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The University of Ottawa
Department of Philosophy

PHD Thesis
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AUSTIN AND AYER AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN PHILOSOPHY

Supervisor: Professor Paul Forster

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to study a dispute between J.L. Austin and A.J. Ayer, and in so doing consider the relevance of a linguistic investigation for philosophy. The dispute is confined for the most part to Austin's criticisms of the sense-datum theory, particularly as it has been supported by the argument from illusion, in Sense and Sensibilia (S&S) and Ayer's reply to these in "Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?" (ARS). The argument from illusion is a traditional philosophical argument whereby incidents of non-veridical perception, e.g., the partly immersed stick that looks bent, are taken to support the claim that we do not (directly) perceive material objects, but must perceive something else, i.e., sense-data. In S&S, Austin contends that the argument is typically philosophical because it over-simplifies and misrepresents the facts of ordinary language and normal perception. In ARS, Ayer replies that the argument is essentially philosophical because it is logical and not factual: it shows that the truth of a material object statement is never entailed by the truth of the experiential statement upon which it is based. The Austin-Ayer dispute is best characterized as a clash of philosophical vision, that is, as a conflict about the proper aim and method of a philosophical investigation, and the role of an "analysis of language" for philosophy. This thesis, then, sets out (a) to describe the philosophical vision of Austin and Ayer, (b) to show how the criticisms that are offered by each philosopher are informed by their respective philosophical viewpoints, and (c) to establish that each philosopher presupposes the legitimacy of his own method in criticizing the other. As a result, (d) the arguments that each philosopher makes in defence of his position are seen as begging the question by presuming the validity of the claims that they must establish.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my two daughters, Caitlin and Roisin, who were born while it was being written: may they also have the opportunity to pursue a dream.

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To my wife Kathy, whose patience and support has been my sustenance over the years.

To Professor Paul Forster, for his interest and insight, and under whose guidance this thesis was brought to light.

To my father and mother, Jack and Cecilia, as well as my brothers and sisters: Stuart, Kent, Dawn, Doreen and Candace, who have always accepted my wandering ways.

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INTRODUCTION

The turn towards language has been one of the most prominent shifts in twentieth-century Anglo-American Philosophy. J.L. Austin and A.J. Ayer represent two distinct approaches to the study of language in philosophy. Both view the study of language as a means of solving (or dissolving) philosophical problems. In Language, Truth and Logic¹ (LTL), Ayer argues that the logical analysis of propositions into suitable verification-components serves as a criterion for determining the meaningfulness of any non-analytic statement. As a result, we can see that some seemingly well-formed statements in philosophy are "pseudo-statements", and the issues that they present are pseudo-problems. [LTL, pp. 64-6] On the other hand, Austin contends in Sense and Sensibilia² (S&S) that certain philosophical problems are dissolved by studying our ordinary use of words. Philosophers are "scholastic" in their obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are "oversimplified" and "not really understood", and with a limited range of "jejune" examples. [S&S, pp. 3-5] According to Austin, our ordinary words are much subtler in their uses and mark many more distinctions than philosophers have realized, and the facts of the world are much more diverse and complicated than philosophers have allowed. He argues, then, that by studying the specific circumstances where we would use the terms that have been appropriated by philosophy, the philosophical use is often found to be

otiose. When the incontestable (and mostly uncontested) facts of ordinary language or actual perception are properly represented, we find that there is no problem for which a philosophical theory or a philosophical vocabulary needs to be offered as a solution.

While Austin and Ayer see the study of language as being central to philosophy, each views it differently. Austin studies the ordinary use of words; Ayer considers the formal relations between classes of statements. Each offers a linguistic critique of philosophy, that is, the features of language are taken as a basis for criticizing what philosophers have to say. But the specific relevance of a linguistic investigation for philosophy is not always obvious. Austin's critics contend with regard to the study of ordinary language that the special interests of a philosophical investigation cannot be served by the common distinctions that work for the practical purposes of everyday life: "if there are things to be said in philosophy which no one would say in talk about brick-laying or golf, the philosopher must either stretch ordinary language or coin new words".³ In Ayer's case, critics contend that his logical analysis of sentences is not properly philosophical because it is not established on First Principles, but is based on the presumption of an a priori principle, i.e., the 'criterion of verifiability', that institutes an Empiricist metaphysical system.⁴

The aim of this thesis is to consider the supposed philosophical relevance of a linguistic investigation for Austin and Ayer. In so doing, we will isolate and contrast the philosophical vision of each philosopher, i.e., how each man views the proper role of the analysis of language in a philosophical inquiry. We will focus on a dispute between Austin and Ayer as a convenient means of making this distinction. In S&S, Austin accuses sense-datum philosophers of perpetuating a "mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies". [S&S, pp. 5] By characterizing different things as the same thing (e.g., rivers, shadows, gases, and images on the movie screen are all "material things") and the same thing as different things (e.g., when seeing a partly immersed straight stick that looks bent, we are said to be seeing something other than the stick itself), the sense-datum philosopher sets up an artificial dichotomy in order to consider an absurdly oversimplistic question about what we are (directly) perceiving at all times and in all instances - Is it a "material object" or a "sense-datum"?. According to Austin, however, any valid answer to a question about perception must take into account the particular circumstances in which it is being asked. Hence, "something pinkish" might be an appropriate answer to a question about what we are seeing when we are describing the contents of our visual field, but it is absurdly vague when we are meant to be identifying barnyard animals, e.g., a pig. [S&S, p. 125] Austin argues, then, that by demanding

an answer that applies in every conceivable situation, the sense-datum philosopher is manufacturing an artificial problem for which the sense-data theory can be offered as a bogus solution.

In "Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory"⁵ (ARS), Ayer replies that in referring to the facts of ordinary language and normal perception, Austin misses the essential logical point of the sense-datum theory. [ARS, pp. 117-40] The sense-datum theory is not about the facts of perception but about the representation of those facts, that is, the logical form of classes of statements. Incidents of illusion are significant in that they illustrate the logical point that while the truth of a material object statement entails the truth of some possible set of statements about experience, the converse is not also the case: it is possible for an experiential statement to be true, while the material object statement that it justifies is false. [ARS, pp. 118-9] Given this logical insight, Ayer argues that the sense-datum theory is best understood as a "linguistic recommendation" that allows us to describe the contents of experience and avoid implying their material existence.

While Austin refers to the particular circumstances for the use of words, Ayer considers the formal relations between classes of statements. Not only do Austin and Ayer disagree as to the point at issue in their dispute, but each discounts the legitimacy of the other's method. According to Ayer, Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are

trivially linguistic in that they do not concern the logic of language, i.e., the formal relations between classes of statements. [ARS, pp. 118-9. 122-5, 128-9. 130-2, 139]. Austin argues, on the other hand, that these formal relations are in fact determined by the circumstances where any particular sentence operates: "just what is meant and what can be inferred (if anything) can be decided only by examining the full circumstances in which the words are used." [S&S, p. 41] The dispute between Austin and Ayer does not turn on the truth or falsity of any particular claim about language, but centres on a disagreement as to the relevance of linguistic investigation for a philosophical inquiry. Hence, Ayer is able to admit most of Austin's points, but also to contend that these are irrelevant for a philosophical investigation. [ARS, pp. 118-9, 122-3, 128-9, 130-2, 139]

And yet the dispute between Austin and Ayer is conducted on a point-by-point basis as if it was a technical dispute concerning the features of language, i.e., the logical form of sentences or the ordinary use of words. This is not an oversight. Austin, for one, deliberately avoids methodological discussions: he maintains that the validity of his method will be established by the success of its results. However, it is precisely the relevance of those results that is being questioned by Ayer when he maintains that Austin's investigation of ordinary usage is beside the logical point of the sense-data theory. In order

to consider the supposed relevance of Austin's method, we must look beyond its application in S&S to other works where methodological concerns are more explicitly discussed. However, these instances are rare and they possess varying levels of authority.⁶ Of the texts to which we will mainly refer, Austin published only "A Plea for Excuses"⁷ (Plea) in his lifetime, that is, in 1956. Other texts were published after his death in 1960: "The Meaning of a Word"⁸ (Word) was read to the Jowett Society in Oxford in 1940 and was not published until 1961; How to Do Things with Words⁹ (HTW) was the William James Lectures which were delivered by Austin at Harvard University in 1955 and published in 1962; "Performative Utterances"¹⁰ (PU) was an unscripted talk for a radio program in 1956 and was published in 1961. In fact, S&S itself is reconstructed from the notes for lectures which Austin gave at Oxford from 1947 to 1959. We will also consider comments made by Austin's acolytes and critics. In attempting to extract a philosophical vision from these various sources, our touchstone will be the coherence and reasonable nature of the account given. Hence, we will forestall any easy objections. For example, we will not burden Austin with the untenable position that ordinary language is the final authority and sacrosanct. All general characterizations will be tested by any contrary evidence.

Unlike Austin, the problem with determining a philosophical vision for Ayer is not that he published so little, but that he published so much and that his views

changed over time. For example, in LTL (1936), Ayer sets out a Logical Positivist position which restricts significance to factual claims and analytic tautologies based on the logical criterion of verifiability. In The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge¹¹ (FEK) (1940), this principle becomes a "recommendation" to restrict our propositions to those which can be proved analytically or supported by empirical evidence. By 1967, Ayer admits in ARS that the validity of his logical analysis of propositions is based on the empiricist theory that we directly perceive a "sensible manifold" which we organize according to certain conceptual schemes. These are the principal texts of our treatment of Ayer. We will argue that there is a philosophical vision that runs throughout these works, namely that there is a 'logical form' under our use of words that a logical analysis can reveal. Once again, the validity of this general claim will be checked by the coherence that it lends and can be challenged by evidence to the contrary.

Of course, in attempting to determine each philosopher's conception of the role of a linguistic analysis in a philosophical investigation, we are implying that such a viewpoint does (and must) exist. This is a particularly contentious issue with Austin, whose commentators often contend that he was interested in linguistic distinctions for their own sakes, and saw the application of his results to the traditional problems of

philosophy as only a by-product.¹² For example, Zeno Vendler argues that the works of Austin are of particular interest to linguistics because philosophical problems or theories are taken as being secondary and often merely the occasion to explore some fascinating aspect about language.¹³ However, to the extent that an investigation of ordinary language or a logical analysis of sentences is thought to solve or dissolve philosophical problems, then it is understood to have a specific philosophical significance. The aim of this thesis is to consider the supposed philosophical relevance of an analysis of language in each case.

This thesis will attempt to (a) describe the 'philosophical vision' of Austin and Ayer, i.e., each philosopher's view of the proper role of a linguistic investigation for philosophy, by considering the Austin-Ayer dispute concerning the sense-data theory.¹⁴ In so doing, we will (b) show how the criticisms that are offered by each philosopher are informed by their respective philosophical viewpoints. As a result, (c) each philosopher will be seen to presuppose the legitimacy of his own method, and thereby to beg the question when dismissing the legitimacy of the other. Hence, (d) we will conclude that the linguistic critique that is offered by Austin and Ayer fails in each case.

Chapter One will describe the sense-datum theory, particularly as it has been set out in the argument from

illusion: incidents where we perceive a quality that does not belong to an object (e.g., a partly immersed stick that looks bent) or an object that does not exist (e.g., the pink rats that are seen by a drunkard, a mirage) are taken as evidence for the theory that we never directly perceive material objects but only sense-data (or percepts, or ideas, etc.). The argument that we outline is primarily Ayer's version in FEK as this provides the basis for Austin's critique in S&S. These criticisms are set out in Chapter Two. According to Austin, the argument from illusion serves to misrepresent the facts of ordinary language and normal perception, and manufactures a philosophical problem for which the sense-datum theory is offered as a solution. In Chapter Three, Ayer is shown to reply that the significance of the argument from illusion is logical and not factual: it concerns the non-reciprocal nature of the entailment relations between classes of statements. Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage and actual perception are beside the point.

Chapter Four is a linchpin.¹⁵ First, it shows that Austin and Ayer are arguing past each other, i.e., that each holds a methodological viewpoint so fundamentally different that one is unable to recognize the validity of the other's criticisms.¹⁶ From Ayer's point of view, Austin's investigation of our actual use of words is superficial in that it does not consider the logical structure of statements. From Austin's viewpoint, however, the logical

relations between statements are in fact determined by the circumstances where these sentences used: he argues that it is a mistake to suppose that we can talk about language and not consider the situation where words are used. We will show how Austin's reply to Ayer's criticisms would not satisfy Ayer and, conversely, how Ayer's reply to Austin's criticisms would not satisfy Ayer. Second, in having established the stand-off between Austin and Ayer, this chapter will also point to subsequent chapters where it will be shown that the validity of the philosophical method is presupposed in each case, and that this fails to provide a legitimate basis for the criticism of a fundamentally different philosophical approach.

