VII

But now, provoked largely by the frequent and unexamined occurrences of 'real', 'really', 'real shape', &c, in the arguments we have just been considering, I want to take a closer look at this little word 'real'. I propose, if you like, to discuss the Nature of Reality—a genuinely important topic, though in general I don't much like making this claim.

There are two things, first of all, which it is immensely important to understand here.

1. 'Real' is an absolutely normal word, with nothing new-fangled or technical or highly specialized about it. It is, that is to say, already firmly established in, and very frequently used in, the ordinary language we all use every day. Thus in this sense it is a word which has a fixed meaning, and so can't, any more than can any other word which is firmly established, be fooled around with ad lib. Philosophers often seem to think that they can just 'assign' any meaning whatever to any word; and so no doubt, in an absolutely trivial sense, they can (like Humpty-Dumpty). There are some expressions, of course, 'material thing' for example, which only philosophers use, and in such cases they can, within reason, please themselves; but most words are in fact used in a particular way already, and this fact can't be just disregarded. (For example, some meanings that have been assigned to 'know' and 'certain' have made it seem outrageous that we should use these terms as we actually do; but what this shows is that the meanings assigned by some philosophers are wrong.) Certainly, when we have discovered how a word is in fact used, that may not be the end of the matter; there is certainly no reason why, in general, things should be left exactly as we find them; we may wish to tidy the situation up a bit, revise the map here and there, draw the boundaries and distinctions rather differently. But still, it is advisable always to bear in mind (a) that the distinctions embodied in our vast and, for the most part, relatively ancient stock of ordinary words are neither few nor always very obvious, and almost never just arbitrary; (b) that in any case, before indulging in any tampering on our own account, we need to find out what it is that we have to deal with; and (c) that tampering with words in what we take to be one little corner of the field is always liable to have unforeseen repercussions in the adjoining territory. Tampering, in fact, is not so easy as is often supposed, is not justified or needed so often as is often supposed, and is often thought to be necessary just because what we've got already has been misrepresented. And we must always be particularly wary of the philosophical habit of dismissing some (if not all) the ordinary uses of a word as 'unimportant', a habit which makes distortion practically unavoidable. For instance, if we are going to talk about 'real', we must
not dismiss as beneath contempt such humble but familiar expressions as 'not real cream'; this may save us from saying, for example, or seeming to say that what is not real cream must be a fleeting product of our cerebral processes.

2. The other immensely important point to grasp is that 'real' is not a normal word at all, but highly exceptional; exceptional in this respect that, unlike 'yellow' or 'horse' or 'walk', it does not have one single, specifiable, always-the-same meaning. (Even Aristotle saw through this idea.) Nor does it have a large number of different meanings—it is not ambiguous, even 'systematically'. Now words of this sort have been responsible for a great deal of perplexity. Consider the expressions 'cricket ball', 'cricket bat', 'cricket pavilion', 'cricket weather'. If someone did not know about cricket and were obsessed with the use of such 'normal' words as 'yellow', he might gaze at the ball, the bat, the building, the weather, trying to detect the 'common quality' which (he assumes) is attributed to these things by the prefix 'cricket'. But no such quality meets his eye; and so perhaps he concludes that 'cricket' must designate a non-natural quality, a quality to be detected not in any ordinary way but by intuition. If this story strikes you as too absurd, remember what philosophers have said about the word 'good'; and reflect that many philosophers, failing to detect any ordinary quality common to real ducks, real cream, and real progress, have decided that Reality must be an a priori concept apprehended by reason alone.

Let us begin, then, with a preliminary, no doubt rather haphazard, survey of some of the complexities in the use of 'real'. Consider, for instance, a case which at first sight one might think was pretty straightforward—the case of 'real colour'. What is meant by the 'real' colour of a thing? Well, one may say with some confidence, that's easy enough: the real colour of the thing is the colour that it looks to a normal observer in conditions of normal or standard illumination; and to find out what a thing's real colour is, we just need to be normal and to observe it in those conditions.

But suppose (a) that I remark to you of a third party, 'That isn't the real colour of her hair.' Do I mean by this that, if you were to observe her in conditions of standard illumination, you would find that her hair did not look that colour? Plainly not—the conditions of illumination may be standard already. I mean, of course, that her hair has been dyed, and normal illumination just doesn't come into it at all. Or suppose that you are looking at a ball of wool in a shop, and I say, 'That's not its real colour.' Here I may mean that it won't look that colour in ordinary daylight; but I may mean that wool isn't that colour before it's dyed. As so often, you can't tell what I mean just from the words that I use; it makes a difference, for instance, whether the thing under discussion is or is not of a type which is customarily dyed.

Suppose (b) that there is a species of fish which looks vividly multi-coloured, slightly glowing perhaps, at a depth of a thousand feet. I ask you what its real colour is.
So you catch a specimen and lay it out on deck, making sure the condition of the light is just about normal, and you find that it looks a muddy sort of greyish white. Well, is that its real colour? It's clear enough at any rate that we don't have to say so. In fact, is there any right answer in such a case?

Compare: 'What is the real taste of saccharine?' We dissolve a tablet in a cup of tea and we find that it makes the tea taste sweet; we then take a tablet neat, and we find that it tastes bitter. Is it really bitter, or really sweet?

(c) What is the real colour of the sky? Of the sun? Of the moon? Of a chameleon? We say that the sun in the evening sometimes looks red—well, what colour is it really? (What are the 'conditions of standard illumination' for the sun?)

(d) Consider a pointilliste painting of a meadow, say; if the general effect is of green, the painting may be composed of predominantly blue and yellow dots. What is the real colour of the painting?

(e) What is the real colour of an after-image? The trouble with this one is that we have no idea what an alternative to its 'real colour' might be. Its apparent colour, the colour that it looks, the colour that it appears to be?—but these phrases have no application here. (You might ask me, 'What colour is it really?' if you suspected that I had lied in telling you its colour. But 'What colour is it really?' is not quite the same as 'What is its real colour?)

Or consider 'real shape' for a moment. This notion cropped up, you may remember, seeming quite unproblematic, when we were considering the coin which was said to 'look elliptical' from some points of view; it had a real shape, we insisted, which remained unchanged. But coins in fact are rather special cases. For one thing their outlines are well defined and very highly stable, and for another they have a known and a nameable shape. But there are plenty of things of which this is not true. What is the real shape of a cloud? And if it be objected, as I dare say it could be, that a cloud is not a 'material thing' and so not the kind of thing which has to have a real shape, consider this case: what is the real shape of a cat? Does its real shape change whenever it moves? If not, in what posture is its real shape on display? Furthermore, is its real shape such as to be fairly smooth-outlined, or must it be finely enough serrated to take account of each hair? It is pretty obvious that there is no answer to these questions—no rules according to which, no procedure by which, answers are to be determined. Of course, there are plenty of shapes which the cat definitely is not—cylindrical, for instance. But only a desperate man would toy with the idea of ascertaining the cat's real shape 'by elimination'. Contrast this with cases in which we do know how to proceed: 'Are those real diamonds?', 'Is that a real duck?' Items of jewellery that more or less closely resemble diamonds may not be real diamonds because they are paste or glass; that may not be a real duck because it is a decoy, or a toy duck, or a species of goose closely resembling a duck, or because I am having a hallucination. These are all of course quite different cases. And notice in
particular (a) that, in most of them 'observation by a
normal observer in standard conditions' is completely
irrelevant; (b) that something which is not a real duck
is not a non-existent duck, or indeed a non-existent
anything; and (c) that something existent, e.g. a toy,
may perfectly well not be real, e.g. not a real duck.1

Perhaps by now we have said enough to establish
that there is more in the use of 'real' than meets the
cursory eye; it has many and diverse uses in many
diverse contexts. We must next, then, try to tidy things
up a little; and I shall now mention under four
headings what might be called the salient features of
the use of 'real'—though not all these features are
equally conspicuous in all its uses.

1. First, 'real' is a word that we may call
substantive-hungry. Consider:
'These diamonds are real'; 'These are real
diamonds'.

This pair of sentences looks like, in an obvious
grammatical respect, this other pair:
'These diamonds are pink'; 'These are pink
diamonds'.

1 'Exist', of course, is itself extremely tricky. The word is a verb, but it
does not describe something that things do all the time, like
breathing, only quieter—ticking over, as it were, in a metaphysical
sort of way. It is only too easy to start wondering what, then, existing
is. The Greeks were worse off than we are in this region of discourse
—for our different expressions 'to be', 'to exist', and 'real' they made
do with the single word elvai. We have not their excuse for getting
confused on this admittedly confusing topic.

But whereas we can just say of something 'This is
pink', we can't just say of something 'This is real'. And
it is not very difficult to see why. We can perfectly
well say of something that it is pink without knowing,
without any reference to, what it is. But not so with
'real'. For one and the same object may be both a real x
and not a real y; an object looking rather like a duck
may be a real decoy duck (not just a toy) but not a real
duck. When it isn't a real duck but a hallucination, it
may still be a real hallucination—as opposed, for
instance, to a passing quirk of a vivid imagination.

That is, we must have an answer to the question 'A real
what ?', if the question 'Real or not ?' is to have a
definite sense, to get any foothold. And perhaps we
should also mention here another point— that the
question 'Real or not?' does not always come up, can't
always be raised. We do raise this question only when,
to speak rather roughly, suspicion assails us—in some
way or other things may be not what they seem; and
we can raise this question only if there is a way, or
ways, in which things may be not what they seem.
What alternative is there to being a 'real' after-image ?

'Real' is not, of course, the only word we have that
is substantive-hungry. Other examples, perhaps better
known ones, are 'the same' and 'one'. The same team
may not be the same collection of players; a body of
troops may be one company and also three platoons.
Then what about 'good' ? We have here a variety of
gaps crying out for substantives—'A good what ?',
'Good at what?'—a good
book, perhaps, but not a good novel; good at pruning roses, but not good at mending cars.\(^1\)

2. Next, 'real' is what we may call a *trouser-word*. It is usually thought, and I dare say usually rightly thought, that what one might call the affirmative use of a term is basic—that, to understand ‘x’, we need to know what it is to be x, or to be an x, and that knowing this apprises us of what it is not to be x, not to be an x. But with 'real' (as we briefly noted earlier) it is the negative use that wears the trousers. That is, a definite sense attaches to the assertion that something is real, a real such-and-such, only in the light of a specific way in which it might be, or might have been, not real. 'A real duck' differs from the simple 'a duck' only in that it is used to exclude various ways of being not a real duck—but a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, &c.; and moreover I don't know just how to take the assertion that it's a real duck unless I know just what, on that particular occasion, the speaker has it in mind to exclude. This, of course, is why the attempt to find a characteristic common to all things that are or could be called 'real' is doomed to failure; the function of 'real' is not to contribute positively to the characterization of anything, but to exclude possible ways of being not real—and these ways are both numerous for particular kinds of things, and liable to be quite different for things of different kinds. It is this identity of

general function combined with immense diversity in specific applications which gives to the word 'real' the, at first sight, baffling feature of having neither one single 'meaning', nor yet ambiguity, a number of different meanings.

3. Thirdly, 'real' is (like 'good') a *dimension-word*. I mean by this that it is the most general and comprehensive term in a whole group of terms of the same kind, terms that fulfil the same function. Other members of this group, on the affirmative side, are, for example, 'proper', 'genuine', 'live', 'true', 'authentic', 'natural'; and on the negative side, 'artificial', 'fake', 'false', 'bogus', 'makeshift', 'dummy', 'synthetic', 'toy'—and such nouns as 'dream', 'illusion', 'mirage', 'hallucination' belong here as well.\(^1\) It is worth noticing here that, naturally enough, the less general terms on the affirmative side have the merit, in many cases, of suggesting more or less definitely what it is that is being excluded; they tend to pair off", that is, with particular terms on the negative side and thus, so to speak, to narrow the range of possibilities. If I say that I wish the university had a proper theatre, this suggests that it has at present a makeshift theatre; pictures are genuine as opposed to fake, silk is natural as opposed to artificial, ammunition is live as opposed to dummy, and so on. In practice, of course, we often get a clue to what it is that is in question from the substantive

\(^1\) In Greek the case of sothos is of some importance; Aristotle seems to get into difficulties by trying to use sothia 'absolutely', so to speak, without specification of the field in which ao’i’a is exercised and shown. Compare on deintos too.

