really rests squarely on the old Berkeleian, Kantian ontology of the 'sensible manifold'. He has all along, it seems, really been completely convinced by the very arguments that he purports to 'evaluate' with so much detachment. And there can be little doubt that this is owing in large measure to his wholesale acceptance of the traditional, time-hallowed, and disastrous manner of expounding them.<sup>1</sup>

It is a curious and in some ways rather melancholy fact that the relative positions of Price and Ayer at this point turn out to be exactly the same as the relative positions of Locke and Berkeley, or Hume and Kant. In Locke's view there are 'ideas' and also 'external objects', in Hume's 'impressions' and also 'external objects', in Price's view 'sense-data' and also 'physical occupants'; in Berkeley's doctrine there are *only* ideas, in Kant's only *Vorstellungen* (things-in-themselves being not strictly relevant here), in Ayer's doctrine there are *only* sense-data—but Berkeley, Kant, and Ayer all further agree that we can *speak as if* there were bodies, objects, material things. Certainly, Berkeley and Kant are not so liberal as Ayer—they don't suggest that, so long as we keep in step with the sensible manifold, we can talk exactly as we please; but on this issue, if I had to take sides, I think I should side with them.

<sup>1</sup> Or can there ? One might also take the, in some ways, more charitable view that his off-hand treatment of the argument from illusion is due to his already being convinced *on other grounds* of what it purports to prove. I suspect there is a good deal in this, and we shall return to it later.