In Chapters Five and Six, we will consider the methodological presuppositions of Austin and Ayer. Chapter Five will show how Austin contends that a careful explication of what we say, and why we say it, can dismantle a philosophical doctrine like the sense-datum theory by dissolving the philosophical problems for which it is offered as a solution. In correcting linguistic fallacies, Austin refers to the rules for the use of words (e.g., 'When we say ... we imply (suggest, say) ---'). By 'rules', we mean certain informal principles to which our actions conform or are intended to conform. For example, Austin argues in S&S that "looks", "appears" and "seems" have quite different uses, and that it makes a great deal of difference which one we use: "looks" is restricted to description in

the general sphere of vision, while "appears" and "seems" do not imply the use of any one of the senses in particular.

[S&S, p. 36] In this case, the critical authority of an investigation of the regularities in language is based on the premise that a distinction in expression will correspond to some difference in cases; Austin argues: "if a distinction works well for practical purposes ... then there is sure to be something in it, it will not mark nothing".

[Plea, p. 185] In Chapter Six, Ayer will be shown to derive the philosophical significance of a linguistic investigation from a logical rule which determines the literal significance of sentences: the 'criterion of verifiability' resolves certain philosophical problems by revealing that the sentences by which these are proposed are in fact pseudo-propositions and are senseless as a result. Analytic tautologies and empirical hypotheses are said to form the entire class of significant propositions; however, Ayer has considerable difficulty in formulating a criterion for determining the members of this class on a strictly formal basis. Finally, he admits that the logical analysis of sentences is based on an empirical theory of perception.

In Chapter Seven we will argue that the critical role of a linguistic investigation for both Austin and Ayer is based on the assumption that there is a fundamental structure for language, that is, a set of essential conditions for the meaningfulness of statements or for the proper use of words. This structure provides an objective

basis for determining the rules of language. Ayer contends that there is a set of statements that is entailed by a sentence and constitutes its logical form; Austin argues that there are specific circumstances for our use of certain words. In each case, the critical force of the analysis of language is based on the presumption of an extra-linguistic ground: Ayer's analysis of the logical form of sentences is preceded by an empirical theory of perception so that the terminus of analysis is understood to denote the contents of experience; Austin's investigation of the ordinary use of words is premised on the idea that the structure of the facts will be reflected in the structure of language. And yet, because the existence of this ground is presumed, the authority of the critique in each case is compromised. For the arguments used in establishing the critical categories, i.e., the classes of significant statements, the ordinary uses of words, beg the question by presupposing the validity of the criteria that they must establish. As a result, the linguistic critique in each case fails.

- 1 A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, second edition (New York: Dover Communications, n.d.). Hereinafter referred to as LTL.
- 2 J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G.J. Warnock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Hereinafter referred to as S&S.
- 3 W.F.R. Hardie, "Austin on Perception", Philosophy 38, July 1963, p. 263. Hereinafter referred to as Austin.
- 4 Ralph W. Erickson, "The Metaphysics of a Logical Empiricist", Philosophy of Science 8, 1941, pp. 320-8.
- 5 A.J. Ayer, "Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?", Synthese 17, 1967, pp. 117-40. Hereinafter referred to as ARS.
- 6 In establishing the chronological order of Austin's work, I am guided by the comments of Professor L.W. Forguson, as well as by J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock's forward to the second edition of Philosophical Papers.
- 7 J.L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," Philosophical Papers, third edition, eds. J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 175-204. Hereinafter referred to as Plea.
- 8 J.L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word," Philosophical Papers, pp. 55-75. Hereinafter referred to as Word.
- 9 J.L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). Hereinafter referred to as HTW.
- 10 J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," Philosophical Papers, pp. 233-52. Hereinafter referred to as PU.
- 11 A.J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1947). Hereinafter referred to as FEK.
- 12 J.O. Urmson, "Austin's Philosophy", Symposium on J.L. Austin, ed. K.T. Fann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p.32.
- 13 Zeno Vendler, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia and How to do Things with Words", Foundations of Language 3, 1967, pp. 303-10. Hereinafter referred to as Review.
- 14 I am grateful for Professor Forguson's assistance in refining the objectives of this thesis. Of course, this does not imply that he agrees with what is argued therein.

15 The inclusion of Chapter Four was suggested by Professor Andrew Lugg.

16 I am grateful for Professor Forguson's assistance in formulating this point.

Chapter 1
The Argument from Illusion

The aim of this chapter is to explain the 'argument from illusion' as it has been used to refute naive realism, or the view that among the objects we perceive are material objects, and to establish a theory of sense-data. Various versions of the argument have been used by philosophers including Descartes¹, Locke², Berkeley³, and Hume⁴. Ayer's explication in FEK, however, will serve as our primary reference because it is this version that Austin chooses as his 'chief stalking horse' in S&S.

Ayer admits that "it does not normally occur to us that there is any need for us to justify our belief in the existence of material things". [FEK, pp. 1ff] However, the fact that we are sometimes deceived by our senses has been taken by philosophers as a reason for doubting that we are always directly aware of material things. Material things can present different appearances to different observers, or to the same observer in different conditions, and these differences in appearances are to some extent dependent upon the state of the observer and the surrounding conditions. [FEK, p. 3] For instance, a penny can look circular from one view point and elliptical from another. A stick that appears straight can also appear bent when it is partly immersed in water. When I see myself in the mirror, my body appears to be standing a few feet behind the glass, while also appearing to be under my nose when I look down. Drugs like mescaline can make things appear to change colour. Nor

is this phenomenon restricted to visual appearances. The taste which something appears to have changes according to the condition of one's palate. The apparent temperature of water depends on whether one's hand is hot or cold. A coin can seem larger when it is placed on the tongue than when it is held in the palm of a hand. Amputees sometimes report feeling pressure or pain in a 'phantom limb'. [FEK, p. 3]

Ayer considers two such cases in detail. The first is the instance where a straight stick appears to be crooked when it is partly immersed in water. [FEK, p. 4] The sense-datum philosopher argues that at least one of the visual appearances of the stick must be delusive; for what we are seeing cannot be both crooked and straight. But it cannot be denied that what we are seeing is something bent. Ayer argues, then, that even in the case where what we see is not the real quality of a material thing, it is supposed that we are seeing something, and it is convenient to give this a name. [FEK, p. 4] Hence, by calling something a "sense-datum", philosophers are able to describe what we are seeing without implying that it exists as part of a material thing.

The second case that Ayer considers is one in which a traveller sees a mirage in the desert:

when a man sees a mirage in the desert, he is not thereby perceiving any material thing; for the oasis which he thinks he is perceiving does not exist. At the same time, it is argued, his experience is not an experience of nothing; it has a definite content. Accordingly, it is said that he is experiencing sense-data, which are similar in character to what he would be experiencing if he were seeing a real oasis, but are delusive in the sense that the material thing which

they appear to present is not actually there. [FEK, p. 4]

When we look at these cases, the sense-datum theorist argues, it is clear that the perceived qualities are not part of the surface of a material object; and yet, they are perceived. Hence, we say that what we are experiencing is a sense-datum. But this is not to say that we experience sense-data in every case. Further argumentation is required in order to establish that what we immediately perceive is always a sense-datum, and never a material object. [FEK, p. 5]

Ayer identifies three arguments which have been used to show that even in the case of veridical perception we are not directly aware of material things. The first makes the contention that there is no intrinsic qualitative difference between perceptions which are veridical in their presentation of material things and perceptions which are delusive. [FEK, pp. 5-6] For example, H.H. Price argues that when we look at a partly immersed stick that looks bent, our experience is qualitatively the same as when we look at a stick that is actually bent.⁵ When looking at a white wall through green-tinted glasses, my experience is qualitatively the same as when I look at a wall which is green. When someone whose leg has been amputated continues to feel pain in it, the pain that he is feeling is qualitatively the same as pain in the real leg. The fact that we can be deceived in these cases is taken as evidence that there is no intrinsic difference between veridical and

delusive perceptions. One might object that in most cases we are not deceived by our delusive perceptions, e.g., when a stick appears crooked by the light being refracted in the water, we do not usually believe that the stick is actually crooked. But this, the sense-datum theorist argues, is not because of the content of the perceptions themselves, but rather because we have learned through past experience what conclusions to draw from these experiences. A child who has not yet learned that refraction is a means of distortion will quite naturally believe that a partly immersed stick really is crooked. [FEK, p. 7] Hence, qualitatively identical experiences will have the tendency to elicit similar judgements.

Another fact which is supposed to show that in all cases we are not directly aware of material objects is that veridical and delusive perceptions may form a continuous series. [FEK, pp. 8-9] H.H. Price, for example, argues that if we walk towards a distant object, then we begin by having a series of sense-data which are delusive in the sense that the object looks smaller than it really is.⁶ Assuming that the series terminates in a veridical perception, i.e., a perception of the object as it actually is, delusive and veridical perceptions can be seen as shading into one another; their difference is a matter of degree and not of kind. This is not what we would expect if veridical perception was perception of an object of a different kind than what we perceive when our perception is delusive, i.e.,

a sense-datum. Hence, given the fact that we don't always perceive veridically, we can conclude that what we experience (at least directly) is always a sense-datum and never a material object.

The final argument for the sense-data theory which is cited by Ayer is based on the fact that all our perceptions, whether veridical or delusive, are to some extent causally dependent upon external conditions, such as lighting, and upon our own physiological and psychological states. [FEK, p. 9] This is particularly evident in cases where the appearance of an object is deceptive. For example, we say that the straight stick looks crooked because it is seen in water; the white walls appear green to me because I am wearing green glasses; the warm water feels cold because my hand is hot; and something appears to change its colour because I have taken a drug. We are perhaps not as likely to notice these causal dependencies in the case of veridical perceptions; however, there is no essential difference between veridical and delusive perception in this regard. In particular, Ayer notes that in order to have the veridical experience I am presently having, namely, of seeing a white piece of paper, the presence of an object is an insufficient condition. [FEK, p. 10] Many other factors are involved, such as the nature of the lighting, my distance from the paper, the type of background, and the state of my nervous system and eyes. While some set of circumstances is necessary for my perception, the presence

of a material object is not. Hence, I may vary certain attendant conditions, e.g., turn off the lights, and find that this effects what I perceive. However, the converse is not also the case. If I affect the object of perception, e.g., remove the sheet of paper, the effect of the lighting, or of my nervous system, or of any other attendant factor on my perception will remain the same. [FEK, p. 10] We can infer from this, then, that what we perceive depends on environing conditions. And yet, the way that material things are does not: it is an essential characteristic of any material object that its existence and essential properties are independent of a particular observer. Hence, we are able to conclude that what we immediately perceive cannot be a material thing. [FEK, p. 11]

Ayer argues that the philosophers who have made use of these arguments have typically taken them as proving a matter of fact, namely, that it is false to say that we are ever directly aware of material things. But interpreted in this way, he argues, the argument is inconclusive at best. Ayer contends that the subsidiary arguments which would establish that there is no generic difference between what we perceive in cases of veridical and delusive perception are based on questionable premises. In the first argument, it is assumed that if veridical and delusional perceptions were of different objects, each would always be 'qualitatively distinguishable' from the other; but it is unclear why perceptions of different things could not be

indistinguishable in certain instances. [FEK, p. 12]

Similarly, with regard to the second argument, it is not obvious why different types of things could not be arranged in a 'continuous series'. [FEK, p. 12] And finally, the argument from 'causal dependence' assumes that the existence of material objects must be independent of experience. Ayer argues that the supposed independence of material objects can be represented in terms of certain hypothetical propositions about our sense-experiences, e.g., that others would be able to have the same perception of an object. [FEK, pp. 12-3] Hence, it is not necessary to admit that a material object is something outside of experience.