\(^1\) Of course, not all the uses of all these words are of the kind we are here considering—though it would be wise not to assume, either, that any of their uses are completely different, completely unconnected.
in the case, since we frequently have a well-founded antecedent idea in what respects the kind of thing mentioned could (and could not) be 'not real'. For instance, if you ask me 'Is this real silk?' I shall tend to supply 'as opposed to artificial', since I already know that silk is the kind of thing which can be very closely simulated by an artificial product. The notion of its being toy silk, for instance, will not occur to me.

A large number of questions arises here—which I shall not go into—concerning both the composition of these families of 'reality'-words and 'unreality'-words, and also the distinctions to be drawn between their individual members. Why, for instance, is being a proper carving-knife one way of being a real carving-knife, whereas being pure cream seems not to be one way of being real cream? Or to put it differently: how does the distinction between real cream and synthetic cream differ from the distinction between pure cream and adulterated cream? Is it just that adulterated cream still is, after all, cream? And why are false teeth called 'false' rather than, say, 'artificial'? Why are artificial limbs so-called, in preference to 'false'? Is it that false teeth, besides doing much the same job as real teeth, look, and are meant to look, deceptively like real teeth? Whereas an artificial limb, perhaps, is meant to do

1 Why not? Because silk can't be 'toy'. Yes, but why not? Is it that a toy is, strictly speaking, something quite small, and specially made or designed to be manipulated in play? The water in toy beer-bottles is not toy beer, but pretend beer. Could a toy watch actually have clockwork inside and show the time correctly? Or would that be just a miniature watch?

the same job, but is neither intended, nor likely, to be passed off as a real limb.

Another philosophically notorious dimension-word, which has already been mentioned in another connexion as closely comparable with 'real', is 'good'. 'Good' is the most general of a very large and diverse list of more specific words, which share with it the general function of expressing commendation, but differ among themselves in their aptness to, and implications in, particular contexts. It is a curious point, of which Idealist philosophers used to make much at one time, that 'real' itself, in certain uses, may belong to this family. 'Now this is a real carving-knife!' may be one way of saying that this is a good carving-knife.1 And it is sometimes said of a bad poem, for instance, that it isn't really a poem at all; a certain standard must be reached, as it were, even to qualify.

4. Lastly, 'real' also belongs to a large and important family of words that we may call adjuster-words—words, that is, by the use of which other words are adjusted to meet the innumerable and unforeseeable demands of the world upon language. The position, considerably oversimplified no doubt, is that at a given time our language contains words that enable us (more or less) to say what we want to say in most situations that (we think) are liable to turn up. But vocabularies are finite; and the variety of possible situations that may confront us is

1 Colloquially at least, the converse is also found: 'I gave him a good hiding'—'a real hiding'—'a proper hiding'.
neither finite nor precisely foreseeable. So situations are practically bound to crop up sometimes with which our vocabulary is not already fitted to cope in any tidy, straightforward style. We have the word 'pig', for instance, and a pretty clear idea which animals, among those that we fairly commonly encounter, are and are not to be so called. But one day we come across a new kind of animal, which looks and behaves very much as pigs do, but not quite as pigs do; it is somehow different. Well, we might just keep silent, not knowing what to say; we don't want to say positively that it is a pig, or that it is not. Or we might, if for instance we expected to want to refer to these new creatures pretty often, invent a quite new word for them. But what we could do, and probably would do first of all, is to say, 'It's like a pig.' ('Like' is the great adjuster-word, or, alternatively put, the main flexibility-device by whose aid, in spite of the limited scope of our vocabulary, we can always avoid being left completely speechless.) And then, having said of this animal that it's like a pig, we may proceed with the remark, 'But it isn't a real pig'—or more specifically, and using a term that naturalists favour, 'not a true pig'. If we think of words as being shot like arrows at the world, the function of these adjuster-words is to free us from the disability of being able to shoot only straight ahead; by their use on occasion, such words as 'pig' can be, so to speak, brought into connexion with targets lying slightly off the simple, straightforward line on which they are ordinarily aimed. And in this way we gain, besides flexibility, precision; for if I can say, 'Not a real pig, but like a pig', I don't have to tamper with the meaning of 'pig' itself.

But, one might ask, do we have to have 'like' to serve this purpose? We have, after all, other flexibility-devices. For instance, I might say that animals of this new species are 'piggish'; I might perhaps call them 'quasi-pigs', or describe them (in the style of vendors of peculiar wines) as 'pig-type' creatures. But these devices, excellent no doubt in their way, can't be regarded as substitutes for 'like', for this reason: they equip us simply with new expressions on the same level as, functioning in the same way as, the word 'pig' itself; and thus, though they may perhaps help us out of our immediate difficulty, they themselves may land us in exactly the same kind of difficulty at any time. We have this kind of wine, not real port, but a tolerably close approximation to port, and we call it 'port type'. But then someone produces a new kind of wine, not port exactly, but also not quite the same as what we now call 'port type'. So what are we to say? Is it port-type type? It would be tedious to have to say so, and besides there would clearly be no future in it. But as it is we can say that it is like port-type wine (and for that matter rather like port, too); and in saying this we don't saddle ourselves with a new word, whose application may itself prove problematic if the vintners spring yet another surprise on us. The word 'like' equips us generally to handle the unforeseen, in a way in which new words invented ad hoc don't, and can't.
(Why then do we need 'real' as an adjuster-word as well as 'like'? Why exactly do we want to say, sometimes 'It is like a pig', sometimes 'It is not a real pig'? To answer these questions properly would be to go a long way towards making really clear the use, the 'meaning', of 'real'.)

It should be quite clear, then, that there are no criteria to be laid down in general for distinguishing the real from the not real. How this is to be done must depend on what it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases. Furthermore, even for particular kinds of things, there may be many different ways in which the distinction may be made (there is not just one way of being 'not a real pig')—this depends on the number and variety of the surprises and dilemmas nature and our fellow men may spring on us, and on the surprises and dilemmas we have been faced with hitherto. And of course, if there is never any dilemma or surprise, the question simply doesn't come up; if we had simply never had occasion to distinguish anything as being in any way like a pig but not a real pig, then the words 'real pig' themselves would have no application—as perhaps the words 'real after-image' have no application.

Again, the criteria we employ at a given time can't be taken as final, not liable to change. Suppose that one day a creature of the kind we now call a cat takes to talking.

Well, we say to begin with, I suppose, 'This cat can talk.' But then other cats, not all, take to talking as well; we now have to say that some cats talk, we distinguish between talking and non-talking cats. But again we may, if talking becomes prevalent and the distinction between talking and not talking seems to us to be really important, come to insist that a real cat be a creature that can talk. And this will give us a new case of being 'not a real cat', i.e. being a creature just like a cat except for not talking. Of course—this may seem perhaps hardly worth saying, but in philosophy it seems it does need to be said— we make a distinction between 'a real x' and 'not a real x' only if there is a way of telling the difference between what is a real x and what is not. A distinction which we are not in fact able to draw is—to put it politely—not worth making.

1 Incidentally, nothing is gained at all by saying that 'real' is a normative word and leaving it at that, for 'normative' itself is much too general and vague. Just how, in what way, is 'real' normative? Not, presumably, in just the same way as 'good' is. And it's the differences that matter.
VIII

TO RETURN NOW TO AYER. WE HAVE already entered a protest against his apparent belief that 'real' is a word that can be used in any way one likes—that though some say, for instance, the real shape of a building remains the same as one views it from different standpoints, one may quite well 'prefer to say' that its real shape constantly changes. But now I want to consider the last section of his book, which is called 'Appearance and Reality', and in which he undertakes to give an account of the distinction as we ordinarily make it. He regards this, I suppose, as a description of our 'preferences'.

Ayer begins by making a distinction between 'perceptions' which are 'qualitatively delusive' and 'existentially delusive'. In the first case we are said to find that 'the sense-data endow material things with qualities that they do not really possess', in the second that 'the material things that they seem to present do not exist at all'. However, this distinction is, to say the least, unclear. The expression 'existentially delusive' puts one in mind, naturally enough, of cases in which one is actually deluded—in which, for instance, one thinks one sees an oasis but an oasis 'does not exist at all'; and it is this sort of case that Ayer evidently has in mind. The phrase 'qualitatively delusive', on the other hand, is evidently meant to apply in cases where some object is certainly before us, no doubt about that, but one of its 'qualities' is under suspicion—it looks blue for instance, but is it really blue? Now it seems to be implied that these two types of cases exhaust the field. But do they? Suppose that I see a decoy duck and take it for a real duck; in which of Ayer's ways is my 'perception' to be said to be 'delusive'? Well, it just isn't clear. It might be held to be 'qualitatively' delusive, as endowing the material thing with 'qualities that it does not really possess'; for example, I mistakeny suppose that the object I see could quack. But then again it might be said to be 'existentially' delusive, since the material thing it seems to present does not exist; I think there is a real duck before me but in fact there isn't. So Ayer's initial distinction presents us with false alternatives; it suggests that we have just two cases to consider, in one of which the only question is whether the thing we perceive really has the 'quality' it seems to have, and in the other of which the only question is whether the thing which we seem to perceive does really exist. But in the case of the decoy duck this breaks down at once; and there are plenty of other such cases. It looks as though, in trying to make this initial distinction, Ayer has frozen on to the truly 'delusive' sort of case, in which I think I see something where nothing really is, and has simply overlooked the much more common case in which I think I see something where something else really is.

1 Ayer, op. cit., pp. 263-74.
As a result a large part, and probably the largest part, of the territory within which we draw distinctions between 'appearance and reality' is completely omitted from his discussion. He discusses (very briefly indeed) the case in which something is or might be taken to exist when it does not really exist at all; he discusses at rather greater length the case in which something is or might be supposed to have a characteristic which it does not really have; but he simply doesn't mention the very numerous and very various cases in which something is or might be taken to be what it isn't really—as paste diamonds, for instance, may be taken to be real diamonds. The distinction between 'qualitative' and 'existential' delusion doesn't properly apply to these cases, but then that is just what is wrong with the distinction. It divides up the topic in a way that leaves a lot of it out.

However, Ayer undertakes as his major enterprise to 'furnish an explanation of the use of the word "real" as it is applied to the characteristics of material things'. The distinction here between being 'delusive' and being 'veridical', he says, 'does not depend upon a difference in the intrinsic qualities of sense-data', since an elliptical sense-datum could, after all, just as well 'present' something really elliptical as something really round; so the distinction 'must depend upon a difference in their relations', namely their relations to other sense-data.

One might try, Ayer says, to identify a sense-datum as 'a bearer of the real character of the relevant material thing' by saying that such a sense-datum is what occurs 'in what are conventionally taken to be preferential conditions'. However, he objects to this on two grounds; first, 'that these preferential conditions are not the same for every kind of material thing', and second, that it is surely necessary to explain why certain conditions should be selected as 'preferential'. This explanation Ayer now gives and elaborates. 'The privileged sense-data', he says, i.e. those which present the 'real qualities' of material things, are found to be the most reliable members of the groups to which they belong, in the sense that they have the greatest value as sources of prediction. He later adds as meritorious features what he calls 'sensible constancy', and measurability; but here too it is really, he thinks, predictive value which determines the ascription of reality. For example; if I am very close to an object, or very far away from it, I am pretty badly placed for predicting 'how it will look' from other points of view, whereas, if I view it from a more moderate distance, I may be able to tell quite well 'how it will look' from closer to, or further away. (It is not quite clear what characteristic of the object is in question here, but it seems to be shape that is meant.) So, the argument goes, we say that the 'real shape' is the shape the thing looks at the more moderate range. Again, if I look at an object through dark glasses, it may be hard to tell what colour.

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1 One might add that a good deal is arbitrarily excluded by Ayer's restriction of his discussion to questions about 'material things'—unless, which I doubt, he could classify as material things such stuffs as silk, glass, gold, cream, &c. And couldn't I raise the question 'Is that a real rainbow?'

1 It's interesting that Ayer should feel this to be an objection.
it will look when I take them off; hence, through dark glasses, we say, it doesn't look its 'real colour'.