According to Ayer, the argument from illusion does not prove that we are always mistaken in believing that what we (directly) perceive are material things. [FEK, p. 14] But does the argument even prove that we are sometimes mistaken in believing that we perceive material things? In cases where our perceptions are delusive, sense-datum philosophers maintain that we must be perceiving 'sense-data' because otherwise we would have to attribute to material objects such mutually incompatible properties as being both crooked and straight, or both round and elliptical. Ayer argues, however, that these contradictions do not derive from the nature of our perception in each case. We could say that the real shape of a penny changes with our point of view, or that the actual temperature of water in a bowl differs when we feel it with a warm hand and then with a cold hand, or

that a partly immersed stick that looks bent is in fact bent when in the water and straight when out. [FEK, pp. 15-7]

The contradiction arises only when we add the assumption that the real shape of the penny remains the same, or that the temperature of the water with which the bowl is filled is really the same throughout, or that the real shape of the stick must be either bent or straight. None of these assumptions is logically necessary since each can be denied without contradiction and the negation accords equally with our experience. Ayer argues, then, that we could take material things to be constantly changing their shapes, temperatures and sizes; or when two observers are seeing the same thing, we could say that each is seeing a different thing. "I have no doubt," he concludes, "that by postulating a greater number of material things and regarding them as being more variable and evanescent than we normally do, it would be possible to deal with all the other cases in a similar way." [FEK, p. 17]

Assumptions concerning the duration and accessibility of material objects are not logically necessary as each can be denied without contradiction. But neither are they empirical propositions, as they constitute hypothetical statements that are consistent with but cannot be verified by experience. Ayer argues, then, that between the philosopher who maintains that what he sees is a material object and another who says that it is sense-data, there is no dispute as to the contents of their experience; hence,

there is no dispute about any matter of fact. [FEK, pp. 17-8] Their disagreement concerns the description of experience. We might restrict ourselves to using words in such a way that to say that an object is seen or touched or otherwise perceived is to say that it really exists, and that something really has the properties which an object appears to have. [FEK, p. 21] But to the extent that we are interested in describing how things look and sound and feel, as distinct from how they actually are, Ayer argues that "it is useful for us to have a terminology that enables us to refer to the contents of our experience independently of the material things that they are taken to present". [FEK, p. 26] In the case where a partly immersed stick looks bent, or where what we see in the desert seems to be an oasis, we are able to speak of perceiving a "sense-datum" so that we might describe these sensible qualities without implying their material instantiation. In so doing, Ayer argues, no extraordinary entities or no new facts have been discovered. Rather, what has been found is that in certain circumstances it is clearer and more convenient to describe what we perceive in terms of a sense-datum vocabulary. [FEK, p. 26]

For Ayer, what is at issue in the argument from illusion is a matter of language and not of fact. He argues, then, that the theory of sense-data is best considered as a "terminology ... intended to ... enable us to deal with the problems which arise from the fact that material things can appear to have qualities that they do

not really have, and can appear to exist when they do not." [FEK, p. 68] And yet philosophers have typically taken the theory of sense-data as constituting an empirical hypothesis, and the argument from illusion as establishing the factual conclusion that what we perceive is a kind of thing called a sense-datum. In so doing, Ayer argues, a philosophical statement like "I never see material things but only sense-data" is construed as an empirical proposition of the same grammatical form as "I never see gold sovereigns but only Bank of England notes". [FEK, p. 27] But the philosopher who says that what he sees is sense-data is not putting forward an empirical hypothesis which can be verified or confuted: "What he is doing is simply to recommend a new verbal usage". [FEK, p. 25] And as a recommendation, the sense-datum language is adopted for specific purposes; hence, it can be judged to be convenient or unwieldy, clarifying or obscurantist, but not true or false. Ayer argues, then, that it is imperative that the conventions of a sense-datum language should be specified according to the task that it is intended for. Otherwise, the language would defeat its own purpose by giving rise to problems which are no less troublesome than those for which it was offered as a solution. [FEK, p. 57] Moreover, Ayer resolves that it should be impossible for sense-data to have qualities that they do not appear to have. For if we reintroduced the distinction between apparent and real qualities into the sense-datum language, we would defeat the

purpose for which the terminology was devised, that is, to allow us to describe what we perceive irrespective of its material existence. [FEK, pp. 68-70]

If what we see is described as a sense-datum, Ayer argues that the word "see" is being used in a particular sense where it is possible to claim that something is seen but avoid implying its material existence. For example, if a drunkard reports to seeing "pink rats", this does imply that what he sees are in fact pink rats: he is no doubt describing his delirium tremens. [FEK, pp. 20-2] It is logically possible for a sense-datum statement describing the contents of experience to be true, while the material object statement that is made on this basis is false. According to Ayer, "no finite set of singular statements about sense-data can ever formally entail a statement about a material thing". [FEK, p. 239] As a result, he maintains that no statement about a material object is ever "conclusively verifiable": regardless of the amount of evidence that we adduce, it is always possible that further experience will reverse the judgement based on our previous evidence. Furthermore, Ayer argues that every material object statement is inherently "imprecise" or "vague" because there is no definite set of experiential statements upon which any given perceptual statement can be founded, and it is impossible to determine the disjunction of experiential statements that it entails. [FEK, p.242; ARS, pp. 138-9] The sense-datum language, on the other hand,

allows the philosopher to refer to the contents of experience apart from any material object that they might be taken to represent. According to Ayer, the truth of a sense-datum statement is determined by the experience to which it uniquely refers; hence, the sense-datum language is "clearer" and "more convenient" than its material object counterpart. [FEK, p. 26]

According to Ayer, the introduction of the sense-datum terminology allows us to deal with the problems which arise from the fact that material things can appear to have qualities that they do not really have, and can appear to exist when in fact they do not. [FEK, pp. 68-9] However, in S&S, J.L. Austin argues that the problem to which the sense-data theory is addressed as a solution is one which can be dissolved by "unpicking, one by one, a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies, of exposing a wide variety range of concealed motives - an operation which leaves us, in a sense, just where we began." [S&S, pp. 4-5] Chapter Two will set out the details of this critique.

- 1 Rene Descartes, "Meditations on the First Philosophy", Meditation VI, Discourse on Method and the Meditations, trans. F.E Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), pp. 154-5.
- 2 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, abridged and edited by A.S. Pringle-Pattison (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 133-5.
- 3 George Berkeley, "Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous: III", Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues, ed. Roger Woolhouse (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988), pp. 185, 204.
- 4 David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), p.104. Hereinafter referred to as Enquiry.
- 5 H.H. Price, Perception, second edition (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1950), p. 31.
- 6 Ibid., p. 32.

Chapter 2

J.L. Austin's Critique of Sense-Data Theory.

The aim of this chapter is to explain Austin's critique of sense-data theory in S&S. The "chief stalking horse" in that work is Ayer's FEK as noted in the previous chapter. The structure of this discussion is adopted from Ayer's reply in ARS. It is hoped that the common numbering of Austin's criticisms and Ayer's rebuttals will assist us in making preliminary comparisons between the two, subsequent to a more detailed examination later.

In S&S, Austin characterizes the doctrine of sense-data as follows:

we never see or otherwise perceive (or 'sense'), or anyhow we never directly perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, sensa, sense-perceptions, percepts, &c.). [S&S, p. 2]

According to Austin, the theory of sense-data is a typical example of philosophical over-simplification: "attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are over-simplified, not really understood or carefully studied or correctly described; and second, to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied 'facts'". [S&S, p. 3] Austin contends that the theory is obscure, and is unsupported by any argument that could bear the weight of the general conclusions that are drawn.¹ As the principal argument for the existence of sense-data, the argument from illusion is taken as a case in

point. The argument takes a limited number of constantly recurring examples (e.g., the elliptical penny, the bent stick, Macbeth's dagger) and groups these together with insufficient attention to the differences between them. The result is that the facts are improperly described (e.g., Why is Macbeth's hallucination of a dagger called an illusion?), and are made the basis for a general conclusion that goes beyond the evidence which is cited in support of it.²

Austin does not formulate the argument from illusion to show that its premises are false or that the argument is invalid.³ Rather, he looks at what is claimed by the argument and compares this with the facts. As a result, he says the argument over-simplifies the facts by taking a limited number of examples (and ignoring the diversity of cases), treating them the same way (and ignoring the differences among them), and subsuming them under a false if not vacuous analysis.⁴ For example, the unsophisticated observer, or the "plain man", is typically portrayed as believing that what he perceives are material objects, and cases of illusion are meant to cause us to rethink this view. With regard to the case of the partially immersed straight stick that looks bent, Ayer had maintained in FEK that "at least one of the visual appearances of the stick is delusive; for it cannot be both crooked and straight. Nevertheless, even in the case where what we see is not the real quality of a material thing, it is supposed that we are still seeing something and that it is convenient to give

this a name." [FEK, pp. 3-4] As a result, the presented property of crookedness is said to belong to a sense-datum, and not to the material object itself.

(1) Austin makes a number of criticisms. First, he argues that the "plain man" is not so naive as to think that what he perceives is always a "material object". What he believes he "perceives" (i.e., sees, feels, smells) are people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the movie screen, pictures in books or hung on walls. [S&S, p. 4] To what extent would the plain man consider each a "material object"? Is one in some way more of a "material object" than another? For example, we might argue that a river is not as durable as a mountain, and a voice is even less so. But, of course, we are not encouraged by the sense-datum philosopher to make any discriminations among "material objects"; Austin argues that this is because the term is already being used in contrast with "sense-data". Rather than establishing the coherence of the notion, the dichotomy is being presumed in describing what we ordinarily believe. Hence, material objects or sense-data are assumed as a premise from the outset. Outside of this presumption, Austin contends that it would never occur to anyone to represent all that we "perceive" as one kind of thing. [S&S, p. 8]

Nor does the ordinary person, or "plain man", necessarily believe that when he is not perceiving material things, he is being "deceived by his senses", and that when

he is being deceived by his senses, he is not perceiving material things. For example, Austin argues that someone who sees a rainbow and is persuaded that it is not a material thing would not at once conclude that he was being deceived by his senses. Nor in the case where he was actually being deceived by his senses, e.g., by a partly immersed stick that looks bent, would someone necessarily conclude that he was seeing an immaterial thing. [S&S, pp. 8-9] There is no simple contrast between the objects we see when all is well, and those we see when something is amiss. By drawing on data which are already characterized in terms of this dichotomy, the ground is being set for a bogus dichotomy between "material objects" and "sense-data". [S&S, p. 9] The argument is circular because the examples which are used to show the need for the dichotomy are already characterized in terms of that dichotomy.⁵

(2) Secondly, Austin argues that the sense-datum theorist wrongly intimates that the plain man is naive in not realizing that his belief in the existence of a "material object" requires justification. He has no doubt whatsoever that he perceives tables and chairs, but the philosopher suggests that perhaps he should have some doubts. In the case where a chair is only a few feet away and seen in broad daylight, Austin argues that the plain man would regard doubt in such an instance as not merely academic or impractical but as plain nonsense, and would quite rightly reply, "Well, if that is not seeing a real

chair, then I don't know what is." [S&S, p. 10] Normally we do not say that the existence of something like a chair is uncertain unless we have some reason to suppose that it is so, e.g., the lighting is bad, or our eyesight is poor, or this is a particularly strange place to find a chair. [ARS, p. 118] Situations where we are not prepared to assert that we know something for certain presume the possibility of knowing for sure. But in the case of the argument from illusion, we are led to suppose that there is no situation where the circumstances are such that we can be said to know a fact about an ordinary object with certainty; hence, doubt always makes sense. But if so, Austin argues that the notion of "doubting" ceases to have any application as there is no possibility of becoming certain of any ordinary fact. It is not the case, then, that our knowledge about ordinary objects is uncertain, but that our distinction between "certainty" and "uncertainty" is inoperable.

(3) The sense-data philosopher is not arguing that the unwary ordinary man is deceived more often than he realizes, but rather that "in some sense or some way he is wrong all the time". [S&S, p. 10] According to Austin, the issue is wrongly portrayed as a matter of degrees of trustworthiness when in fact it amounts to a difference in kinds.⁶ Hence, the sense-datum philosopher is not merely a bit more skeptical than the ordinary man, but rather is claiming that what the ordinary man believes he is perceiving is always an object of a different kind. But, Austin argues, it is

important to recognize that "talk of deception only makes sense against a general background of non-deception. It must be possible to recognize a case of deception by checking the odd case against more normal ones." [S&S, p. 11] The appearance of a partly immersed stick can be deceptive only in contrast to how it normally looks, i.e., when out of the water. Our mistake is in failing to recognizing the difference and concluding that the appearance of a stick when it is partially immersed in water is how it normally appears. But by recognizing that we can be mistaken, we imply that proper discrimination should be made. Hence, there can be no question of our being systematically deceived.

The argument from illusion exaggerates the frequency of the instances where we are 'deceived by our senses'. In fact, Austin argues, the cases where an ordinary man would say that he was being deceived by his senses are not very common. Sometimes he prefers to say that his senses are being deceived, and not that he is being deceived by his senses, e.g., in the case of a magical trick where the hand is said to be quicker than the eye. [S&S, p. 13] And even the plainest of men would want to distinguish (a) cases where the sense-organ is deranged or abnormal or not working properly, e.g., the case of color-blindness; (b) cases where the medium is abnormal or off-colour, e.g. the case of wearing rose-coloured glasses; and (c) cases where a wrong inference is made, or a wrong construction is put on things,

e.g. the case where a car's backfire is mistaken for a gunshot. [S&S, p. 13] Things can go wrong in lots of different ways, and there is no need to assume that these should be classifiable in any simple way. As a result, Austin argues that there is just as little reason to suppose that there is just one kind of case where the ordinary man is "deceived", as there is for supposing that there is just one kind of thing that the ordinary man believes he perceives. [S&S, p. 14]

(4) But to be perfectly fair, we must admit that the usual contention by the sense-data philosopher is that we are unable to "directly" perceive material objects, although we can infer their existence from the perceived properties. Hence, the perceived property of bentness in the case of the partly immersed stick leads us to posit the existence of a material object which may or may not in fact be bent. Austin argues in this case that, to the contrary, the use of "directly" in the philosophical idiom "directly perceiving" is a typical example of an ordinary word with a specific use being gradually stretched, without caution or definition or limit, until it becomes meaningless. [S&S, p. 15] Perceiving "directly" takes its sense from its opposite - perceiving "indirectly"; the latter "wears the trousers". We would not say that we are perceiving something directly unless there was the contrasting possibility of perceiving it indirectly. In trying to understand what it is to perceive something directly, one has to be aware of the

various possibilities of perceiving something indirectly, e.g., by perceiving it in a mirror, through a periscope, by seeing its shadow, etc. "Indirectly" not only has a use in special cases, but it also has different uses in different cases. [S&S, p. 15] For example, we might contrast the man who sees a procession directly with someone who sees it through a periscope; or we might contrast the place from where you can watch the door directly with the place from where you can see it only in a mirror. The problem is that the sense-datum philosopher takes perception to be indirect in all cases. But Austin argues that the notion of not seeing something "directly" is most at home where it retains a link with a kink in direction so that we are not looking straight on at an object. Hence, seeing your shadow is a doubtful case of seeing indirectly, while seeing something through binoculars or glasses is not considered a case of seeing indirectly at all. Nor is the notion of indirect perception naturally at home with senses other than sight: Do I hear you indirectly if what I hear is your echo? If I touch you with a barge-pole, am I touching you indirectly? [S&S, pp. 16-7] These distinctions are lost in the sense-datum philosopher's claim that we perceive ordinary objects indirectly.

And it is doubtful how far the metaphor of "perceiving indirectly" can or should be extended: "Does it, or should it, cover the telephone, for instance? Or television? Or radar?" [S&S, p. 17] But it is certain that some line must

be drawn by the sense-datum philosopher. For the particularities of the directly-indirectly contrast will have considerable bearing on the epistemological theory that what we directly perceive are "sense-data". We should be able to ask when and how do we perceive them indirectly.⁷ Conversely, in the case of "material objects", Austin argues that "if we are seriously inclined to speak of something as being perceived indirectly, it seems that it has to be the kind of thing which we (sometimes at least) just perceive, or could perceive, or which - like the backs of our own heads - others could perceive". [S&S, p. 18] Without the possibility of making this distinction, we would not want to say that we perceive the thing at all, let alone that we perceive it indirectly.

(5) Sense-datum philosophers have relied upon the argument from illusion as a means of inducing people into saying that what they directly perceive on certain abnormal and exceptional occasions is not a material thing but a "sense-datum". [S&S, p. 20] Austin argues that there is a logical step from here to the general claim that we never directly perceive material objects, even in ordinary and unexceptional cases. The argument from illusion is based on the fact that something can appear different to two different observers or to the same observer on different occasions. With regard to the case of the straight stick that looks bent, it is argued that "at least one of the visual appearances of the stick must be delusive; for it

cannot be both crooked and straight". [FEK, p. 4] Other examples of "illusions" include the effects of perspective (the elliptical penny, converging railway lines), of distance (the silvery moon), of mirrors, of refracted light (the bent-stick), of drugs, of abnormal mental states (Macbeth's dagger). Austin argues, however, that this heterogeneous collection contains things that are doubtfully called "illusions", e.g., the elliptical penny, as well as things that might be better named "delusions", e.g., Macbeth's dagger. Cases of optical illusion where it can be agreed that we are seeing something that exists are included with cases of delusions which are primarily a matter of disordered beliefs and can be entirely without any factual basis, e.g. delusions of persecution, delusions of grandeur. The argument from illusion turns on this confusion. Incidents of illusion are characterized as delusions, i.e., as "delusive perceptions", in order to suggest that "something is being conjured up, something unreal or at any rate 'immaterial'". [S&S, p. 25] The word "illusion" implies that something is seen wrongly; the word "delusion" implies that there is in fact nothing there. The equivocation of the two suggests that there is something that we perceive in each case that is not a material thing, i.e., a sense-datum.

While each of the above cases is characterized by the sense-datum theorist as an "illusion", Austin notes that in most cases there is no question of anyone being taken in by

what they see. Familiarity takes the edge off illusion. [S&S, p. 26] For instance, only in the case of someone who has never come across a mirror, e.g., an infant or an aborigine, would we say that seeing a mirror-reflection might constitute an illusion. Similarly, with the phenomenon of perspective there is usually no question of illusion. And refraction is far too familiar a case to be called an illusion. Hence, while we might agree that a partly immersed stick looks bent, we can also see that it is partly immersed in water, and this is exactly how we would expect it to look. In fact, Austin argues, it is difficult to determine what is "delusive" in this case: "Does anyone suppose that if something is straight, then it jolly well has to look straight at all times and in all circumstances?" [S&S, p. 29]

Yet in each of these cases it is suggested that there is a problem about what is perceived for which the existence of sense-data is offered as the solution. In the case of the partially immersed stick, we are told that we are seeing something and asked, what it is if not a material thing? This question, according to Austin, is "completely mad". [S&S, pp. 29-30] For we see the straight part of the stick that is above water, and we see the part that is under water. In fact, Austin argues, what we see is a stick partly immersed in water, and it is particularly extraordinary that in this situation a question should be raised about what we are seeing; for this question is

answered simply by describing the situation at hand, e.g., the situation in which we are perceiving a partly immersed stick that looks bent. [S&S, pp. 29-30]

Austin denies that a mirror-image is a sense-datum; "it can be photographed, seen by a number of people, and so on". [S&S, p. 31] It is not a perceptual phenomenon. In the more likely case of a mirage, he argues that what we are seeing might seem more amenable to being described as "sense-data", for we are not seeing any material thing. But even in this case, Austin argues, we are not forced to say that what we are experiencing is a "sense-datum". For what we are experiencing is a natural phenomenon which already has a name - a "mirage". [S&S, p. 32]

(6) Austin argues that by failing to distinguish between illusions, hallucinations and mirages, philosophers have manufactured a problem for which the sense-data theory is offered as a solution. Similarly, he argues that philosophers are indiscriminate in their use of words. Ayer's discussion is taken as a case in point. In his exposition of the argument from illusion in FEK, Ayer is said to make pretty free use of the expressions "look", "appear", and "seem", thereby implying that they can be used interchangeably. [S&S, p. 35] Austin argues, however, that "the expressions in question actually have quite different uses, and it often makes a great difference which one you use." [S&S, p. 35] For instance, the use of "looks" is generally restricted to the general sphere of vision, while

"appears" and "seems" do not require, or imply, any one of the senses in particular. [S&S, pp. 36-8] Hence, it is possible for someone who seems or appears to be guilty to not look guilty.

Slippage between these terms, i.e. "looks", "seems", "appears", has a purpose in that it allows the sense-datum philosopher to advance from a visual analogy to a general theory of perception. For example, while the use of "looks" in "It looks blue" is restricted to describing what we see, this statement becomes applicable to any one of the senses when it is transformed into "It appears to be blue". What results is a general theory where every perceptual statement is likened to being a premise for an inductive inference. Statements describing our experience are thought to constitute evidence for material object statements. In this case, the general theory of perception is derived from a series of equivocations which results in a subsumption of differences and a considerable loss of information.

(7) The argument used to integrate the possibility of illusion into a general theory of perception involves the claim that there is no "intrinsic difference" between veridical and delusive perceptions. Austin challenges the truth of this assertion. Could it be seriously suggested that dreaming of being presented to the Pope is qualitatively indistinguishable from actually being presented to him? [S&S, p. 48] For we have the phrase "a dream-like quality" which would suggest that there is a

means of distinguishing dreams from our waking experiences. Similarly, Austin contends that it is simply not true to say that seeing a bright green after-image against a white wall is exactly like seeing a bright green patch actually on the wall; or that seeing a white wall through blue glasses is exactly like seeing a blue wall; or that seeing pink rats while having the D.T.s is exactly like seeing real pink rats; or that seeing a stick refracted in water is exactly like seeing a bent stick. [S&S, p. 49] In each of these cases we may say the same thing, e.g., "It looks green", "It looks bent", but the experiences are obviously different.

Austin further charges that the argument from illusion seems to rely on the erroneous assumption that veridical and delusive experiences must be qualitatively indistinguishable because if they were distinguishable we would never be deluded. [S&S, p. 51] He argues, however, that from the fact that we are sometimes deluded, or mistaken by failing to distinguish between A from B, it does not follow that A and B must thereby be indistinguishable. He asks, "What sort of reception would I be likely to get from a professional tea-taster, if I were to say to him, "But there can't be any difference between the flavours of these two brands of tea, for I regularly fail to distinguish between them?" [S&S, pp. 51-2] While this is not to deny that there might be circumstances where delusive and veridical perceptions are in fact qualitatively indistinguishable, Austin argues that these cases are much rarer, are more

exceptional, than sense-data philosophers suggest; hence, the perceptual situation that is depicted is an inadequate basis for any general theory of perception. [S&S, p. 52]

(8) Having offered his own point-by-point critique of the argument from illusion, Austin now turns to consider criticisms of the argument made by Ayer in FEK. As was noted in Chapter One, Ayer contends that philosophers have mistakenly supposed that the argument from illusion concerns a matter of fact, i.e., the existence of a sense-datum, when in fact it concerns a matter of language. [See above, pp. 20-5] The introduction of the sense-datum terminology is intended to enable us to deal with problems which are presented by the argument from illusion, that is, problems arising from the fact that "material things can appear to have qualities that they do not really have, and can appear to exist when they do not." [FEK, p. 68] In the case of the partly immersed stick that looks bent, we are to speak of perceiving a "sense-datum" so that we are able to describe the presented property, e.g., "bentness", without implying its instantiation by a material object. The choice of the sense-datum vocabulary is said to be merely a matter of "linguistic convenience". Ayer argues, then, that while the sense-datum vocabulary is adopted in order to allow us to describe how things appear, as distinct from how they really are, it is equally possible to maintain that every appearance of an object reveals in fact how it is. For instance, in the case where a penny looks round from one

viewpoint and elliptical from another, we could choose to deny the assumption that the real shape of the penny remains the same when we change our point of view. [FEK, pp. 14-5] We could say that in each case we are seeing the coin as it really is; a contradiction arises only when we add the assumption that the real shape of the penny must remain the same. Ayer has no doubt that by "postulating a greater number of material things and regarding them as being more variable and evanescent than we normally do," we should be able to deal with any other case in an similar way. [FEK, p. 17]

Austin finds all of this ridiculous: "If we allow ourselves this degree of insouciant latitude, surely we shall be able to deal - in a way, of course - with absolutely anything." [S&S, p. 58] In Ayer's discussion of language, there are no facts that determine our choice of language. Austin contends, therefore, that the only facts which Ayer recognizes are facts about sense-data, i.e., about the nature of 'sensible appearances' or the 'phenomena'. As a result, Austin charges that Ayer does not really regard the issue concerning the theory of sense-data as being purely verbal: "his real view is that in fact we perceive only sense-data". [S&S, pp. 59-60] Thus, according to Austin, it becomes clear that "Ayer's linguistic doctrine really rests squarely on the old Berkelian, Kantian ontology of the 'sensible manifold'". [S&S, p. 61]

(9) Against Ayer, Austin contends that there are certain facts about language. While Ayer seems to put forward the notion that the words "real", "really", "real shape", "really round", etc. can be used in any way we wish, Austin contends that each of these words in fact has quite specific uses, and that it makes a great deal of difference how they are used. For example, Austin argues that "real" is a trouser-word because it is the negative use that "wears the trousers". [S&S, pp. 70ff] Hence, we wouldn't characterize something as being real unless there was a possibility of its being not real. Real silk is opposed to synthetic silk; real ducks are contrasted with decoy or toy ducks; real flowers are distinguished from artificial ones. Austin argues, then, that the question as to whether or not something is "real" is meaningful only given the possibility of a certain kind of "nonreality" which is appropriate for a specific kind of thing.⁸ Hence, we can see that the problem with the epistemologist's concern about the reality of material things in general is that "real" has no positive content. Thus, it can't be an object of theory. While Ayer suggests that we could identify the real properties of an object (of any object) as those which it appears to have under conditions which afford the best basis for prediction, Austin maintains that what is called real cannot be considered in isolation from the application of the term to a particular objects: "real" is said to be an adjective which is substantive-hungry. [S&S, pp. 68-9] Unlike the

assertion "This is pink", "This is real" does not amount to a definite assertion unless it is further specified, e.g., "This is real silk" or "This is a real duck". As a result, Austin argues that "we must have an answer to the question 'A real what?', if the question 'Real or not?' is to have a definite sense." [S&S, p. 69]

(10) While what is "real" can be considered only in terms of a particular case, Austin also argues that there are cases where the distinction between real and unreal is inapplicable. Austin asks: "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?" [S&S, p. 67] And the real colour of the sky: "We say that the sun in the evening sometimes looks red - well, what colour is it really?" [S&S, p. 66] It is pretty obvious, Austin argues, that there are no answers to these questions; neither are there any rules according to which, nor procedures by which, these answers can be determined. [S&S, p. 67] Hence, Ayer's suggestion that an object's real properties should be considered those that it appears to have under the most predictive conditions is seen not to cover the case where we say of a woman, "That's not the real colour of her hair", on the grounds that she has dyed it. [S&S, p. 65] Similarly, we can imagine the situation where upon looking at a ball of wool in a shop we say, "That's not its real colour". But by this do we mean that it won't look this colour in ordinary daylight, or that wool isn't this colour before it is dyed?