However, this will not do as a general account even of the very restricted bit of the use of 'real' which Ayer chooses to discuss. (The important point is, in fact, just that there is no general account, and Ayer is chasing a will-o'-the-wisp in trying to find one.) For consider some questions about 'real' colour. Here there are many cases of a kind which Ayer, generalizing on the basis of one example, takes no account of. Some we have already mentioned. For instance, 'That's not the real colour of her hair.' Why not? Because the colour her hair now looks is an unreliable basis for prediction? Because the colour her hair now looks is not 'most conspicuously differentiated' from the other constituents of the sense-field? No. That's not the real colour of her hair because she's dyed it. Or suppose that I have grown a specimen of what is normally a white flower in an appropriately constituted green fluid, so that its petals are now a pale shade of green: I say, 'Of course, that's not its real colour.' Why do I say this? I can, after all, make all the standard predictions about how my specimen will look in various conditions. But my reason for saying that pale green is not its real colour has nothing at all to do with that; it is simply that the flower's natural colour is white. And there are some cases, involving no artificial interference with things, which run directly counter to Ayer's doctrine. If I look very closely indeed at a piece of cloth I may see it as a criss-cross pattern of black and white, and be able to predict that from other points of view it will look grey; if I look at it from a range of several yards, it may look grey, and I may not be able to predict that, close to, it will look black and white; but we say, all the same, that its colour is grey. Then what about taste? If someone who isn't in the habit of drinking wine says of the glass I give him that it's sour, I might protest, 'It isn't really sour'—meaning thereby, not that the notion that it's sour will provide a poor basis for prediction, but that, if he savours it a bit more sympathetically, he'll realize that it just isn't like things that are sour, that his first reaction, though understandable perhaps, was inappropriate.

However, as I said, what is wrong in principle with Ayer's account of the use of 'real' is just that he is attempting to give one account—or two, if we include his perfunctory remarks on the 'existentially' delusive. In fact what he says is not generally true even of 'real colour'; and certainly it does not help us at all with real pearls, real ducks, real cream, real watches, real novels, and the rest—all those uses of 'real' which Ayer overlooks entirely. Just why it is a mistake to look for any single, quite general account of the use of the word 'real' has, I hope, been made clear enough already, and I shall not repeat it now. I should like to emphasize, however, how fatal it always is to embark on explaining the use of a word without seriously considering more than a tiny fraction of the contexts in which it is actually used. In this case, as in others, Ayer seems to be encouraged in the fatal enterprise by an initial propensity to believe that the terrain can be neatly and exhaustively divided in two.
IX

ALL THIS LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF THE Nature of Reality arose, you may remember, out of the passage in which Ayer 'evaluates' the argument from illusion, arriving at the conclusion that the issue it raises is really not factual but linguistic. I argued earlier that his way of arriving at this conclusion actually shows that he does not believe it; for it relies on the doctrine that real 'empirical facts' are in fact always about 'sensible appearances', and that remarks ostensibly about 'material things' are to be contrasted as just a way of speaking—'the facts to which these expressions are intended to refer' are facts about 'phenomena', the only real facts there are. But however that may be, the official state of play at this point is that we are confronted with a linguistic question: are we to say that the objects we directly perceive are sense-data?—and that the argument from illusion has given us no compelling reason for choosing to say this. So Ayer next goes on himself to give the reasons why we should say this; and this section,¹ which is called 'The Introduction of Sense-data', must now be considered.

It is indeed true, Ayer says, that 'if we restrict ourselves to using words in such a way that to say of an object that it is seen or touched or otherwise perceived entails saying that it really exists and that something really has the character that the object appears to have, we shall be obliged either to deny that any perceptions are delusive or else to admit that it is a mistake to speak as if the objects that we perceived were always material things'. But in fact we do not have to use words in this way. 'If I say that I am seeing a stick which looks crooked, I do not imply that anything really is crooked ... or if, being subject to an illusion of double vision, I say that I am perceiving two pieces of paper, I need not be implying that there really are two pieces of paper there. But surely, it may be said, if the two pieces of paper really are perceived they must both exist in some sense, even if not as material things. The answer to this objection is that it is based on a misunderstanding of the way in which I am using the word "perceive". I am using it here in such a way that to say of an object that it is perceived does not entail saying that it exists in any sense at all. And this is a perfectly correct and familiar usage of the word.'

But, Ayer continues, 'there is also a correct and familiar usage of the word "perceive", in which to say of an object that it is perceived does carry the implication that it exists'. And if I use the word 'in this sense' in my case of double vision, I must say, 'I thought I perceived two pieces of paper but I was really perceiving only one.' 'If the word is used in one familiar sense, it can be said that I really did perceive two pieces of paper. If it is used in another sense, which is also sanctioned by convention,

then it must be said that I perceived only one.' 'There is no problem so long as one keeps the two usages distinct.'

Similarly, a man may say 'that he sees a distant star which has an extension greater than that of the earth'; he may also say that he is 'actually seeing ... a silvery speck no bigger than a sixpence'. And these remarks, Ayer says, are not inconsistent. For in one sense of 'see', 'it is necessary that what is seen should really exist, but not necessary that it should have the qualities that it appears to have' — in this sense the man sees an enormous star; but in another sense, 'it is not possible that anything should seem to have qualities that it does not really have, but also not necessary that what is seen should really exist'—in this sense the man 'can say truly that what he sees is no bigger than a sixpence'.

But what about sense-data? They are now brought in, in the following way. Some philosophers may decide, Ayer says, both 'to apply the word "see" or any other words that designate modes of perception to delusive as well as veridical experiences', and also (rather mis-guidedly, one might think) to use these words 'in such a way that what is seen or otherwise sensibly experienced must really exist and must really have the properties that it appears to have'. But then, naturally enough, they find that they can't say that 'what is experienced' is always a

material thing; for in 'delusive' situations, either the thing doesn't 'really exist' or doesn't 'really have the properties that it appears to have'. And then, it seems—instead of having second thoughts about their use of 'see'—they decide to say that 'what is experienced' in 'delusive' situations is a sense-datum. Next, they find it 'convenient', Ayer says, 'to extend this usage to all cases', on the old, familiar ground that 'delusive and veridical perceptions' don't differ in 'quality'. This, Ayer says, 'can reasonably be accepted as a rule of language. And thus one arrives at the conclusion that in all cases of perception the objects of which one is directly aware are sense-data and not material things.' This procedure, Ayer says, does not embody 'any factual discovery'; it amounts to the recommendation of 'a new verbal usage'. And he for his part is disposed to adopt this recommendation; 'it does not in itself add to our knowledge of empirical facts, or even make it possible for us to express anything that we could not have expressed without it. At the best it enables us only to refer to familiar facts in a clearer and more convenient way.' My italics.

Now an important, or at any rate prominent, part of the argumentation which leads to this conclusion is the allegation that there are different senses, all (or is it only some?) 'correct and familiar', of 'perceive' and other verbs designating modes of perception. Just what this

1 Price also thinks that 'perceive' is ambiguous, that it has two senses. Cp. Perception, p. 23. 'It is possible to perceive what does not exist.... But in another sense of 'perceive', and one that comes closer to ordinary speech, it is not possible to perceive what does not exist.'

1 Justice, I think, demands that I should reiterate here that a lot of water has flowed under the bridges since Ayer wrote his book. Doctrines
allegation has to do with the argument we shall have to consider in due course; but first, I want to look into the grounds on which it is made, and to ask whether it is well founded. Let us look, then, at the examples in which these different senses are supposed to be exhibited. First, the familiar old case of the stick in water. Ayer says: 'If I say that I am seeing a stick which looks crooked, I do not imply that anything really is crooked.' Now this is quite true; but what does it show? It is evidently meant to show that there is a sense of 'see' in which to say that something is seen does not entail saying 'that it exists and that something really has the character that the object appears to have'. But the example surely does not show this at all. All that it shows is that the complete utterance 'I see a stick which looks crooked' does not entail that anything really is crooked. That this is so in virtue of the sense in which 'see' is here used is an additional step, for which no justification is given. And in fact, when one comes to think of it, this step is not only undefended, but pretty certainly wrong. For if one had to pick on some part of the utterance as that in virtue of which it doesn't entail that anything really is crooked, surely the phrase 'which looks crooked' would be the likeliest candidate. For whatever views we may or may not have about senses of 'see', we all know that what looks crooked may not really be crooked.

The second example is ineffective, off-target, in a rather similar way. Ayer says: 'If I say that someone is feeling pressure on his leg, I do not necessarily exclude the possibility that his leg has been amputated.' But again, why explain this by invoking a sense of 'feel'? Why not say instead, for instance, that the expression 'pressure on his leg' can sometimes be used to specify what someone feels, even if his leg has actually been amputated? It seems to me very doubtful whether we should say that there is exemplified here a special sense even of the words 'pressure on his leg'; but at any rate the case for saying this would be just as good as for saying we have here a special sense of 'feel'—in fact a good deal better.

The third example, of double vision, is less easily dealt with. Here Ayer says: 'If I say that I am perceiving two pieces of paper, I need not be implying that there really are two pieces of paper there.' Now this, I think, is true only with some qualification. It is, I suppose, true that, if I know that I am suffering from double vision, I may say 'I am perceiving two pieces of paper' and, in saying this, not mean that there really are two pieces of paper there; but for all that, I think, my utterance does imply that there are, in the sense that anyone not apprised of the special circumstances of the case would naturally and properly, in view of my utterance, suppose that I thought there were two pieces of paper. However, we may agree that in saying 'I am perceiving two pieces of paper', I may not mean—since I may know it to be untrue—that there really are two pieces of paper before me. So far, so good.
But in the next sentence Ayer changes the form of words; 'if two pieces of paper really are perceived', he says, it need not be true that there are two pieces of paper. And this is surely just wrong. In fact, that 'two pieces of paper really are perceived' is just what we should not say in a case of double vision—just for the reason that there must be two, if two 'really are perceived'.

But, it may be said, have we not conceded enough to justify the main point that Ayer is making here? For whatever the case may be with 'really are perceived', we have agreed that I may properly say, 'I am perceiving two pieces of paper', in the full knowledge that there are not really two pieces before me. And since it is undeniable that these words may also be so used as to imply that there really are two pieces of paper, do we not have to agree that there are two different senses of 'perceive'?

Well, no, we don't. The linguistic facts here adduced are not enough to prove anything like so much as this. For one thing, if there really were two senses of 'perceive', one would naturally expect that 'perceive' might occur in either of these senses in any of its constructions. But in fact, even if 'I perceive two pieces' needn't mean that there are two pieces, it seems that 'Two pieces really are perceived' is not compatible with there being really only one. So it looks as though it might be better to say that the implications of 'perceive' may differ in different constructions than just that there are two senses of 'perceive'. But more important than this is the fact that double vision is a quite exceptional case, so that we may have to stretch our ordinary usage to accommodate it. Since, in this exceptional situation, though there is only one piece of paper I seem to see two, I may want to say, 'I am perceiving two pieces of paper' faute de mieux, knowing quite well that the situation isn't really that in which these words are perfectly appropriate. But the fact that an exceptional situation may thus induce me to use words primarily appropriate for a different, normal situation is nothing like enough to establish that there are, in general, two different, normal ('correct and familiar') senses of the words I use, or of any one of them. To produce a rather baffling abnormality like double vision could establish only, at most, that ordinary usage sometimes has to be stretched to accommodate exceptional situations. It is not, as Ayer says, that 'there is no problem so long as one keeps the two usages distinct'; there is no reason to say that there are two usages; there is 'no problem' so long as one is aware of the special circumstances.

I might say, while visiting the zoo, 'That is a lion', pointing to one of the animals. I might also say, pointing to a photograph in my album, 'That is a lion.' Does this show that the word 'lion' has two senses—one meaning an animal, the other a picture of an animal? Plainly not. In order (in this case) to cut down verbiage, I may use in one situation words primarily appropriate to the other; and no problem arises provided the circumstances are known.

As a matter of fact, in the case of double vision, it is not true that my only resource is to stretch in the way envisaged the ordinary use of 'I am perceiving two pieces
of paper.' Certainly I might do this; but in fact there is a special idiom, which Ayer might usefully have mentioned, for use in this special case—'I see the piece of paper double.' I might also say that I 'see it as two'.

Now let us consider the case of the man who sees a star, a case of which Ayer's account is particularly puzzling. The man is supposed, you remember, to say two things: (a) 'I see a distant star which has an extension greater than that of the earth'; and (b)—on being asked to describe what it is that he is actually seeing—'I see a silvery speck no bigger than a sixpence.' Ayer's first observation is that 'one is tempted to conclude that one at least of these assertions is false'. But is one? Why should one be? One might of course feel this temptation if one were in a state of extreme astronomical ignorance—if, that is, one thought that those silvery specks in the sky couldn't really be stars larger than the earth, or if, conversely, one thought that something larger than the earth, even though distant, couldn't really be seen as a silvery speck. But most of us know that stars are very, very big, and that they are a very, very long way away; we know what they look like to the naked and earthbound eye, and we know a bit at any rate about what they are like. Thus, I can't see any reason at all why we should be tempted to think that 'seeing an enormous star' is incompatible with 'seeing a silvery speck'. Wouldn't we be quite prepared to say, and quite correct in saying, that the silvery speck is a star?