Austin argues in this case, as in any other case, that you can't tell what we mean solely by the words that we use: it makes a difference, for instance, whether what we are talking about is the kind of thing that is customarily dyed. [S&S, p. 65] Ayer's attempt to give "real" a general definition fails, and with it goes the question of how appearance relates to reality.⁹ There is no one way that things are real. Hence, to the extent that Ayer's linguistic doctrine is based on an ontology of the "sensible manifold", then what it says about language is groundless.

(11) In FEK, Ayer had distinguished between two familiar senses of the word "see": one in which to say that something was seen implied that it existed but did not imply that it had the qualities that it appeared to have, e.g., "I see a bent stick", and another where to say that something was seen did not admit of its lacking the qualities that it appeared to have, but did not imply that it existed, e.g. "I see something bent" (in the case of refraction). [FEK, pp. 20-2; ARS, p. 135] Austin simply denies that there is this second sense of "see". If we claim that something is seen, he says, we must imply that it exists in some sense; for otherwise what can be said to have these qualities? [S&S, p. 95n] In taking an example that is supplied by Ayer, Austin argues that if what I see can be described as a huge star, bigger than the earth, and also as a silvery speck, no bigger than a sixpence, this fact does not of itself prove so much as the existence of different senses of "see":

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. [S&S, p. 98]

The fact that we can normally describe, identify, and classify things in different ways makes it unnecessary and misguided to hunt up different senses of "see". [S&S, p. 100] For when we consider the situations where we use words, we find the different ways of saying what we see will depend upon the particular circumstances of the case. And not only will there be different ways of saying what is seen, but there will also be different ways of seeing something. Hence, we would expect a distant star to look like a silver speck when viewed from where we are on the earth, and there is no need to distinguish a specific sense of "see" to account for this fact.

(12) According to Ayer, sense-data philosophers have decided to use "see" 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". [FEK, p. 24] Behind the effort at distinguishing different senses of perceptual verbs, e.g. "see", "perceive", Austin detects the wish to produce a statement which is incorrigible. [S&S, pp. 103ff] And he argues that towards this end Ayer has invented a sense of "see" (or "perceive") where what is seen (or perceived) has to exist and has to be as it appears so that in saying what I see (or perceive) in this sense I can't be wrong. [S&S, p. 103] The pursuit of the

incorrigible is one of the most "venerable bugbears" in the history of philosophy. In hankering for something that is absolutely certain, knowledge is held to have foundations. [S&S, pp. 105-6] Hence, in the case of the partly immersed stick that looks bent, the possible falsity of our perceptual judgement is thought to be derived from the inference based on sense experience, and not from the experience itself. Ayer also wants to determine the "foundations of empirical knowledge"; hence, he distinguishes a certain kind or form of sentence with which it is impossible to be mistaken. This goal, Austin argues, is completely unattainable; there isn't, and there couldn't be, any one kind of sentence which as such is incapable, once uttered, of being subsequently amended or retracted. [S&S, p. 112] "For ... the question of truth and falsehood does not turn on only what a sentence is, nor yet on what it means, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered." [S&S, p. 111] As a result, the incorrigibility of a statement must be considered along with the facts of a case that contribute to fixing its meaning. In instances where there are no good reasons for retracting a statement, this is because the speaker is in, or has got herself into, the very best of positions for making that statement. [S&S, p. 114] In such an instance, Austin admits that it might be possible to represent what someone knows in terms of a foundation of evidence upon which inferential super-structures are constructed. But it would be a mistake

to suppose that the same 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." [S&S, p. 124] For the status of any particular sentence, i.e. whether it is true or false, whether it is evidence, cannot be considered in isolation from the specific circumstances where it operates.

(13) In FEK, Ayer had argued that the truth of any particular material object statement entails the truth of some set of experiential statements which can be adduced as evidence for it; hence, the possible verification of a (non-analytic) statement is said to constitute a criterion for its significance. [FEK, pp. 97, 107, 112] But given the fact that no finite set of statements about experience can ever formally entail a statement about a material thing, he also says that no statement about a material object is ever "conclusively verifiable". [FEK, p. 239] Against this, Austin argues first that we must rely on evidence only when we are not in a position to see the thing itself. For example, if there is a pig in plain sight, then I don't need evidence for its existence and it is wrong to characterize the situation as one where I am simply collecting evidence for the truth of the assertion "It's a pig". [S&S, p. 115] Ayer would require evidence for an assertion on each and

every occasion. Secondly, Austin argues that it is not the case that the formulation of evidence is the function of any special sort of sentence: "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". [S&S, p. 111] Any kind of sentence can serve as evidence for a statement given the right circumstances. For example, Austin argues that "it is not true in general that statements about how things are are 'based on' statements of how things appear, look, or seem and not vice versa. I may say, for example, '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." [S&S, pp. 116-7] Furthermore, while Austin argues that there is no type of sentence which always operates as the evidence for any other type, he also argues that there is no type of sentence which always requires evidence. Hence, he maintains that it is not true that statements about material things, in general, need to be verified. [S&S, p. 117] For instance, if someone remarks, "As a matter of fact I live in Oxford," it might be worth our while to verify this assertion; but the speaker has no need to do this, for he knows it to be true (or false, if he is lying). Doubt does not seem to have a place in this scenario. In fact, we may wonder how the speaker would go

about verifying this and why he or she would try. [S&S, p. 126]

(14) Ayer had argued in FEK that our reference to material things is imprecise or vague in its application to phenomena: the set of experiential statements which would verify any particular material object statement is indefinite. [FEK, p. 242] Austin denies that we are able to divide statements into one type which is vague - material object statements, and another type which is precise - experiential statements. [S&S, pp. 124-5] In the first place, he argues, it is the use of words, and not the words themselves, which is properly called 'vague' or 'precise'. For example, the statement 'It seems to me as if I were seeing something sort of pinkish' might be considered precise in the instance where we are describing the contents of our visual field, but it is exceedingly vague where we are meant to be identifying barnyard animals, i.e. a pig. [S&S, p. 125] According to Austin, the classic "stomping-ground" for issues of precision is in the field of measurement where being "precise" is understood to be a matter of using a sufficiently finely graduated scale. [S&S, p. 127] In this sense, words could be said to be precise when their application is fixed within narrow limits: "duck-egg blue" is more precise than blue". But there is no general answer to the question as to how finely graduated a scale should be, nor how narrowly determined the application of a word should be for precision to be achieved. Austin

argues that this is partly due to the fact that there is no final terminus in making divisions and discriminations, but also because what is precise (enough) for some purposes will be much too rough and crude for others. [S&S, p. 128]

(15) As a final point, Austin argues that after a process of refining down and cutting away in order to arrive at an ideally basic, completely minimal form of sentence, it is wrong to imply that these statements are what we started with:

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 [the philosopher's] 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. [S&S, pp. 141-2]

Austin argues that there are certain times when we want to use a minimally adventurous form of words, by the use of which we can stick our necks out as little as possible, e.g., "It seems to me now as if ...". But we don't begin to hedge our bets unless there is some specific reason to do so, e.g. when we are not quite sure what we are seeing. And it is entirely false to imply that every situation is akin to these quite specific circumstances.

In conclusion, Austin maintains that he has established the following claims:

1. There is no kind or class of sentences ('propositions') of which it can be said 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. [S&S, p. 123]

Sentences, as distinct from statements made in certain circumstances, cannot be divided by these principles into two, three or any number of epistemological classes. The error in Ayer's approach, Austin says, is in neglecting the circumstances in which things are said, and supposing that words alone can be discussed in a quite general way. [S&S, p. 118]

But Ayer is unrepentant. In ARS, he concedes the majority of Austin's points but maintains that they are superficial and beside the main point of the sense-datum theory. Chapter Three will set out the specifics of this response.

¹ F. Copleston, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia", Heythrop Journal 3, 1962, p. 389. Hereinafter referred to as Review.

² Ibid.

³ Winston H.F. Barnes, "The Myth of Sense-Data", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 45, 1944-45, pp. 89-117. Hereinafter referred to as Myth. Murray Kiteley, "The Argument from Illusion: Objects and Objections", Mind 81, 1972, pp. 191-207.

⁴ I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for this point.

⁵ I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for this point.

⁶ This point was clarified for me by Professor Forster.

⁷ Vendler, Review, p. 306.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 306-7.

⁹ This point was clarified for me by Professor Forster.

Chapter 3

A.J. Ayer's Defence of Sense-Data Theory

In ARS, Ayer's main strategy is to acknowledge most of Austin's criticisms but to insist that they are shallow and irrelevant to the central doctrines of the theory of sense-data. The aim of this chapter is to review this response. Each of Ayer's counter-arguments will be considered in the general order in which they are presented. These points are numbered so that they can be compared with the points which have been set out in our previous discussion of S&S.¹

In S&S, Austin had argued that sense-datum philosophers typically proceed as follows: A) They provide examples where our perception is held to be illusory, e.g. the bent stick. Then they call what we directly perceive in these instances a "sense-datum". B) Then they go on to argue that there is no feature of our experience which marks these instances as being specifically illusions, i.e., there is no difference in kind between illusory and veridical experiences. C) From there they claim that in any given perceptual situation, what we directly experience is always a sense-datum. D) Hence, they conclude that any perceptual claim is based on evidence, the existence of which we can know for certain, although we may be in error about the conclusions that we draw from them.² [S&S, pp. 20-2, 44-5] All of this, Austin had argued, is no more than a philosopher's myth. [S&S, pp. 6-32] We have no great problem with illusions in our

ordinary life; hence, there is no great need to introduce the existence of entities like 'sense-data' (or 'ideas', or 'sensa', etc.), or to supplement our ordinary perceptual language with a sense-datum vocabulary. Our ordinary language is nuanced enough to allow us to differentiate and to deal with illusions, delusions, and hallucinations; and while on occasion we might be deceived by what we see, e.g., we might take a woman on stage with her head in a black bag to be headless, we easily learn to recognize that these are illusions. [S&S, p. 3] Hence, there is no need to introduce sense-data in order to explain these cases.

In ARS, Ayer argues that these criticisms are beside the point of the doctrine which they would dismantle. Rather than resting on a question of the significance of actual illusions, or of the adequacy of our ordinary language to deal with these, the sense-datum theorist's position rests on a point of logic: namely, that every perceptual statement goes beyond the perceptual evidence upon which it is based. He writes:

As I see it, the point is purely a logical one. It is that in any such situation as that described by Austin the occurrence of the experience which gives rise to the perceptual judgement is logically consistent with the judgement's being false. [ARS, pp. 118-9]

(1) Ayer admits that the sense-datum theorist does tend to over-simplify the view of the plain man with regard to what he sees (or "perceives"). Accordingly, the plain man is often portrayed as believing that he perceives one kind of thing, i.e., a "material object", and examples of

material objects are usually confined to what Austin characterizes as "moderate sized specimens of dry goods", e.g. chairs and tables. The result of this, Ayer argues, is that in drawing the distinction between material things and sense-data, sense-datum theorists have not sufficiently considered how such things as shadows and photographs fit into their scheme. [ARS, p. 118] But this does not affect the logical soundness of their arguments, which concern the formal relations between statements of fact and not the nature of any particular fact. Hence, while Austin contends that the dichotomy between sense-data and material objects is already presumed when sense-datum theorists describe facts like what the "plain man" believes, Ayer maintains that these facts are secondary to and illustrative of a fundamental logical point concerning the formal structure of factual statements in general.