Perhaps, though, this is not very important, since, although Ayer surprisingly thinks we should feel this temptation, he also thinks that we ought to resist it; the man's two statements, he agrees, aren't really incompatible. And he goes on to explain this by saying 'that the word "see", like the word "perceive", is commonly used in a variety of senses'. There is one 'sense' in which it is true that the man sees a star, and another 'sense' in which it is true that he sees a silvery speck. Well, what are these senses?

'In one sense', Ayer says, 'the sense in which the man can say truly that he sees the star, it is necessary that what is seen should really exist, but not necessary that it should have the qualities that it appears to have.' This is probably all right, though in the context a bit obscure. We may accept that 'it is necessary that what is seen should really exist'; the difficulty with the other condition—'not necessary that it should have the qualities that it appears to have'—is that it is not made clear what, in the example, 'the qualities that it appears to have' are supposed to be. The general trend of the discussion suggests that size is meant. But if so there is the difficulty that the question 'What size does it appear to be?' asked of a star, is a question to which no sensible man would attempt to give an answer. He might indeed say that it 'looks tiny'; but it would be absurd to take this as meaning that it looks as if it is tiny, that it appears to be tiny. In the case of an object so immensely distant as a star, there is really no such thing as 'the size that it appears to be' when one looks at it, since there is no question of making that sort
of estimate of its size. One couldn't sensibly say 'To judge from appearances, it's {smaller \ bigger} than the earth' because appearances in fact provide no basis whatever even for so rough a judgement as this. However, we can perhaps patch things up by changing the example. Stars notoriously twinkle; and one could, I think, reasonably say in virtue of this that they appear to be intermittently, irregularly, or discontinuously luminous. Thus, if we take it that stars are not really discontinuously luminous, and we are prepared to say that we see stars, it can be concluded that we evidently do not require that what is seen should have 'the qualities that it appears to have'.

So now let us turn to Ayer's other 'sense'. 'In another sense', he says, 'which is in that which the man can truly say that what he sees is no bigger than a sixpence, it is not possible that anything should seem to have qualities that it does not really have, but also not necessary that what is seen should really exist.' Now perhaps this would be 'another sense' of 'see', if there were any such sense; but in fact there is no such 'sense' as this. If a man says 'I see a silvery speck', of course he 'implies' that the speck exists, that there is a speck; and if there is no speck in the region of the night sky at which he is looking, if that part of the sky is perfectly blank, then of course he does not see a silvery speck there. It is no use his saying, 'Well, that region of the sky may be perfectly blank, but it is still true that I see a silvery speck; for I am using 'see' in such a sense that what is seen need) not exist.' It might be thought, perhaps, that I am being unfair here; in saying that the speck the man sees need not 'really exist', it might be said, Ayer can't mean that there may be simply no speck to be seen—he just means that it needn't 'really exist' as the occupant of a definite region of physical space, as the star does. But no—Ayer certainly does mean just what I have taken him to mean; for you may remember that he said earlier, as explicitly as could be, that there is a 'correct and familiar' usage of 'perceive' which is such that 'to say of an object that it is perceived does not entail saying that it exists in any sense at all'. On this there is no possible comment except that there isn't.¹

The other feature of this alleged sense of 'see' is hardly less peculiar. It is suggested that, in the 'sense' of 'see' in which the man sees a silvery speck, it is 'not possible that anything should seem to have qualities that it does not really have'. Here again it is not perfectly clear what qualities are meant; but it looks as if Ayer has in mind the 'quality' of being no bigger than a sixpence. But surely there is something rather absurd about this. Remember that we are talking here about the speck, not the star. And can the question whether the speck really is no bigger than a sixpence, or whether perhaps it just seems to be no

¹ What about seeing ghosts? Well, if I say that cousin Josephine once saw a ghost, even if I go on to say I don't 'believe in' ghosts, whatever that means, I can't say that ghosts don't exist in any sense at all. For there was, in some sense, this ghost that Josephine saw. If I do want to insist that ghosts don't exist in any sense at all, I can't afford to admit that people ever see them—I shall have to say that they think they do, that they seem to see them, or what not.
bigger than a sixpence, be seriously raised? What difference could there be between the supposed alternatives? To say 'It's no bigger than a sixpence' is itself nothing more, after all, than a rough-and-ready way of saying how it looks. But then, if we think instead of something that might seriously be taken to be a 'quality' of the speck—for instance, the quality of being pinkish in colour—we get the conclusion, once again, that there is no such sense of 'see' as Ayer is saying there is. For of course, when someone sees a speck in the night sky, it might, through some abnormality in the state of his eyes for instance, look greyish to him though it's really pinkish. The only way in which one can make it appear that something seen can't seem to have a quality that it really has not is to pick on something like 'being no bigger than a sixpence'—but in that case the impossibility is due, not to the 'sense' in which 'see' is being used, but to the absurdity of treating 'being no bigger than a sixpence' as if (in this context) it were a quality with respect to which it could make any sense at all to distinguish between really having it and only seeming to. The fact is that, just as there is no sense of 'see' which is such that what is seen need 'not exist in any sense at all', there is no sense of 'see', neither the same sense nor any other,1 in which it is impossible that what is seen 'should

1 It is in fact very hard to understand how Ayer could ever have thought he was characterizing a single sense of 'See' by this conjunction of conditions. For how could one possibly say, in the same breath, 'It must really have the qualities it seems to have', and 'It may not exist'? What must have the qualities it seems to have?

seem to have qualities that it does not really have'. I am not denying, of course, that we could arbitrarily invent such uses of 'see', though I don't know why we should want to; but it must be remembered that Ayer is purporting here to describe 'senses' of 'see' which are already 'correct', and even 'familiar'.

We have now come to the end of the examples which Ayer produces; and it appears that none of them gives any support to the idea that there are different 'senses' of 'perceive', 'see', and the rest. One of the examples—the one about double vision—does suggest, what in any case is only to be expected, that in exceptional situations ordinary forms of words may be used without being meant in quite the ordinary way; our saying of the D.T.'s sufferer that he 'sees pink rats' is a further instance of this, since we don't mean here (as would be meant in a normal situation) that there are real, live pink rats which he sees; but such stretchings of ordinary words in exceptional situations certainly do not constitute special senses, still less 'correct and familiar' senses, of the words in question. And the other examples either fail to be relevant to the question about different senses of these words, or, as in the star case as described by Ayer, bring in alleged 'senses' which quite certainly don't exist.

What has gone wrong, then? I think that part of what has gone wrong is this: observing, perfectly correctly, that the question 'What does X perceive?' can be given—normally at least—many different answers, and that these different answers may all be correct and therefore
compatible, Ayer has jumped to the conclusion that 'perceive' must have different 'senses'—for if not, how could different answers to the question all be correct? But the proper explanation of the linguistic facts is not this at all; it is simply that what we 'perceive' can be described, identified, classified, characterized, named in many different ways. If I am asked 'What did you kick?', I might answer 'I kicked a piece of painted wood', or I might say 'I kicked Jones's front door'; both of these answers might well be correct; but should we say for that reason that 'kick' is used in them in different senses? Obviously not. What I kicked—in just one 'sense', the ordinary one—could be described as a piece of painted wood, or identified as Jones's front door; the piece of wood in question is Jones's front door. Similarly, I may say 'I see a silvery speck' or 'I see a huge star'; what I see—in the single, ordinary 'sense' this word has—can be described as a silvery speck, or identified as a very large star; for the speck in question is a very large star.1

Suppose you ask me 'What did you see this morning?'. I might answer, 'I saw a man shaved in Oxford.' Or again I might say, no less correctly and referring to the same occasion, 'I saw a man born in Jerusalem.' Does it follow that I must be using 'see' in different senses? Of course not. The plain fact is that two things are true of the man that I saw—(a) that he was being shaved in Oxford, and (b) that he had been born some years earlier in Jerusalem. And certainly I can allude to either of these facts about him in saying—in no way ambiguously—that I saw him. Or if there is ambiguity here, it is not the word 'saw' that is ambiguous.

Suppose that I look through a telescope and you ask me, 'What do you see?'. I may answer (1) 'A bright speck'; (2) 'A star'; (3) 'Sirius'; (4) 'The image in the fourteenth mirror of the telescope.' All these answers may be perfectly correct. Have we then different senses of 'see'? Four different senses? Of course not. The image in the fourteenth mirror of the telescope is a bright speck, this bright speck is a star, and the star is Sirius; I can say, quite correctly and with no ambiguity whatever, that I see any of these. Which way of saying what I see I actually choose will depend on the particular circumstances of the case—for instance, on what sort of answer I expect you to be interested in, on how much I know, or on how far I am prepared to stick my neck out. (Nor is it a question of elongating my neck in a single dimension; it may be a planet, not a star, or Betelgeuse, not Sirius—but also, there may be only twelve mirrors in the telescope.)

'I saw an insignificant-looking man in black trousers.' 'I saw Hitler.' Two different senses of 'saw'? Of course not.

This fact—that we can normally describe, identify, or classify what we see in lots of different ways, sometimes differing in degree of adventurousness—not only makes it unnecessary and misguided to hunt up different senses

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1 It doesn't follow, of course, that we could properly say, 'That very large star is a speck.' I might say, 'That white dot on the horizon is my house', but this would not license the conclusion that I live in a white dot.
of 'see'; it also shows incidentally that those philosophers are wrong who have held that the question, 'What do you see ?' has only one right answer, for example, 'part of the surface of whatever it may be. For if I can see part of the surface, for instance part of the top, of a table, of course I can also see, and can say that I see if in a position to do so, a table (a dining-table, a mahogany table, my bank-manager's table, &c). This particular proposal has the further demerit that it would mean ruining the perfectly good word 'surface'; for not only is it wantonly wrong to say that what we see of a thing is always its surface; it is also wrong to imply that everything has a surface. Where and what exactly is the surface of a cat ? Also, why 'part of'? If a piece of paper is laid before me in full view, it would be a wanton misuse to say that I see 'only part' of it, on the ground that I see (of course) only one side. Another point which should at least be mentioned briefly is this. Although there is no good reason to say that 'perceive' ('see', &c.) have different senses, the fact that we can give different descriptions of what we perceive is certainly not the whole story. When something is seen, there may not only be different ways of saying what is seen; it may also be seen in different ways, seen differently. This possibility, which brings in the important formula 'see ...as...', has been taken very seriously by psychologists, and also by Wittgenstein, but most philosophers who write about perception have scarcely noticed it. The clearest cases, no doubt, are those in which (as for instance with Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit) a picture or diagram is specially so devised as to be capable of being seen in different ways—as a duck or as a rabbit, as convex or concave, or whatever it may be. But the phenomenon also occurs, as one might say, naturally. A soldier will see the complex evolutions of men on a parade-ground differently from someone who knows nothing about drill; a painter, or at any rate a certain kind of painter, may well see a scene differently from someone unversed in the techniques of pictorial representation. Thus, different ways of saying what is seen will quite often be due, not just to differences in knowledge, in fineness of discrimination, in readiness to stick the neck out, or in interest in this aspect or that of the total situation; they may be due to the fact that what is seen is seen differently, seen in a different way, seen as this rather than that. And there will sometimes be no one right way of saying what is seen, for the additional reason that there may be no one right way of seeing it. It is worth noticing that several of the examples we have come across in other contexts provide occasions for the use of the 'see ...as' formula. Instead of saying that, to the naked eye, a distant star looks like a tiny speck, or appears as a tiny speck, we could say that it is seen as a tiny speck; instead

1 Do we normally see things as they really are? Is this a fortunate fact, something that a psychologist might set about explaining? I should be inclined to resist the temptation to fall in with this way of speaking: 'seeing as' is for special cases. We sometimes say that we see a person 'as he really is'—in his true colours'; but this is (a) an extended if not metaphorical use of 'see', (b) pretty well confined to the case of persons, and (c) a special case even within that limited field. Could it be said that we see, say, match-boxes in their true colours?
of saying that, from the auditorium, the woman with her head in a black bag appears to be headless, or looks like a headless woman, we could say that she is seen as a headless woman.

But now we must turn back to the course of the philosophical argument. Ayer's section on 'the introduction of sense-data' consisted largely, you may remember, in attempts to establish the thesis that there are different 'senses'—two or perhaps more—of 'perceive' and other verbs of perception. I have argued that there is no reason at all to suppose that there are such different senses. Now it might be expected that this would be a serious matter for Ayer's argument; but curiously enough, I don't think it is. For though his argument is certainly presented as if it turned on this doctrine about different 'senses' of verbs of perception, it doesn't really turn on this doctrine at all.

The way in which sense-data are finally 'introduced', you remember, is this. Philosophers, it is said, decide to use 'perceive' ('see', &c.) in such a way 'that what is seen or otherwise sensibly experienced must really exist and must really have the properties that it appears to have'. This, of course, is not in fact the way in which 'perceive' ('see', &c.) is ordinarily used; nor, incidentally, is it any one of the ways of using these words which Ayer himself labels 'correct and familiar'; it is a special way of using these words, invented by philosophers. Well, having decided to use the words in this way, they naturally discover that, as candidates for what is perceived, 'material things' won't fill the bill; for material things don't always really have the properties they appear to have, and it may even seem that they exist when really they don't. Thus, though few philosophers if any are so brazen as to deny that material things are ever perceived in any 'sense' at all, at least something else has to be nominated as what is perceived in this special, philosophical sense. What is it that does fill the bill? And the answer is: sense-data.

Now the doctrine that there already are, in unphilosophical currency, different 'senses' of 'perceive' has as yet played no part in these manoeuvres, which have consisted essentially in the invention of a quite new 'sense'. So what is its role? Well, according to Ayer (and Price), its role is that it provides the philosophers with the motive for inventing their own special sense. Their own special sense is invented, according to Ayer, 'in order to avoid these ambiguities'. Now, the reason why it does not matter that no such ambiguities actually exist is that the avoidance of ambiguities is not in fact their motive. Their real motive—and this lies right at the heart of the whole matter—is that they wish to produce a species of statement that will be incorrigible; and the real virtue of this invented sense of 'perceive' is that, since what is perceived in this sense has to exist and has to be as it appears, in saying what I perceive in this sense I can't be wrong. All this must be looked into.

To be quite accurate, Price regards the existence of these different 'senses' as a motive for inventing a special terminology. See Perception, p. 24: 'In this situation, the only safe course is to avoid the word "perceive" altogether.'
THE PURSUIT OF THE INCORRIGIBLE IS ONE of the most venerable bugbears in the history of philosophy. It is rampant all over ancient philosophy, most conspicuously in Plato, was powerfully re-animated by Descartes, and bequeathed by him to a long line of successors. No doubt it has many motives and takes many forms, and naturally we can't go into the whole story now. In some cases the motive seems to be a comparatively simple hankering for something to be absolutely certain—a hankering which can be difficult enough to satisfy if one rigs it so that certainty is absolutely unattainable; in other cases, such as Plato's perhaps, what is apparently sought for is something that will be always true. But in the case now before us, which descends directly from Descartes, there is an added complication in the form of a general doctrine about knowledge. And it is of course knowledge, not perception at all, in which these philosophers are really interested. In Ayer's case this shows itself in the title of his book, as well as, passim, in his text; Price is more seriously interested than is Ayer in the actual facts about perception, and pays more attention to them—but still, it is worth noticing that, after raising the initial question, 'What is it to see something?', his very next sentence runs,

'When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt.' This suggests that he too is really interested, not so much in what seeing is, as in what one can't doubt.

In a nutshell, the doctrine about knowledge, 'empirical' knowledge, is that it has foundations. It is a structure the upper tiers of which are reached by inferences, and the foundations are the data on which these inferences are based. (So of course—as it appears—there just have to be sense-data.) Now the trouble with inferences is that they may be mistaken; whenever we take a step, we may put a foot wrong. Thus—so the doctrine runs—the way to identify the upper tiers of the structure of knowledge is to ask whether one might be mistaken, whether there is something that one can doubt; if the answer is Yes, then one is not at the basement. And conversely, it will be characteristic of the data that in their case no doubt is possible, no mistake can be made. So to find the data, the foundations, look for the incorrigible.

Now of course Ayer's exposition of this very old story is (or at any rate was when it was written) very up-to-date, very linguistic. He constantly reproves Price and his other predecessors for treating as questions of fact what are really questions of language. However, as we have seen, this relative sophistication does not prevent Ayer from swallowing whole almost all the old myths and mistakes incorporated in the traditional arguments. Also, as we have seen, it is not really true that he himself believes the questions raised to be questions about language, though this is his official doctrine. And finally, as
we shall see in a moment, the doctrine that the questions are questions about language leads him, in the course of expounding it, to make about language a number of rather serious mistakes.

But before going into this, I should like to say one word more about this rift between Ayer's official views and his actual views. We detected it, earlier, in the second section of his book—to wit, in the startling conviction that there are no real facts about 'material things', we can say what we like about them, the only facts there really are are facts about 'phenomena', 'sensible appearances'. But the belief that really there are only sense-data emerges again, more clearly and much more frequently, in the final chapter, significantly entitled 'The Constitution of Material Things'. ('What are material things made of?') For example: 'As for the belief in the "unity" and "substantiality" of material things, I shall show that it may be correctly represented as involving no more than the attribution to visual and tactual sense-data of certain relations which do, in fact, obtain in our experience. And I shall show that it is only the contingent fact that there are these relations between sense-data that makes it profitable to describe the course of our experience in terms of the existence and behaviour of material things.' (The italics are mine.) Again: 'I can describe the task I am about to undertake as that of showing what are the general principles on which, from our resources of sense-data, we "construct" the world of material things.' Of course, the official interpretation of these and many other such

remarks is that, strictly speaking, they are concerned with the logical relations obtaining between two different languages, the 'sense-datum language' and 'material-object language', and are not to be taken literally as concerned with the existence of anything. But it is not just that Ayer sometimes speaks as if only sense-data in fact existed, and as if 'material things' were really just jig-saw constructions of sense-data. It is clear that he is actually taking this to be true. For he holds without question that empirical 'evidence' is supplied only by the occurrence of sense-data, and that it is for this reason that 'any proposition that refers to a material thing must somehow be expressible in terms of sense-data, if it is to be empirically significant'. (My italics again.) That is, the official question, how these two supposed 'languages' may be related to one another, is never regarded as genuinely open; the material-object language must somehow be 'reducible' to the sense-datum language. Why? Because in fact sense-data make up the whole of 'our resources'.

But we must go a bit further into this doctrine about 'two languages'. On this topic Ayer becomes involved in a fracas with Carnap, and it will be instructive to see how the argument between them goes.¹

Carnap's doctrine on this subject, with which Ayer finds himself in partial disagreement, is to the effect that the (legitimate) indicative sentences of a language, other than those which are analytic, can be divided into two

¹ Ayer, op. cit., pp. 84-92, 113-14.
groups, one group consisting of 'empirically testable' sentences, the other of observation-sentences', or 'protocols'. A sentence belongs to the first group, is empirically testable, if and only if, as Ayer puts it, some observation-sentence is 'derivable from it in accordance with the established rules of the language'. About these observation-sentences themselves Carnap has two things to say. He says (a) that it is fundamentally just a matter of convention which observation-sentences are taken to be true; all we need bother about is to fix it so that the total corpus of sentences we assert is internally consistent; and (b) that it doesn't much matter what sort of sentence we classify as an observation-sentence; for 'every concrete sentence belonging to the physicalistic system-language can in suitable circumstances serve as an observation-sentence'.

Now Ayer disagrees with Carnap on both of these points. On the first he argues, vehemently and perfectly correctly, that if anything we say is to have any serious claim to be in fact true (or even false) of the world we live in, then of course there have to be some things we say the truth (or falsehood) of which is determined by non-verbal reality; it can't be that everything we say has merely to be assessed for consistency with other things we say.

On the second point it is not quite so clear where Ayer stands. He holds—and this looks reasonable enough—that the only sentences which can properly be called 'observation-sentences' are those which record 'observable states of affairs'. But what kind of sentences do this? Or, as Ayer puts it, is it possible 'to delimit the class of propositions that are capable of being directly verified'? The trouble is that it is not quite clear how he answers this question. He begins by saying that 'it depends upon the language in which the proposition is expressed'. There is evidently no serious doubt that propositions about sense-data can be directly verified. 'On the other hand, when we are teaching English to a child, we imply that propositions about material things can be directly verified.' Well, perhaps we do; but are we right in implying this? Ayer sometimes seems to say that we can at any rate get away with it: but it is difficult to see how he could really think so. For (apart from his tendency, already noted, to express the conviction that the only real facts are facts about sense-data) there is the point that observation-sentences are regarded by him, as by Carnap, as the termini of processes of verification; and Ayer repeatedly expresses the view that propositions about 'material things' not only stand in need of verification themselves, but are actually incapable of being 'conclusively' verified. Thus, unless Ayer were prepared to say that propositions which can't be 'conclusively' verified can be 'directly' verified, and furthermore that they can figure as termini in processes of verification, he must surely deny that propositions about material things can be 'observation-sentences'. And in fact it is fairly clear, from the general trend of his argument as well as from its internal structure, that he does deny this. In the terms
used by Carnap, his real view seems to be that propositions about 'material things' are 'empirically testable', propositions about sense-data are 'observation-sentences'; and whereas members of the first group are not conclusively verifiable, members of the second group are actually *incorrigible*.

We must now consider the rights and wrongs of all this. Ayer is right, we have said already, and Carnap wrong, on the question of connexion with non-verbal reality; the idea that nothing at all comes in but the consistency of sentences with each other is, indeed, perfectly wild. On the second question, however, Carnap is at least more nearly right than Ayer; there is indeed no special subclass of sentences whose business it is to count as evidence for, or to be taken as verifying, other sentences, still less whose special feature it is to be incorrigible. But Carnap is not *quite* right even about this; for if we consider just why he is nearly right, we shall see that the most important point of all here is one on which he and Ayer are both equally mistaken.

Briefly, the point is this. It seems to be fairly generally realized nowadays that, if you just take a bunch of sentences (or propositions,¹ to use the term Ayer prefers)

¹ The passage in which Ayer explains his use of this term (p. 102) obscures exactly the essential point. For Ayer says (a) that in his use 'proposition' designates a class of sentences that all have the same meaning, and (b) that 'consequently' he speaks of propositions, not sentences, as being true or false. But of course to know what a sentence *means* does not enable us to say that it is true or false; and that of which we can say that it is true or false is *not* a 'proposition', in Ayer's sense.

impeccably formulated in some language or other, there can be no question of sorting them out into those that are true and those that are false; for (leaving out of account so-called 'analytic' sentences) the question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence is, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sentences are not *as such* either true or false. But it is really equally clear, when one comes to think of it, that for much the same reasons there could be no question of picking out from one's bunch of sentences those that are evidence for others, those that are 'testable', or those that are 'incorrigible'. What kind of sentence is uttered as providing evidence for what depends, again, on the circumstances of particular cases; there is no kind of sentence which *as such* is evidence-providing, just as there is no kind of sentence which *as such* is surprising, or doubtful, or certain, or incorrigible, or true. Thus, while Carnap is quite right in saying that there is no special kind of sentence which *has* to be picked out as supplying the evidence for the rest, he is quite wrong in supposing that *any* kind of sentence *could* be picked out in this way. It is not that it doesn't much matter how we do it; there is really no question of doing such a thing at all. And thus Ayer is also wrong in holding, as he evidently does hold, that the evidence-providing kind of sentences are always sense-datum sentences, so that these are the ones that ought to be picked out. This idea that there is a certain kind, or form, of
sentence which as such is incorrigible and evidence-providing seems to be prevalent enough to deserve more detailed refutation. Let's consider incorrigibility first of all. The argument begins, it appears, from the observation that there are sentences which can be identified as intrinsically more adventurous than others, in uttering which we stick our necks out further. If for instance I say 'That's Sirius', I am wrong if, though it is a star, that star is not Sirius; whereas, if I had said only 'That's a star', its not being Sirius would leave me unshaken. Again, if I had said only, 'That looks like a star', I could have faced with comparative equanimity the revelation that it isn't a star. And so on. Reflections of this kind apparently give rise to the idea that there is or could be a kind of sentence in the utterance of which I take no chances at all, my commitment is absolutely minimal; so that in principle nothing could show that I had made a mistake, and my remark would be 'incorrigible'.