(2) The truth of a material object claim does not follow logically from any finite set of statements which describe the contents of our experience; given this logical point, sense-datum philosophers have maintained that the existence of a material object is uncertain. According to Austin, however, this wrongly supposes that there is some uncertainty about the existence of an object, e.g., a chair, even when it is in plain sight and there is no reason to doubt what we are seeing. In this case, the plain man would quite rightly reply, "Well, if that's not seeing a real chair, then I don't know what is." [S&S, p. 10] In ARS,

Ayer agrees that we would not normally say that the existence of a chair was uncertain unless we had some reason to do so, e.g., if we had something wrong with our eyes, the circumstances are in some sense unusual, etc. [ARS, p. 118] But this is irrelevant to the sense-data theorist's point that these claims are uncertain since "the statement that the chair exists does not follow logically from any statement, or indeed from any finite number of statements, which are limited to describing the content of the observer's experience". [ARS, p. 119]

Even if we have a use for the word "certain" which makes it proper to say that in particular circumstances it is certain that the chair exists, Ayer argues that a statement asserting its existence is still not logically deducible from statements describing our experience: "the certainty in question is not based on logical entailment." [ARS, p. 119] Hence, this technical use of "certain", though uncommon, is no less apt. But Austin had argued that it is wrong to suppose that verification consists of checking a set of statements which is entailed by, for example, "That's a chair", and that it is wrong to suggest that we need evidence when the chair is in plain view. [S&S, pp. 115-23] The fact that we are unable to verify a statement under such conditions is not proof that propositions cannot be conclusively verified, or that they always stand in need of verification, but rather it is an indication that verification has been totally

misrepresented. [S&S, pp. 117-8] Ayer accepts this point as a "comment on ordinary usage". He admits that as a general rule,

when one speaks of having evidence for a proposition p, one expects it to be understood that one is not entirely convinced of the truth of p. ... If I think that I know that p, I am underplaying my hand, and so misleading my audience, if I say no more than that I have good evidence for p. [ARS, p. 121]

But it would be rash to lay any philosophical weight on the fact that I would not normally say that I have evidence for the truth of a claim when I know, i.e. I am sure, that it is true, since "my knowing that p is certainly not inconsistent with my having good evidence for it." [ARS, p. 121] In fact, Ayer contends, in many instances it is improper to claim to know p if you do not have such evidence. I am taken as committing myself more strongly to the truth of p when I assert that p rather than claim that I have good evidence for p. While we are normally not in the habit of making a weaker claim when the stronger one is available, Ayer argues that it does not follow from this that when I know that p, and it seems odd to ask for evidence for p, that I do not have evidence for p. Thus, the fact that it is not "good usage" to speak of having evidence for the existence of a chair when it is in plain view does not entail that seeing a chair does not involve having evidence for its existence. On the contrary, Ayer contends, "the truth is that it is very strong evidence: and it does not

cease to be evidence just because of its strength". [ARS, p. 122]

This in no way implies that we go through a conscious process of inference. According to Ayer, those who say that even the most straightforward judgement of perception like "This is a chair" embodies an inference are trying to make the same logical point as those who say that all our judgements are uncertain:

In both instances the contention is that the judgement goes beyond the data on which it is grounded, that it claims more than is contained in the experience which gives rise to it, that it makes assumptions which may be false, consistently with this experience. [ARS, p. 122]

Questions as to whether these inferences are made consciously or unconsciously, hesitantly or spontaneously, are psychological ones and not to the logical point of Ayer's philosophical thesis. [ARS, p. 122]

Hence, Ayer argues, Austin's comment that we do not normally verify the truth of a statement, e.g., "That's a chair", by checking out the truth of other statements, e.g., "It looks ...", "It feels...", is entirely beside the point. The contention that all judgements of perception are the conclusions of inductive inferences is based on the fact that even with the most unambitious of perceptual statements, e.g., "This is a chair", the speaker commits herself to a series of assumptions that go beyond her immediate evidence. [ARS, p. 123] For example, Ayer argues that it is a requirement of a material object that: (a) it

occupies a position in three-dimensional space; (b) it endures throughout a period of time; (c) it is accessible to touch as well as to sight; (d) it is accessible to different observers; and (e) it continues to exist even when no one is perceiving it. [ARS, p. 123] All these assumptions are implied by the claim that "This is a chair". Ayer acknowledges Austin's point that not all of these assumptions hold of every type of object. Shadows and images, for example, are accessible only to the sense of sight, and there is a sense in which they do not occupy space, although they are spatially located; however, they are accessible to different observers and are capable of existing unperceived. [ARS, p. 126] And in the case of statements based on the other senses, Ayer argues that it can hardly be disputed that our judgements are inferential: when we identify an object only by the noise it makes or the taste or smell it has, quite obviously my judgement embodies an inference from the effect on my senses to the existence of an unobserved cause. [ARS, p. 126] The inferential nature of our knowledge of objects is less evident in the case of sight and touch, as we commonly speak of touching or seeing objects and not their visual or tactual effects. But it is certainly possible to be mistaken about what we see or feel, and this possibility is reflected in the claim that our knowledge is inferential.

As a preliminary summation, Ayer concludes:

I don't see how it can reasonably be denied that our ordinary judgements of perception go beyond the evidence on which they are based. Another way of expressing this fact would be to say that they are conclusions of inductive inferences. But if they are the conclusions of inductive inferences, it ought to be possible to formulate the premises. It ought to be possible to make statements which are tailored to our experience, in the sense that they offer a qualitative description of what is sensibly presented on a given occasion, without carrying any further implications of any kind whatsoever. [ARS, p. 126]

From this vantage point, any appeal to normal practices or ordinary usage is irrelevant as such observations are not inconsistent with Ayer's logical analysis of the formal relations between classes of sentences.³

(3) Ayer now turns to consider Austin's claim that "talk of deception only makes sense against a general background of non-deception". [S&S, p. 11] Austin had argued it was impossible that the plain man should ever be systematically deceived, i.e., that what he believes he is perceiving, i.e., a "material object", is always something of a different kind, i.e., a "sense-datum". Ayer agrees that on the rare occasions where our senses deceive us, we are able to discover this by checking these odd cases against the normal ones. [ARS, p. 126] And yet he argues that this point is ineffective as an argument against the sense-datum theorist, for it establishes only that we take some perceptual judgements to be false because they conflict with others we take to be true. "But this gives us no guarantee, in any particular instance, that the judgement we take to be true will not itself turn out to be false." [ARS, p. 127] And it is this possibility of error that the sense-

datum philosopher wishes to integrate into a general theory of perception (or perceptual statements). As a result, we are able to accommodate the case where we are not deceived by arguing that the assumptions which are involved in the perceptual judgement are corroborated by further experience.

(4) Austin had criticized the way philosophers have used the term "directly see" in claiming that we never directly see (or "perceive") material things. [S&S, pp. 14-9] In so doing, Ayer contends that he belabours the obvious point that philosophers are not using these expressions in their ordinary sense. [ARS, p. 127] In response to Austin's complaint that sense-datum theorists provide no explanation or definition of the way in which they are using these terms, Ayer provides the following definition: To say of something that it is "directly seen" is to refer to it as a visual datum, without implying anything about its status. A statement of this kind would be an "experiential statement", with the force of the word "directly" meaning to make the point that "these statements provide the evidence on which all our perceptual judgements are based". [ARS, p. 127] As the basis for the verification of perceptual statements, these claims are themselves unverifiable. They are immediately grasped by having a certain visual (or aural, etc.) presentation.

(5) In FEK, Ayer had remarked that what leads philosophers to deny that they were directly aware of material things is their acceptance of the argument from

illusion. [FEK, pp. 1-11] The argument is based on empirical facts:

First the existence of hallucinations, mainly exemplified by cases of seeing objects which are not really there, such as Macbeth's dagger and the drunkard's pink rats;

Secondly cases, like that of mistaking a wax figure for a flesh and blood policeman at Madame Tussaud's, where an object is misidentified;

Thirdly the variations in the appearance of an object which may be due to perspective, the conditions of the light, or the presence of some distorting medium ...;

Finally the dependence of the way an object looks or otherwise appears to us on the nature of the physical conditions under which it is perceived and on the physiological and psychological states of the observer. [ARS, p. 128]

According to Ayer, Austin's main comment on these facts is that they are not all the same, and it is misleading to lump them all together. Austin correctly pointed out that in many cases the word "illusion" is a misnomer, because the observer is normally not deceived by what she sees. But Ayer contends that this is unimportant to the logical point of the thesis. It is the possibility of misperception that is meant to be introduced into a general theory of perception. Hence, Ayer argues that it unnecessary to rely on the fact that an illusion occurs, or that anyone is actually deceived: "It is enough that these things be possible; and this possibility is already secured by the fact that our judgements of perception go beyond the data on which they are based." [ARS, p. 129]

(6) Austin had accused Ayer of using the words "looks", "appears" and "seems" interchangeably, when in fact each has quite different uses, and it often makes a great deal of difference which one we use. [S&S, p. 33] Ayer comments that while much of what Austin has to say on this topic is interesting, it is nonetheless irrelevant to the main point at issue. [ARS, p. 130] All that the sense-data theorist requires is that the purely phenomenal sense in which he employs words like "looks" and "appears" should be legitimate, and once this is granted it does not greatly matter to him what word is chosen to mark it. While Austin is quite right to remark that a statement about how something looks is just as open to public confirmation as a statement about how something is (S&S, p.43), the fact remains that the common dispositional sense of a word like "look", e.g., "Petrol looks like water", is based on its occurrent sense, e.g., "They both look translucent". We determine how something of a certain kind will look to normal observers under normal conditions on the basis of the way things of that kind look to certain persons on particular occasions. [ARS, p. 130] Thus, Ayer concludes, the phenomenal sense is fundamental.

(7) In FEK, Ayer had maintained that "there is no intrinsic difference in kind between those of our perceptions that are veridical in their presentation of material things and those that are delusive". [FEK, pp. 5-6] Austin wondered whether it was being suggested that my

experience while dreaming of being presented to the Pope is "qualitatively indistinguishable" from actually being presented to the Pope. [S&S, p. 48] There are obvious differences in these cases. After all, Austin says, we do have the phrase "a dream-like quality". [S&S, pp. 48-9]

To this, Ayer has two different replies.⁴ In the first place, he argues that while it might always be possible to find a qualitative difference between two kinds of things, this difference is often discovered only in retrospect and it is not always obvious at the time that we are having the experience. [ARS, p. 131] Ayer concedes that if I have both dreamed of being presented to the Pope, and have actually been presented to him, these experiences would seem very different in retrospect. "But at the same time," he says, "when I am dreaming of being presented to the Pope is it obvious to me that this is not really happening? Is it always clear from the quality of the dream itself that it is only a dream? Plainly not, otherwise no one would ever suffer nightmares." [ARS, p. 131] Hence, any general theory of perception must include the possibility of being deceived by our dreams, i.e., by taking delusive perception as veridical.

In his second rebuttal, Ayer argues that while there might always be some qualitative difference to be found between our delusive and veridical perceptions, our practical ability to tell the difference will depend upon our past experience: "once one has learned about

perspective, refractions, and so forth one can, usually though not in fact invariably, discriminate between delusive and veridical experiences." [ARS, p. 132] But it is still the case that there is nothing in the character of the experience itself which allows us to make this distinction.