But in fact this ideal goal is completely unattainable. There isn't, there couldn't be, any kind of sentence which as such is incapable, once uttered, of being subsequently amended or retracted. Ayer himself, though he is prepared to say that sense-datum sentences are incorrigible, takes notice of one way in which they couldn't be; it is, as he admits, always possible in principle that, however non-committal a speaker intends to be, he may produce the wrong word, and subsequently be brought to admit this. But Ayer tries, as it were, to laugh this off as a quite trivial qualification; he evidently thinks that he is conceding here only the possibility of slips of the tongue, purely 'verbal' slips (or of course of lying). But this is not so. There are more ways than these of bringing out the wrong word. I may say 'Magenta' wrongly either by a mere slip, having meant to say 'Vermilion'; or because I don't know quite what 'magenta' means, what shade of colour is called magenta; or again, because I was unable to, or perhaps just didn't, really notice or attend to or properly size up the colour before me. Thus, there is always the possibility, not only that I may be brought to admit that 'magenta' wasn't the right word to pick on for the colour before me, but also that I may be brought to see, or perhaps remember, that the colour before me just wasn't magenta. And this holds for the case in which I say, 'It seems, to me personally, here and now, as if I were seeing something magenta', just as much as for the case in which I say, 'That is magenta.' The first formula may be more cautious, but it isn't incorrigible.1

1 Ayer doesn't exactly overlook the possibility of misdescribing through inattention, failure to notice or to discriminate; in the case of sense-data he tries to rule it out. But this attempt is partly a failure, and partly unintelligible. To stipulate that a sense-datum has whatever qualities it appears to have is insufficient for the purpose, since it is not impossible to err even in saying only what qualities something appears to have—one may, for instance, not attend to its appearance carefully enough. But to stipulate that a sense-datum just is whatever the speaker takes it to be—so that if he says something different it must be a different sense-datum—amounts to making non-mendacious sense-datum statements true by fiat; and if so, how could sense-data be, as they are also meant to be, non-linguistic entities of which we are aware, to which we refer, that against which the factual truth of all empirical statements is ultimately to be tested?
Yes, but, it may be said, even if such cautious formulae are not \textit{intrinsically} incorrigible, surely there will be plenty of cases in which what we say by their utterance will \textit{in fact} be incorrigible—cases in which, that is to say, nothing whatever could actually be produced as a cogent ground for retracting them. Well, yes, no doubt this is true. But then exactly the same thing is true of utterances in which quite different forms of words are employed. For if, when I make some statement, it is true that nothing whatever could in fact be produced as a cogent ground for retracting it, this can only be because I am in, have got myself into, the very best possible position for making that statement—I have, and am entitled to have, \textit{complete} confidence in it when I make it. But whether this is so or not is not a matter of what \textit{kind of sentence} I use in making my statement, but of what \textit{the circumstances are} in which I make it. If I carefully scrutinize some patch of colour in my visual field, take careful note of it, know English well, and pay scrupulous attention to just what I'm saying, I may say, 'It seems to me now as if I were seeing something pink'; and nothing whatever could be produced as showing that I had made a mistake. But equally, if I watch for some time an animal a few feet in front of me, in a good light, if I prod it perhaps, sniff, and take note of the noises it makes, I may say, 'That's a pig'; and this too will be 'incorrigible', nothing could be produced that would show that I had made a mistake. Once one drops the idea that there is a special \textit{kind of sentence} which is \textit{as such} incorrigible, one might as well admit (what is plainly true anyway) that \textit{many} kinds of sentences may be uttered in making statements which are \textit{in fact} incorrigible—in the sense that, when they are made, the circumstances are such that they are quite certainly, definitely, and un-retractably \textit{true}.

Consider next the point about evidence—the idea that there is, again, some special kind of sentences whose function it is to formulate the evidence on which other kinds are based. There are at least two things wrong with this.

First, it is not the case, as this doctrine implies, that whenever a 'material-object' statement is made, the speaker must have or could produce evidence for it. This may sound plausible enough; but it involves a gross misuse of the notion of 'evidence'. The situation in which I would properly be said to have \textit{evidence} for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more \textit{evidence} that it's a pig, I can now just \textit{see} that it is, the question is settled. And of course I might, in different circumstances, have just seen this in the first place, and not had to bother with collecting evidence at all.\footnote{I have, it will be said, the 'evidence of my own eyes'. But the point of} Again, if I actually see one man shoot
another, I may give evidence, as an eye-witness, to those less favourably placed; but I don't have evidence for my own statement that the shooting took place, I actually saw it. Once again, then, we find that you have to take into account, not just the words used, but the situation in which they are used; one who says 'It's a pig' will sometimes have evidence for saying so, sometimes not; one can't say that the sentence 'It's a pig', as such, is of a kind for which evidence is essentially required.

But secondly, as the case we've considered has already shown, it is not the case that the formulation of evidence is the function of any special sort of sentence. The evidence, if there is any, for a 'material-object' statement will usually be formulated in statements of just the same kind; but in general, any kind of statement could state evidence for any other kind, if the circumstances were appropriate. It is not true in general, for instance, that general statements are 'based on' singular statements and not vice versa; my belief that this animal will eat turnips may be based on the belief that most pigs eat turnips; though certainly, in different circumstances, I might have supported the claim that most pigs eat turnips by saying that this pig eats them at any rate. Similarly, and more relevantly perhaps to the topic of perception, it is not true in general that statements of how things are are 'based on' statements of how things appear, look, or seem and not vice versa. I may say, for instance, 'That pillar is bulgy' on the ground that it looks bulgy; but equally I might say, in different circumstances, 'That pillar looks bulgy'—on the ground that I've just built it, and I built it bulgy.

We are now in a position to deal quite briefly with the idea that 'material-object' statements are as such not conclusively verifiable. This is just as wrong as the idea that sense-datum statements are as such incorrigible (it is not just 'misleading', as Ayer is prepared to allow that it might be). Ayer's doctrine is that 'the notion of certainty does not apply to propositions of this kind',¹ And his ground for saying this is that, in order to verify a proposition of this kind conclusively, we should have to perform the self-contradictory feat of completing 'an infinite series of verifications'; however many tests we may carry out with favourable results, we can never complete all the possible tests, for these are infinite in number; but nothing less than all the possible tests would be enough.

Now why does Ayer (and not he alone) put forward this very extraordinary doctrine? It is, of course, not true in general that statements about 'material things', as such, need to be 'verified'. If, for instance, someone remarks in casual conversation, 'As a matter of fact I live

¹ He is, incidentally, also wrong, as many others have been, in holding that the 'notion of certainty' does apply to 'the a priori propositions of logic and mathematics' as such. Many propositions in logic and mathematics are not certain at all; and if many are, that is not just because they are propositions in logic and mathematics, but because, say, they have been particularly firmly established.
in Oxford', the other party to the conversation may, if he finds it worth doing, verify this assertion; but the speaker, of course, has no need to do this—he knows it to be true (or, if he is lying, false). Strictly speaking, indeed, it is not just that he has no need to verify his statement; the case is rather that, since he already knows it to be true, nothing whatever that he might do could count as his Verifying it. Nor need it be true that he is in this position by virtue of having verified his assertion at some previous stage; for of how many people really, who know quite well where they live, could it be said that they have at any time verified that they live there? When could they be supposed to have done this? In what way? And why? What we have here, in fact, is an erroneous doctrine which is a kind of mirror-image of the erroneous doctrine about evidence we discussed just now; the idea that statements about 'material things' as such need to be verified is just as wrong as, and wrong in just the same way as, the idea that statements about 'material things' as such must be based on evidence. And both ideas go astray, at bottom, through the pervasive error of neglecting the circumstances in which things are said—of supposing that the words alone can be discussed, in a quite general way.

But even if we agree to confine ourselves to situations in which statements can be, and do need to be, verified, the case still looks desperate. Why on earth should one think that such verification can't ever be conclusive? If, for instance, you tell me there's a telephone in the next room, and (feeling mistrustful) I decide to verify this, how could it be thought impossible for me to do this conclusively? I go into the next room, and certainly there's something there that looks exactly like a telephone. But is it a case perhaps of trompe l'oeil painting? I can soon settle that. Is it just a dummy perhaps, not really connected up and with no proper works? Well, I can take it to pieces a bit and find out, or actually use it for ringing somebody up—and perhaps get them to ring me up too, just to make sure. And of course, if I do all these things, I do make sure; what more could possibly be required? This object has already stood up to amply enough tests to establish that it really is a telephone; and it isn't just that, for everyday or practical or ordinary purposes, enough is as good as a telephone; what meets all these tests just is a telephone, no doubt about it.

However, as is only to be expected, Ayer has a reason for taking this extraordinary view. He holds, as a point of general doctrine, that, though in his view statements about 'material things' are never strictly equivalent to statements about sense-data, yet 'to say anything about a material thing is to say something, but not the same thing about classes of sense-data'; or, as he sometimes puts it, a statement about a 'material thing' entails 'some set of statements or other about sense-data'. But—and this is his difficulty—there is no definite and finite set of statements about sense-data entailed by any statement about a 'material thing'. Thus, however assiduously I check up on the sense-datum statements entailed by a statement
about a 'material thing', I can never exclude the possibility that there are other sense-datum statements, which it also entails, but which, if checked, would turn out to be untrue. But of course, if a statement may be found to entail a false statement, then it itself may thereby be found to be false; and this is a possibility which, according to the doctrine, cannot in principle be finally eliminated. And since, again according to the doctrine, verification just consists in thus checking sense-datum statements, it follows that verification can never be conclusive.¹

Of the many objectionable elements in this doctrine, in some ways the strangest is the use made of the notion of entailment. What does the sentence, 'That is a pig' entail? Well, perhaps there is somewhere, recorded by some zoological authority, a statement of the necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to the species pig. And so perhaps, if we use the word 'pig' strictly in that sense, to say of an animal that it's a pig will entail that it satisfies those conditions, whatever they may be. But clearly it isn't this sort of entailment that Ayer has in mind; nor, for that matter, is it particularly relevant to the use that non-experts make of the word 'pig'.² But what other kind of entailment is there? We have a pretty rough idea what pigs look like, what they smell and sound like, and how they normally behave; and no doubt, if something didn't look at all right for a pig, behave as pigs do, or make pig-like noises and smells, we'd say that it wasn't a pig. But are there—do there have to be—statements of the form, 'It looks ...', 'It sounds ...', 'It smells .. .' of which we could say straight off that 'That is a pig' entails them? Plainly not. We learn the word 'pig', as we learn the vast majority of words for ordinary things, ostensively—by being told, in the presence of the animal, "That is a pig"; and thus, though certainly we learn what sort of thing it is to which the word 'pig' can and can't be properly applied, we don't go through any kind of intermediate stage of relating the word 'pig' to a lot of statements about the way things look, or sound, or smell. The word is just not introduced into our vocabulary in this way. Thus, though of course we come to have certain expectations as to what will and won't be the case when a pig is in the offing, it is wholly artificial to represent these expectations in the guise of statements entailed by 'That is a pig.' And for just this reason it is, at best, wholly artificial to speak as if verifying that some animal is a pig consists in checking up on the statements entailed by 'That is a pig.' If we do think of verification in this way, certainly difficulties abound; we don't know quite where to begin, how to go on, or where to stop. But what this shows is, not that 'That is a pig' is very difficult to verify or incapable of being conclusively verified, but that this is an impossible travesty of verification. If the procedure of verification were rightly described in this

¹ Material things are put together like jig-saw puzzles; but since the number of pieces in a puzzle is not finite, we can never know that any puzzle is perfect, there may be pieces missing or pieces that won't fit.

² Anyway, the official definition won't cover everything—freaks, for instance. If I'm shown a five-legged pig at a fair, I can't get my money back on the plea that being a pig entails having only four legs.
way, then indeed we couldn’t say just what would constitute conclusive verification that some animal was a pig. But this doesn’t show that there is actually any difficulty at all, usually, in verifying that an animal is a pig, if we have occasion to do so; it shows only that what verification is has been completely misrepresented.\footnote{Another way of showing that 'entailment' is out of place in such contexts: Suppose that tits, all the tits we’ve ever come across, are bearded, so that we are happy to say ‘Tits are bearded.’ Does this entail that what isn’t bearded isn’t a tit? Not really. For if beardless specimens are discovered in some newly explored territory, well, of course we weren’t talking about them when we said that tits were bearded; we now have to think again, and recognize perhaps this new species of glabrous tits. Similarly, what we say nowadays about tits just doesn’t refer at all to the prehistoric co-tit, or to remote future tits, defeathered perhaps through some change of atmosphere.}

We may add to this the rather different but related point that, though certainly we have more or less definite views as to what objects of particular kinds will and won’t do, and of how they will and won’t react in one situation or another, it would again be grossly artificial to represent these in the guise of definite entailments. There are vast numbers of things which I take it for granted that a telephone won’t do, and doubtless an infinite number of things which it never enters my head to consider the possibility that it might do; but surely it would be perfectly absurd to say that ‘This is a telephone’ entails ‘You couldn’t eat it’. Must I try to eat it, and fail, in the course of making sure that it’s a telephone?\footnote{Philosophers, I think, have taken too little notice of the fact that most words in ordinary use are defined ostensively. For example, it has often been thought to be a puzzle why A can’t be B, if being A doesn’t entail being not-B. But it is often just that ‘A’ and ‘B’ are brought in as, ostensively defined as, words for different things. Why can’t a Jack of Hearts be a Queen of Spades? Perhaps we need a new term, ‘ostensively analytic.’}

The conclusions we have reached so far, then, can be summed up as follows:

1. There is no kind ox class of sentences (‘propositions’) of which it can be said that as such
   (a) they are incorrigible;
   (b) they provide the evidence for other sentences; and
   (c) they must be checked in order that other sentences may be verified.

2. It is not true of sentences about ‘material things’ that as such
   (a) they must be supported by or based on evidence;
   (b) they stand in need of verification; and
   (c) they cannot be conclusively verified.

Sentences in fact—as distinct from statements made in particular circumstances—cannot be divided up at all on these principles, into two groups or any other number of groups. And this means that the general doctrine about

class of these supposed entailments. Does ‘This is a telephone’ entail ‘You couldn’t eat it’? Must I try to eat it, and fail, in the course of making sure that it’s a telephone?\footnote{Another way of showing that 'entailment' is out of place in such contexts: Suppose that tits, all the tits we’ve ever come across, are bearded, so that we are happy to say ‘Tits are bearded.’ Does this entail that what isn’t bearded isn’t a tit? Not really. For if beardless specimens are discovered in some newly explored territory, well, of course we weren’t talking about them when we said that tits were bearded; we now have to think again, and recognize perhaps this new species of glabrous tits. Similarly, what we say nowadays about tits just doesn’t refer at all to the prehistoric co-tit, or to remote future tits, defeathered perhaps through some change of atmosphere.}
knowledge which I sketched at the beginning of this section, which is the real bugbear underlying doctrines of the kind we have been discussing, is radically and in principle misconceived. For even if we were to make the very risky and gratuitous assumption that what some particular person knows at some particular place and time could systematically be sorted out into an arrangement of foundations and super-structure, it would be a mistake in principle to suppose that the same thing could be done for knowledge in general. And this is because there could be no general answer to the questions what is evidence for what, what is certain, what is doubtful, what needs or does not need evidence, can or can't be verified. If the Theory of Knowledge consists in finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing.

Before leaving this topic, though, there is one more doctrine about the 'two languages' that we ought to consider. This final doctrine is wrong for reasons not quite the same as those we have just been discussing, and it has a certain interest in its own right.

It is not very easy to say just what the doctrine is, so I shall give it in Ayer's own words (with my italics). He says for instance: 'Whereas the meaning of a sentence which refers to a sense-datum is precisely determined by the rule that correlates it with the sense-datum in question, such precision is not attainable in the case of a sentence which refers to a material thing. For the proposition which such a sentence expresses differs from a proposition about a sense-datum in that there are no observable facts

that constitute both a necessary and sufficient condition of its truth.' And again: '... one's references to material things are vague in their application to phenomena...'

Well, perhaps it isn't very clear just what is meant by these remarks; still, it is clear enough that what is being said is that statements about sense-data—all such statements—are, in some way or in some sense, precise, while by contrast statements about material things are—all are—vague in some sense or some way. It is, for a start, difficult to see how this could be true. Is 'Here are three pigs' a vague statement? Is 'It seems to me as if I were seeing something sort of pinkish' not vague? Is the second statement necessarily precise in a way in which the first just couldn't be? And isn't it surprising that precision should be paired off with incorrigibility; vagueness with impossibility of verification? After all we speak of people 'taking refuge' in vagueness—the more precise you are, in general the more likely you are to be wrong, whereas you stand a good chance of not being wrong if you make it vague enough. But what we really need to do here is to take a closer look at 'vague' and 'precise' themselves.

'Vague' is itself vague. Suppose that I say that something, for instance somebody's description of a house, is vague; there is a quite large number of possible features— not necessarily defects, that depends on what is wanted— any or all of which the description might have and which

1 Ayer, op. cit., p. no. 'Observable facts' here, as so often, means, and can only mean, 'facts about sense-data'.
might lead me to pronounce it vague. It might be (a) a rough description, conveying only a 'rough idea' of the thing to be described; or (b) ambiguous at certain points, so that the description would fit, might be taken to mean, either this or that; or (c) imprecise, not precisely specifying the features of the thing described; or (d) not very detailed; or (e) couched in general terms that would cover a lot of rather different cases; or(/) not very accurate; or perhaps also (g) not very full, or complete. A description might, no doubt, exhibit all these features at once, but clearly they can also occur independently of each other. A rather rough and incomplete description may be quite accurate as far as it goes; it may be detailed but very imprecise, or quite unambiguous but still very general. In any case, it is clear enough that there is not just one way of being vague, or one way of being not vague, viz. being precise.

Usually it is uses of words, not words themselves, that are properly called 'vague'. If, for instance, in describing a house, I say among other things that it has a roof, my not saying what kind of roof it has may be one of the features which lead people to say that my description is a bit vague; but there seems no good reason why the word 'roof itself should be said to be a vague word. Admittedly there are different kinds of roofs, as there are different kinds of pigs and policemen; but this does not mean that all uses of 'roof are such as to leave us in some doubt as to just what is meant; sometimes we may wish the speaker to be 'more precise', but for this there would presumably be some special reason. This feature of being applicable over a considerable range of non-identical instances is, of course, enormously common; far more words exhibit it than, I think, we should want to label as, in general, vague words. Again, almost any word may land us in difficulty over marginal cases; but this again is not enough to make a charge of vagueness stick. (Incidentally the reason why many words exhibit these features is not that they occur in 'material-object' language, but that they occur in ordinary language, where excessive nicety of distinction would be positively tiresome; they stand in contrast, not with 'sense-datum' words, but with the special terminologies of the 'exact sciences'.) There are, however, a few notoriously useless words—'democracy', for instance—uses of which are always liable to leave us in real doubt what is meant; and here it seems reasonable enough to say that the word is vague.

The classic stamping-ground of 'precise' is the field of measurement; here, being precise is a matter of using a sufficiently finely graduated scale. '709.864 feet' is a very precise answer to the question how long the liner is (though it might not be accurate). Words may be said to be precise when, as one may put it, their application is fixed within narrow limits; 'duck-egg blue' is at least a more precise term than 'blue'. But there is, of course, no general answer to the question how finely graduated a scale must be, or how narrowly determined the application of a word, for precision to be achieved—partly because there is no terminus to the business of making ever
finer divisions and discriminations, and partly because what is precise (enough) for some purposes will be much too rough and crude for others. A description, for example, can no more be absolutely, finally, and ultimately precise than it can be absolutely full or complete.

'Precisely' can be, and should be, distinguished from 'exactly'. If I measure a banana with a ruler, I may find it to be precisely 5 5/8 inches long. If I measure my ruler with bananas, I may find it to be exactly six bananas long, though I couldn't claim any great precision for my method of measurement. If I have to divide a load of sand into three equal parts, having no means of weighing it, I can't do it precisely. But if I have to divide a pile of 26 bricks into three equal piles, I can't do it exactly. One might say there is something exciting, specially noteworthy, where 'exactly' is used —its being exactly two o'clock has, so to speak, better news-value than its being three minutes past; and there's a kind of exhilaration in finding the exact word (which may not be a precise word).

Then what about 'accurate'? Plainly enough, neither a word nor a sentence can, as such, be accurate. Consider maps, for instance, where accuracy is most comfortably at home; an accurate map is not, so to speak, a kind of map, as for instance is a large-scale, a detailed, or a clearly drawn map—its accuracy is a matter of the fit of the map to the terrain it is a map of. One is tempted to say that an accurate report, for instance, must be true whereas a very precise or detailed report may not be; and there is something right in this idea, though I feel rather uneasy about it. Certainly 'untrue but accurate' is pretty clearly wrong; but 'accurate and therefore true' doesn't seem quite right either. Is it only that 'true', after 'accurate', is redundant? It would be worth while to compare here the relation of 'true' to, say, 'exaggerated'; if 'exaggerated and therefore untrue' seems not quite right, one might try 'untrue in the sense that it's exaggerated', 'untrue, or rather, exaggerated', or 'to the extent that it's exaggerated, untrue'. Of course, just as no word or phrase is accurate as such, no word or phrase is as such an exaggeration. Here, though, we are digressing.

What are we to make, then, of the idea that sentences about sense-data are as such precise, while sentences about 'material things' are intrinsically vague? The second part of this doctrine is intelligible, in a way. What Ayer seems to have in mind is that being a cricket-ball, for instance, does not entail being looked at rather than felt, looked at in any special light or from any particular distance or angle, felt with the hand rather than the foot, &c. . . . This of course is perfectly true; and the only comment required is that it constitutes no ground at all for saying that 'That is a cricket-ball' is vague. Why should we say that it is vague 'in its application to phenomena'? The expression is surely not meant to 'apply to phenomena'. It is meant to identify a particular kind of ball—a kind which is, in fact, quite precisely defined— and this it does perfectly satisfactorily. What would the speaker make of a request to be more precise? Incidentally, as has been pointed out before, it would be a mistake
to assume that greater precision is always an improvement; for it is, in general, more difficult to be more precise; and the more precise a vocabulary is, the less easily adaptable it is to the demands of novel situations.

But the first part of the doctrine is much less easy to understand. By saying that 'the meaning of a sentence which refers to a sense-datum is precisely determined by the rule that correlates it with the sense-datum in question', Ayer can hardly mean that such a sentence can refer only to one particular sense-datum; for if this were so there could be no sense-datum language (but only, I suppose, 'sense-datum names'). On the other hand, why on earth should it be true in general that expressions used in referring to sense-data should be precise? A difficulty here is that it is never really made clear whether Ayer regards the 'sense-datum language' as something which already exists and which we use, or whether he thinks of it as a merely possible language which could in principle be invented; for this reason one never knows quite what one is supposed to be considering, or where to look for examples. But this scarcely matters for the present purpose; whether we are to think of an existent or an artificial language, there is in any case no necessary connexion between reference to sense-data and precision; the classificatory terms to be used might be extremely rough and general, why ever not? It is true presumably that reference to sense-data couldn't be 'vague in its application to phenomena' in just the way Ayer holds that reference to 'material things' must be; but then this isn't really a way of being vague. And even if it had been, it is still pretty obvious that avoidance of it would not guarantee precision. There are more ways of being vague than one. Thus, to the summary we set out a few pages ago we can now add this: there is no reason to say that expressions used in referring to 'material things' are (as such, intrinsically) vague; and there is no reason to suppose that expressions used in referring to 'sense-data' would be (as such, necessarily) precise.
XI

I CONCLUDE WITH SOME REMARKS ON PART of Warnock's book on Berkeley.\(^1\) In this book, with much of which I am in general agreement, Warnock shows himself to be a relatively wary practitioner; and of course he was writing a great many years later than were Price and Ayer. All the same, I think it is clear that something goes badly wrong; for he ends up with a dichotomy between two kinds of statements, one about 'ideas' and the other about 'material objects', of just the kind which I have been arguing against all along. Admittedly what Warnock is trying to do is to produce a version of Berkeley's doctrine, removing what he regards as unnecessary mistakes and obscurities; he is not, that is, explicitly setting out views of his own. Still, some views of his own do emerge in the course of the discussion; and in any case I shall argue that he regards his version of Berkeley's doctrines with far too indulgent an eye. It all runs quite smoothly, there's positively no deception: and yet in the end that baby has somehow been spirited down the waste-pipe.