(8) In FEK, Ayer had maintained that the main issue between rival theories of perception, i.e., between sense-data theory and naive realism, is linguistic and not factual. [FEK, p. 25] The sense-datum philosopher, he claimed, is not making an empirical statement, but is recommending a technical terminology, i.e., a sense-datum language, which allows us to refer to the contents of our experiences independently of the material objects that they are taken to present. [FEK, p. 26] Austin charged, however, that Ayer does not believe that absolutely every dispute is verbal: he claims that sometimes there are empirical disagreements about the nature of the 'sensible appearances', i.e., the sense-data. From this, Austin concluded that "the apparent sophistication of Ayer's 'linguistic' doctrine really rests squarely on the old Berkeleian, Kantian ontology of the 'sensible manifold'". [S&S, pp. 60-1]

In ARS, Ayer admits that he does take it for granted that we are presented with a "sensible manifold" which is open for us to characterize in different ways, to organize in accordance with different conceptual schemes. [ARS, p. 133] Ayer maintains that he does so rightly. But he goes

on to argue that this does not mean that organization which our concepts might take is limitless; rather, certain rules will be found to be untenable, e.g., self-contradictory. Hence, Ayer says that he is not advocating a program of talking any way we wish, as Austin had charged, but is exploring alternatives to our present conceptual scheme. The question of the viability of a particular language will be determined by trying it out and seeing where and how it breaks down; the fact that we do not normally speak this way is beside the point. [ARS, p. 134]

(9) Furthermore, Ayer notes that while he was reproached by Austin for his cavalier use of "really", the account which Austin himself provides of our actual use of "real" is inadequate. This is shown by Jonathan Bennett, who identifies several uses of "real", including an approving use (e.g., "Now this is real coffee!"), a stressed classification use (e.g., "Waffles in real maple syrup"), an intensifying use (e.g., "A really ugly waist coat"), and an ellipsis-excluding use (e.g., A "real dog" as opposed to a stuffed dog, a dream dog, or a picture of a dog).⁵ In characterizing "real" as a trouser-word, Austin limits himself primarily to the ellipsis-excluding use of the word.⁶ But by considering instances where we are mistaken in our perceptual claims, Ayer's main interest is in the classifying use of the word whereby we contrast what is real with what is apparent (e.g., "The penny looks elliptical from this angle but it is really round"). According to

Ayer, it is a simple linguistic fact that this distinction exists and can be used. [ARS, p. 134]

Nevertheless, Ayer admits that Austin is successful in showing that there are various other ways in which the word "real" is used: we talk of real ducks as opposed to decoy ducks, real pearls in contrast to cultured pearls, a real sword as compared to a toy one. [ARS, p. 134] But this is not to deny the fact that we sometimes contrast what is real with what is apparent, and what is real with what is illusory, as in the case where the drunkard claims to see pink rats. According to Ayer, "the sense-datum theorist concentrates on these distinctions because they are the ones that are relevant to his argument. The fact that he does not deal with distinctions which are not relevant is not a reproach to him." [ARS, p. 134]

(10) In discussing cases where the perceptible qualities of an object are contrasted with its real properties, e.g., the elliptical penny, Ayer had suggested in FEK that our procedure was to identify the object's real properties as those that it normally appeared to have under conditions which afforded the best basis for prediction. [FEK, pp. 267-9] For example, if we see a penny from straight on, we are better able to predict how it will look from another viewpoint; hence, we say that the real shape of a penny is round. Austin replied, however, that there are many cases where this distinction does not apply: What is the real colour of the sun or the real shape of a cat? [S&S,

pp. 66-7] Ayer acknowledges Austin's point, but goes on to argue that does not prove that his explanation of the distinction was incorrect in the cases where it does apply: "I agree that it does not cover the case where we say of a woman 'That's not the real colour of her hair', on the ground that she has dyed it. I was not concerned with the distinction, also sometimes marked by the word "real", between the natural and the artificial. Could Austin really (i.e. genuinely) have believed that I was?" [ARS, pp. 134-5]

(11) In F&K, Ayer had suggested that there are two different senses of the word "see": one of which to say that something was seen implied that it existed, but did not imply that it had the qualities that it appeared to have, and another where to say that something was seen did not admit of its lacking qualities that it appeared to have, but this did not imply that it existed. [ARS, p. 135] In S&S, Austin denied that there is any second sense of the word "see", i.e. where we are unable to admit of an object's not having the qualities that we think it has. [S&S, p. 95] Ayer replies that Austin is wrong on a point of "linguistic fact". For when we speak of a drunkard's seeing pink rats, we do not imply that the rats actually exist, and yet we do not dispute the claim that the rats actually appeared pink to him. "Admittedly", Ayer says, "[this] second sense of 'see' is uncommon, but that is because the occasions for employing it are so". [ARS, p. 135]

(12) Turning to the question of the incorrigibility of statements, Ayer recognizes that this is an important one for epistemology: "the admission of incorrigible propositions puts a stop to what otherwise threatens to become an infinite regress". [ARS, p. 137] If proposition p is known to be true on the basis of some other true proposition q, and if proposition q must also be known on the basis of another proposition, then this would lead to an infinite regress unless some propositions were knowable in their own right, i.e., it would be senseless to say that a person who accepted them could be mistaken about their truth. Ayer maintains that the most obvious candidates for these are sentences directly describing the contents of our experience. For when we misdescribe the way things appear to us, our mistake is verbal and not factual. [FEK, pp. 83-4] Hence, I might call a colour "magenta" when I should have said "vermillion", and do so because I don't know what shade of colour is properly called magenta. But in this case, I am misnaming and not misperceiving. Austin had argued that this example shows that we can be mistaken about the way things appear, e.g., I can be brought to see that the colour before me just isn't magenta. [S&S, p. 113] Hence, experiential statements are not incorrigible.

On this point, Ayer is not sure whether Austin is right or wrong. While he is "inclined to think" that experiential statements can embody factual errors, Ayer still wishes to maintain the "slightly weaker" principle that the subject is

the final authority regarding the truth of any experiential statement: "the criterion for saying that his description was mistaken will be his own decision to revise it." [ARS, p. 138] However, he goes on to argue that the falsity of even this weaker principle would not of itself prove fatal to his main contention that perceptual statements are founded on statements describing the contents of our experience. This is because the analysis of propositions is based on a logical rule concerning the meaning of (non-analytic) statements; hence, the existence of some terminus for analysis is a logical requirement. Ayer acknowledges, then, that "it would be a weakness in my general position if I were unable to give a satisfactory account of the criteria by which the truth of experiential statements themselves is to be determined." [ARS, p. 138] Experiential statements are said to be true (or false) to the extent that they describe (or misdescribe) the contents of our experience.

(13) In FEK, Ayer had argued that the support which experiential statements give to statements which imply the existence of physical objects never amounts to logical entailment. [FEK, pp. 44-5] The complete verification of a material object statement would involve the self-contradictory task of completing an infinite series of verifications. According to Austin, this seems to imply that our ordinary statements are inconclusive because nothing short of all possible tests could ever suffice for establishing their truth. [S&S, pp. 117-8. 119-20] Ayer

admits that the idea of conclusive verification as an end which is pursued but never attained is misleading because it seems that we are never in the position to know for certain. [ARS, p. 138] But he goes on to argue that this is no more than a picturesque way of making a logical point, i.e. that while the truth of any material statement entails the truth of some set of statements about experience, the set of such experiential statements is indefinite. [ARS, p. 138] This is not to say that we are unable to verify a statement for our own practical purposes; on this Ayer agrees with Austin. However, Ayer contends that he wishes to hold the further position that "statements about physical objects are at a theoretical level with respect to experiential statements". [ARS, p. 138]

(14) Similarly, Ayer had argued in FEK that because the set of experiential statements which are entailed by any particular perceptual statements is indefinite, our references to material things are imprecise or vague in their application to phenomena. [FEK, p. 242] Austin denied that there is any class of statements that are of themselves imprecise or vague: "Usually it is the uses of words, not words themselves, that are properly called 'vague'". [S&S, p. 126] Ayer admits that while perhaps he could have expressed himself more clearly, what he was intending to say is in fact true: logical relations between material object and experiential statements are non-reciprocal in that while the truth of a material object statement entails the truth

of some experiential statement, the contrary is not also the case. [ARS, p. 139]

(15) Finally, Ayer responds to Austin's comment that experiential statements are typically not foundational, but are arrived at by a process of progressive hedging, e.g., There's a tiger - there seems to be a tiger - it seems to me that there is a tiger - it seems to me now that there is a tiger - it seems to me now as if there were a tiger. [S&S, pp. 141-2] Once again, Ayer argues that this point is irrelevant to the logical role of an experiential statement. In maintaining that perceptual statements are "based on" experiential statements, Ayer insists he is not implying that the one is consciously inferred from the other. Rather than claiming that we go through a psychological process of accumulating experiential statements before venturing a perceptual statement, Ayer is making only the logical point about the entailment relations between two classes of statements. Perceptual statements are based on experiential statements "just in the sense that it is necessary for any perceptual statement to be true that some experiential statement be true, but possible for the experiential statement to be true even though the perceptual statement is false". [ARS, p. 139]

Ayer concludes, then, that not only has Austin failed in his attempt to refute the sense-datum theory, but that he has made "very little attempt" to do so. In particular, he argues that Austin has not established the claim that (a)

that there is no particular kind of sentence which as such is evidence-providing, nor (b) that it is untrue that statements about 'material things' are always, and must be, supported by evidence. [ARS, p. 140] Having failed to refute the central doctrines of sense-datum theory, Ayer contends that it is "a tribute to [Austin's] wit and to the strength of his personality that he was able to persuade so many philosophers that he had succeeded". [ARS, p. 140]

We might conclude, then, that Ayer defends the sense-datum theory by changing the orientation of its major axis. Rather than being about what we perceive, Ayer contends that the sense-data theory is about how we describe what we perceive. A sense-datum vocabulary is useful because it allows us to refer to a perceptual datum, and not infer anything about its existence. Ayer argues that the significance of the argument from illusion is logical and not empirical, that is, incidents of illusion are meant to show that the description of an experience which gives rise to a perceptual judgement is logically consistent with that judgement being false. [ARS, pp. 118-9] A perceptual statement like 'That is a chair' is characterized as the conclusion of an inductive inference so as to integrate the logical possibility of error into a general theory of perception. As a result, Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are said to be trivially linguistic in that they ignore the formal relations between classes of statements.

Austin's general reply is that the inferential relations between statements are in fact determined by the practical circumstances where any particular statement is used. For example, he argues that we cannot infer from the fact that petrol looks like water that petrol is water. [S&S, p. 39] But this is due not to the formal relations between types of sentences, i.e., between material object and experiential statements, but to the nature of the situation where these words make sense. Hence, by claiming that water looks like petrol, we are not implying that water is in fact petrol. In this case, as in any case, "just what is meant and what can be inferred (if anything) can be decided only by examining the full circumstances in which the words are used." [S&S, p. 41]

There is a stand-off between Austin and Ayer: each is unwilling to accept the legitimacy of the other's criticisms. Ayer admits most of Austin's comments about the ordinary use of words, but maintains that these are philosophically irrelevant to the extent that they ignore the logic of language. Austin maintains, on the other hand, that in characterizing the logic of language, Ayer restricts his investigation to a limited set of examples and in so doing produces an oversimplistic model of how language works. In the following chapter, we will show how Austin's points are irrelevant from Ayer's methodological viewpoint, and yet are crucial in Austin's view. Ayer studies the formal relations between classes of statements, while Austin

considers the actual use of words and sentences. Because there is no general agreement as to the point at issue, there is no general criterion by which any particular point can be judged to be relevant or valid. In this case, the admissibility of evidence is at issue, and not merely its truth or falsity.

¹ The point-by-point structure of this discussion is also used by L. W. Forguson in "Has Ayer Vindicated the Sense-Datum Theory?", Symposium on J.L. Austin, ed. K.T. Fann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 309-341. Hereinafter referred to as AVS. I have found both the content and the structure of Professor Forguson's discussion to be very helpful in understanding the dynamics of the Austin-Ayer dispute.

² Stephen H. Bickham provides a particularly concise review of the argument from illusion in "What is at Issue in the Ayer-Austin Dispute about Sense-Data?", Midwestern Journal of Philosophy, Spring, 1975, p. 1.

³ I am grateful to Professor Forster for this point.

⁴ Forguson, AVS, pp. 330-1.

⁵ Jonathan Bennett, "Real", Mind 75, 1966, pp. 501-515.

⁶ Ibid., p. 508.

Chapter 4

The Austin-Ayer Dispute

The aim of this chapter is to establish that there is a stand-off between Austin and Ayer.¹ More specifically, we will show that each holds a methodological viewpoint so fundamentally different from the other that it is impossible for the one to accept the legitimacy of the other's criticisms. From Ayer's point of view Austin's comments about ordinary usage are superficial and beside the point, while from Austin's view Ayer's claims about language are oversimplistic and false. This difference in viewpoint reflects a fundamental difference in method, that is, in each philosopher's conception of the aims and methods that are appropriate for philosophy, and of the role of an "analysis of language" for a philosophical investigation. Hence, an investigation of language is not the neutral means by which the dispute between Austin and Ayer can be decided; for there is no agreement as to the features of language which are relevant and can function as a common criterion. The significance of the linguistic features to which Austin and Ayer refer, i.e., the ordinary use of words and the logical structure of sentences, is derived from the methodological framework that each employs. From Ayer's viewpoint, Austin's comments on the ordinary use of words are superficial and beside the point because they do not consider the logical structure beneath the surface of our

everyday speech. But for Austin, what Ayer characterizes as the 'logical structure' of sentences is determined by the factual circumstances in which we use words; hence, in ignoring these circumstances and attempting to base his generalizations on certain types of sentences, Ayer's claims about language are said to be oversimplistic if not false.²

Both Austin and Ayer characterize their linguistic investigation as being fundamental. According to Ayer, an analysis of the formal structure of sentences is logically prior to any discussion about the truth or falsity of any particular sentence; for the logical structure of a sentence determines its meaningfulness, and it is impossible for a sentence to be true or false and not be meaningful but possible for a statement to be meaningful and not be true or false, such as is the case with analytic tautologies. On the other hand, Austin contends that the meaning of sentences cannot be considered outside the circumstances where a particular sentence is used: "just what is meant and what can be inferred (if anything) can be decided only by examining the full circumstances in which the words are used". [S&S, p. 41] As a result, he argues that any question about the meaning of sentences or the meaning of words must begin with a careful examination of the actual circumstances where such a question would make sense. [Word, p. 56]

In criticizing the other philosopher's claims about language, and in defending their own claims, Austin and Ayer

fall back upon their essential methodological positions. Methodological differences provide the basis for the Austin-Ayer dispute; however, these differences are not actively engaged in the dispute. Because each philosopher presupposes the validity of his own method in criticizing the legitimacy of the other, we will argue that there is a stand-off between Austin and Ayer: each argues past the other, so that the criticisms that the one provides do not affect the force of the other's argument. In the effort to establish this stand-off between Austin and Ayer, we will consider Ayer's fifteen counter-points as they were set out in the previous chapter and will attempt to reply on Austin's behalf, but will show how this would not satisfy Ayer.³ In so doing, we will be guided by two texts: the first is L.W. Forguson's point-by-point defence of Austin's position in "Has Ayer Vindicated the Sense-Datum Theory?"⁴ (AVS). While Forguson is not necessarily convinced of Austin's claims in S&S, he contends that Ayer's criticisms of these in ARS are philosophically unsuccessful. We will also refer to Ayer's reply in "Rejoinder to Professor Forguson"⁵ (R), where he contends that both Austin and Forguson miss the logical point of his thesis. Our treatment will correspond roughly to the points that are taken up by Forguson and Ayer, but we will specifically address the points that we set out in Chapters Two and Three, and our numbering will follow that order.