Warnock begins (in the passage we're concerned with) by undertaking to explain what Berkeley meant, or at least what he should have meant, by the dictum that only 'our own ideas' are 'immediately perceived'. Why, to begin with, did Berkeley raise an objection to such everyday remarks as that we see chairs and rainbows, hear coaches and voices, smell flowers and cheese? It is not, Warnock says, that he regarded such remarks as never true; his notion was that in saying such things we are speaking loosely.\(^1\) Although there is no great harm in saying, for instance, that I hear a coach on the road, 'strictly speaking, what I actually hear is a sound'. And similarly in other cases; our ordinary judgements of perception are always 'loose', in the sense that they go beyond what we actually perceive, we make 'inferences' or assumptions. Warnock's comment on this is that we commonly do, as Berkeley says, make assumptions and take things for granted in saying what (for instance) we see; however, he thinks that Berkeley is wrong in holding that to do this is always to speak loosely. 'For in order to report correctly what I actually see, it is sufficient for me to confine my statement to what, on the basis of sight on the present occasion, I am entitled to say; and in good conditions of observation, I am certainly entitled to say that I see a book'; and again, 'to make no assumptions about what makes the noises that I hear is to be specially

\(^1\) Warnock, Berkeley, chapters 7-9.
cautious In saying what I hear; but correct speech does not require us always to be as cautious as possible'. It is true, Warnock thinks, that the question, 'What did you actually see?' requires the answerer to be less liberal with his assumptions, extraneous evidence, &c, than does the question, 'What did you see?'; but it does not demand that they should be eliminated altogether, and Berkeley is wrong in suggesting that, 'strictly', this is necessary.

On at least one point, though, Warnock himself has gone astray here. He illustrates the distinction between 'see' and 'actually see' by the case of a witness under cross-examination, who is sharply instructed to confine his remarks to what he actually saw, and he concludes from this (one!) example that to say what one actually saw is always to draw in one's horns a bit, to be a bit more cautious, to reduce the claim. But this just isn't true in general; it may be just the other way round. I might begin, for instance, by saying that I saw a little silvery speck, and go on to say that what I actually saw was a star. I might say in evidence that I saw a man firing a gun, and say afterwards, 'I actually saw him committing the murder!' That is (to put it shortly and roughly), sometimes I may supposedly see, or take it that I see, more than I actually see, but sometimes less. Warnock is hypnotized by the case of the nervous witness. Before resting any weight on this word 'actually', he would have been well advised not only to consider a lot more examples of its use, but also to compare it with such related phrases as 'really', 'in fact', 'in actual fact', 'as a matter of fact'.

But in any case, Warnock continues, Berkeley is really concerned not with the question what we actually perceive, but with his own question, what we immediately perceive. About this he says that 'the expression has no ordinary use at all', so that Berkeley is perfectly entitled, he thinks, to use it in any way he likes. (This in itself is decidedly over-bold. 'Immediately perceive' may not have a clear meaning; but 'immediately' at any rate is quite an ordinary word, of which the ordinary meaning certainly does have implications and associations on which, as a matter of fact, the argument trades very substantially.) Well, how does Berkeley use this expression? Warnock explains as follows: 'I say, for instance, that I see a book. Let it be admitted that this is a perfectly correct thing to say. But there is still in this situation something (not the book) which is immediately seen. For, whether or not any further investigations would confirm the claim that I see a book, whatever I know or believe about what I see, and whatever I might see, touch, or smell if I came closer, there is now in my visual field a certain coloured shape, or pattern of colours. This is what I immediately see. . . . This is more "fundamental" than the book itself, in the sense that, although I might immediately see this pattern of colours and yet no book be there, I could not see the book nor indeed anything at all unless such coloured shapes occurred in my visual field.'

But does this introduce the expression 'immediately perceive' satisfactorily? It seems that what I am to be
said to see 'immediately' must be what is 'in my visual field'. But this latter phrase is not explained at all; isn't the book in my visual field? And if the right answer to the question what is in my visual field is to be, as Warnock assumes, 'a coloured shape', why should one further assume that this is 'something, not the book'? It would surely be quite natural and proper to say, 'That patch of red there is the book' (cp. 'That white dot is my house'). By ignoring the fact that coloured shapes, patches of colour, &c. can quite often and correctly be said to be the things that we see, Warnock is just quietly slipping in here that dichotomy between 'material objects' and entities of some other kind which is so crucially damaging. Furthermore, he has himself admitted in several earlier passages that patches of colour, &c. can be and are said to be seen in a perfectly ordinary, familiar sense; so why do we now have to say that they are immediately seen, as if they called for some special treatment?

Warnock's exposition next takes quite a new turn. So far, he seems to have been falling in with Berkeley's views to the extent of conceding that there are entities of some sort—not 'material things'—which are what we 'immediately perceive'. But in the next two chapters he takes the linguistic line, attempting to distinguish the kind of sentence which expresses a 'judgement of immediate perception'. Starting from Berkeley's dictum that 'the senses make no inferences', Warnock sets off on the familiar process of refining down and cutting away, with the intention of arriving at the ideally basic, completely minimal form of assertion. He gets off to rather a bad start, however, which reveals him as already at least half-way to perdition. What he is looking for, he says, is a kind of assertion 'in the making of which we "make no inferences", or (as we have suggested it would be better to say) take nothing for granted, make no assumptions'. From the way he puts it, it is clear that he is making the (by now) familiar mistake of supposing that there is some special form of words that will meet this requirement, while other forms of words do not. But his own examples serve to show that this is a mistake. Consider, he says, the statement, 'I hear a car'. This is non-minimal, he says, not a statement of 'immediate perception', since, when I make this judgement, the sound that I hear leads me 'to make certain assumptions, which further investigation might show to have been mistaken'. But in fact the question whether I am making assumptions which might turn out to be mistaken depends, not on the form of words I use, but on the circumstances in which I am placed. The situation Warnock evidently has in mind is that in which I hear a car-like sound, but have nothing except this sound to go on. But what if I already know that there is a car just outside? What if I can actually see it, and perhaps touch and smell it as well? What would I then be 'assuming', if I were to say, 'I hear a car'? What 'further investigation' would be necessary, or even possible? 1 To make the form of words 'I hear a car' look

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1 Part of the trouble is that Warnock never makes clear enough just what is supposed to be assumed, or taken for granted. Sometimes he
intrinsically vulnerable, by implying that their utterance can only be based on just hearing a sound, is little better than a frame-up.

Again, Warnock condemns as also non-minimal the form of words 'I hear a sort of purring noise', on the ground that one who says this is assuming that he isn't wearing ear-plugs; it might really be a very loud noise, which just sounds purring to him, because of the ear-plugs. But one can't seriously say to someone, 'But you might be wearing ear-plugs' whenever he utters that form of words; he isn't necessarily assuming that he isn't, he may know that he isn't, and the suggestion that he might be may itself be perfectly absurd. Although Warnock insists that neither he nor Berkeley has any intention of casting doubt on the judgements we ordinarily make, of arguing for any brand of philosophical scepticism, this procedure of representing forms of words as in general vulnerable is, of course, one of the major devices by which sceptical theses have commonly been insinuated. To say, as Warnock does, that we are making assumptions and taking things for granted whenever we make an ordinary assertion, is of course to make ordinary assertions look somehow chancy, and it's no good his saying that he and Berkeley don't mean to do that. One might add that Warnock subtly intensifies this air of chanciness by taking his examples from the sphere of hearing. It is, as

seems to have in mind further facts about the present situation, sometimes the outcome of future investigations by the speaker, sometimes the question of what other observers would report. But can it be assumed that these all come to much the same?

a matter of fact, quite often true that, just going by the sound, we do make some sort of inference in saying what we hear, and it is quite often easy to see how we might go wrong. But then seeing is not, as Warnock quietly takes for granted, exactly like this; for it is, characteristically, by seeing the thing that the question is settled.

What Warnock is really trying to do, though, is to produce, not a maximally certain, but a minimally adventurous form of words, by the use of which we can always stick our necks out as little as possible. And in the end he arrives at the formula, 'It seems to me now as if... ' as the general prefix which guarantees immediacy, keeps the speaker within the bounds of 'his own ideas'. Berkeley's doctrine that material objects are 'collections of ideas' can then be presented, Warnock thinks, in linguistic dress, as the doctrine that a sentence about a material object means the same as an indefinitely large collection of appropriate sentences beginning, 'It seems to... as if... ' Any statement about any material thing is really (can be analysed into) an indefinitely large set of statements about what it seems, or in suitable conditions would seem, as if the speaker and other people and God were hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling.

Now Warnock, rightly enough, finds this version of the relation between statements about 'material things' and statements about 'ideas' unacceptable. There is indeed something absurd in the idea that all we can ever really do is to pile up more and more statements as to how things seem; and if this is what Berkeley meant, then the
people who said he failed to do justice to 'the reality of things' had right on their side. But Warnock doesn't leave it at that; he goes on to say that statements about 'material things' are not the same as sets of statements about how things seem—the two kinds of statements are related as verdicts to evidence, or at least the relation, he says, is Very similar. 'There is an essential logical difference between discussing evidence and pronouncing verdicts—a difference which cannot be abolished by any amount, however vast, of piling up evidence, however conclusive... . Similarly, there is an essential logical difference between saying how things seem and how they are—a difference which cannot be removed by assembling more and more reports of how things seem.'

But this comparison is really quite disastrous. It clearly involves falling in with a number of the mistakes we mentioned earlier on—with the idea, for instance, that statements about 'material things' as such are always, have to be, based on evidence, and that there is a particular other kind of sentence the business of which is to be evidence-providing. But, as we saw, whether or not I have, or need, evidence for what I say is not a question of the kind of sentence I utter, but of the circumstances in which I am placed; and if evidence is produced or needed, there is no special kind of sentence, no form of words, by which this has to be done.

But Warnock's comparison also leads directly to just the kind of 'scepticism' which he is officially anxious to disavow. For verdicts are given, in the light of the evidence, by judges or juries—that is to say, precisely by people who were not actual witnesses of the matter in question. To give a verdict on evidence is precisely to pronounce on some matter on which one is not a first-hand authority. So to say that statements about 'material things' are in general like verdicts is to imply that we are never, that we can't be, in the best position to make them—that, so to speak, there is no such thing as being an eye-witness of what goes on in the 'material world', we can only get evidence. But to put the case in this way is to make it seem quite reasonable to suggest that we can never know, we can never be certain, of the truth of anything we say about 'material things'; for after all, it appears, we have nothing but the evidence to go on, we have no direct access to what is really going on, and verdicts of course are notoriously fallible. But how absurd it is, really, to suggest that I am giving a verdict when I say what is going on under my own nose! It is just this kind of comparison which does the real damage. Furthermore, Warnock's picture of the situation gets it upside-down as well as distorted. His statements of 'immediate perception', so far from being that from which we advance to more ordinary statements, are actually arrived at, and are so arrived at in his own account, by retreating from more ordinary statements, by progressive hedging. (There's a tiger—there seems to be a tiger—it seems to me that there's a tiger—it seems to me now that there's a tiger—it seems to me now as if there were a tiger.) It seems extraordinarily perverse to represent as that on
which ordinary statements are based a form of words which, *starting from* and moreover incorporating an ordinary statement, qualifies and hedges it in various ways. You've got to get something on your plate before you can start messing it around. It is not, as Warnock's language suggests, that we can stop hedging if there is a good case for coming right out with it; the fact is that we don't *begin* to hedge unless there is some special reason for doing so, something a bit strange and off-colour about the particular situation. But what is generally, and most importantly, wrong with Warnock's argument is simply that he has got into (perhaps has let Berkeley lead him into) the position of swallowing the two-languages doctrine—temporarily, at least, appearing to swallow the two-entities doctrine on the way. And the resulting question about how the evidence-language 'idea'-language) is related to material-object-language, which he tries to answer, is a question that *has* no answer, it's a quite unreal question. The main thing is not to get bamboozled into asking it at all. Warnock, I think, makes matters even worse by hitting on the particular formula, 'It seems as if...'; for this formula is already heavily loaded with the ideas of passing judgement, assessing evidence, reaching tentative verdicts. But nothing else would be much better as a limb of this quite bogus dichotomy. The right policy is not the one that Warnock adopts, of trying to patch it up a bit and make it work properly; that just can't be done. The right policy is to go back to a much earlier stage, and to dismantle the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground.

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