(1) In ARS, Ayer had contended that Austin fails to refute the sense-data theory because he does not engage its essential philosophical point. The argument from illusion is aimed at the naive realist, who believes that there is ordinarily no distinction between how the world appears and how it really is. Examples where a straight stick when it is partly immersed looks bent, or where the heat haze in the desert is mistaken for a body of water, are used as counterpoints to the philosophical theory that what we directly perceive are material objects: in these cases, the properties that are perceived are found not to belong to the material objects in question. However, Austin had argued that to the extent that the "plain man" is represented as being a naive realist, this is an extreme oversimplification. [S&S, pp. 7-9] In fact, the ordinary man does not believe that he perceives only one kind of thing, i.e., a "material thing", or that material things are always how they appear. In reply, Ayer admitted that sense-datum philosophers have tended to oversimplify the views of the ordinary man. [ARS, pp. 284-5] But taken as a caricature which embodies the philosophical viewpoint of the naive realist, the "plain man" has a rhetorical function in the context of a philosophical dispute. Hence, the fact that the "plain man" is not an ordinary man is irrelevant.

Ferguson takes up Austin's position and denies that 'straight-forward refutation' of the sense-datum philosopher's claims was in fact Austin's primary aim. [AVS,

p. 310] Rather than showing that the sense-datum theory was an inadequate solution to the philosophical problems which are raised by the argument from illusion, Austin's intention was to show that the problems themselves were misconceived:

His general view was that the entire framework of the traditional philosophical controversy within which the sense-datum theory is one alternative should be abandoned. [AVS, p. 310]

The sense-datum theory is plausible only when our options are artificially restricted by a limited set of examples, and we are asked whether what we are perceiving is a "sense-datum" or a "material object". Our problem is dissolved if the perceptual situation is described in its full detail. Forguson contends, then, that in order to rebut Austin's critique of the sense-data theory, Ayer must show that we must refer to "sense-data" in order to adequately account for what we are perceiving in the cases that he considers. [AVS, p. 312] Forguson agrees with Austin that Ayer has failed to make this case.

Ayer replies, however, that it is not necessary that the sense-datum theory is shown to be inevitable; it is enough that it is shown to be possible. [R, p. 342] As an essentially logical point about the formal relations between statements, what must be demonstrated with the sense-datum theory is that it is possible to 'translate' a material object statement into some set of statements about experience. This claim is based on the rule which determines the literal significance of sentences, i.e., the

criterion of verifiability. Of course, this is not to say that we should or must resort to a sense-datum vocabulary in every account of a perceptual illusion; it is a useful convention in the case where we wish to describe the contents of our experience and not entail their material existence. But it is a mistake to suppose that every perceptual situation should and must be described in terms of "material objects". Ayer argues, then, that if the plain man is not a naive realist, then the sense-datum theorist has no quarrel with him. [R, p. 343]

The criterion of verifiability is a central fixture for Ayer because it provides a linguistic basis for his critique of philosophy. In LTL, Ayer argues that a "a great deal of what is commonly called philosophy is metaphysical in character," and that the criterion of verifiability shows metaphysical statements to be without literal significance. [LTL, p. 51] The criterion of verifiability is itself based on the contention that there is a logical form for sentences: the criterion represents the essential logical structure of empirical propositions. According to Ayer, the fact that we would not normally characterize the verification of a statement in terms of the truth of other statements is irrelevant to the specific logical nature of the claim. [ARS, pp. 119-22]

(2) As reflected by the criterion of verifiability, the truth of an experiential statement is entailed by the truth of a material object statement. However, this logical

relation is not reciprocal: the argument from illusion shows that it is possible for an experiential statement to be true while the material object claim that is made on this basis is false. According to Ayer, then, the sense-datum vocabulary is a useful tool for philosophers in that it allows them to describe the contents of experience and yet avoid implying their material existence. Austin argues, on the other hand, that if the sense-datum theory is not required in order to account for instances of illusion, then there is little to gain from the over-simplification and distortion that is inherent with its use. For example, in S&S, Austin charged that by characterizing every ordinary statement as a 'perceptual judgement' based on experiential (or sense-datum) statements, Ayer is implying that every perceptual situation is one where we are always only presented with evidence for our perceptual claims; hence, some sort of judgement is always required. [S&S, pp. 115-6] Austin noted, however, that we are forced to rely on evidence for our perceptual claims only cases where we are unable to perceive something; hence, the evidence that we take for the existence of something, say, a pig, cannot be seeing the thing itself. For when a pig is in plain view, there is no question of relying on evidence - we see straight off that it is a pig and no evidence is required. According to Austin, then, Ayer is entirely misrepresenting "evidence" and "verification" in claiming that some

experiential statement is always required in order to verify our material object claims.

At the bottom of the Austin-Ayer dispute is a fundamental disagreement concerning the nature of a philosophical investigation. Ayer argues that philosophy is essentially logical, and concerns the formal relations between propositions; Austin contends that philosophy is typically obtuse, and obscures the facts of ordinary language and everyday perception. Taking up Austin's example of perceiving a pig, Forguson argues in AVS that what Ayer takes as perceiving evidence for the existence of a pig cannot be simply seeing a pig, but must be taken as only seeming to see a pig - looking at a pig cannot be construed as gathering evidence for its existence. [AVS, p. 316] But if so, the ontological neutrality of sense-data statements describing the pig is only professed. For while the statements are said to be useful because they do not necessarily imply the material existence of the objects that they describe, what they describe cannot be identified as the physical objects that we ordinarily claim to see. [AVS, pp. 313-4] This is because our description can function as evidence only in the absence of an object; hence, the object of perception must be taken as something which is inherent in experience itself, i.e., the 'contents of experience'. [AVS, p. 314]

To this, Ayer replies in R that his point is a logical one in that it concerns the analysis of perceptual

statements and not the analysis of perceptual situations.

[R, p.343] Whereas perceptual statements are characterized as the conclusions of inductive inferences, the claim is based on a logical point that is set out by the argument from illusion, namely, that the occurrence of an experience which gives rise to a perceptual judgement is always logically consistent with that judgement's being false.

[ARS, pp. 118-9] This is a logical requirement for an inductive system. Ayer argues, then, that if perceptual statements can be said to "go beyond" the evidence upon which they are based, then it should be possible to formulate the experiential statements which record this evidence without going beyond it. [R, p. 343] Experiential statements are characterized as "evidence" in the sense where one proposition p is considered as evidence for another proposition q when p supports q but does not entail it. [R, p. 343] In this light, the sense-datum theorist's case against the direct perception of material objects means no more than that experiential statements should not refer to material objects, and this for the reason that by definition experiential statements are barred from carrying any material implications. Ayer argues, then, that from the claim that material objects are not directly seen, it does not follow that physical things cannot be seen: while seeing a pig is not normally taken as evidence for the pig's existence, this is because "seeing a pig" is ordinarily understood as entailing the existence of a pig. [R, p. 343]

In order to avoid the suggestion of this entailment, he spoke in ARS of "seeming to see a pig" and not simply of "seeing a pig". [ARS, 122] In this case, Ayer argues, "seeming to see" is meant to be a neutral formulation that does not carry the implication that we fail to see what we seem to see. [R, p. 343]

Because it is logically consistent for a statement or a set of statements describing our experience to be true while a material object claim that is made on this basis is false, Ayer argued in ARS that by asserting the existence of a material object we are committing ourselves to a series of assumptions:

It is required of the object at least that it shall occupy a position in three dimensional space, that it shall endure throughout a period of time, that it shall be accessible to touch as well as to sight, that it shall be accessible to different observers, and that it shall continue to exist even when no one is perceiving. [ARS, p. 123]

Given these assumptions, it is always possible for our statements about material objects to be mistaken. For example, because the partly immersed stick that looks bent does not also feel bent, we conclude that the 'bent stick' that we see cannot be a material object. Forguson agrees that there are certain conditions for normal perception, and argues that these might include (1) having an experience or a sensation, (2) the exercise of acquired knowledge, and (3) committing ourselves to a number of statements about time, space, accessibility to other observers and other senses,

etc. when we are making statements about physical objects. [AVS, p. 321] But he argues that this admission does not commit us to the conclusion that ordinary perception involves inductive inferences. For on the evidence provided, the contention that perception is inferential is simply a shorthand way of referring to the above facts about perceiving physical objects. [AVS, p. 318] This does not mean that perception is analogous to arriving at conclusions via an internal argument. [AVS, p. 320] While in certain abnormal situations, e.g., when the lighting is poor, we might be said to go through a procedure that is akin to considering evidence or premises, but this is not to say that we always do so and that all perceptual recognition is a case of concluding on the basis of evidence or premises. [AVS, p. 320] Austin made a similar point. [S&S, 116]

From Austin's point of view, it is simply wrong to suppose that we must at all times infer from evidence. Ayer replies that his point is not about perceptual processes, but about the logical status of perceptual statements such that if a perceptual judgement which refers to a material object is true, then it is necessary that a certain number of conditions must be satisfied, and these conditions are not deductively established by the contents of experience upon which the judgement is based. [ARS, p. 122-3; R, p. 344] As a result, the truth of a statement describing the experience that gives rise to a perceptual judgement is found to be logically consistent with that judgement's being

false, and this possibility is expressed by the logical claim that the judgement embodies an inference. This would be the case even if there was no conscious process of inference. [R, p. 344]

(3) From Ayer's point of view, the question of whether we are in fact aware of the inferential nature of our perceptual judgements is irrelevant to the question of their logical status. Similarly, he argues that it is unnecessary that we should ever be deceived by appearances, or that anything should ever look different from how it actually is, in order to establish the essential logical point that by referring to 'material objects' we are making certain assumptions that could prove to be false. [ARS, p. 129] For the fact that we are not often mistaken about what we perceive is no guarantee that any particular judgement that we make will not turn out to be false. It is enough that this is possible, and this possibility is secured by the logical claim that our judgements of perception go beyond the data upon which they are based. [ARS, p. 129] In S&S, Austin had argued that there are circumstances where a statement about an ordinary object can be taken as being incorrigible. [S&S, pp. 114-5] For in the case where we make a statement, and it is true that nothing whatsoever can be produced as cogent grounds for retracting that statement, he argues that this is because we are in the very best position to make that statement, e.g. being an eyewitness, and we are entitled to have complete confidence in our

claim. [S&S, p. 114] Ayer replies that we might have practical confidence in what we say, but this does not entail logical certainty whereby it is a contradiction to admit the premises and deny the conclusion. [ARS, pp. 118-9]

From Austin's viewpoint, it is misleading for the sense-datum philosopher to argue that we can never be certain about the existence of physical objects: our knowledge is uncertain only because the philosopher has made it impossible for us to know for sure. According to Ayer, however, the contention that our material object claims do not yield logical certainty is misleading only if this is taken as a comment on the amount of practical confidence that can be allowed. Hence, the fact that there are situations where we can rightfully be said to know for sure is no argument against the logical point that what we know is not known with logical certainty, i.e., to deny the truth of our claim would constitute a logical contradiction. For his part, Ferguson admits that Austin's argument does not establish that perceptual statements are ever incorrigibly true. [AVS, pp. 324-5] Rather it shows that there are practical situations where a statement can be incorrigibly justified so that its falsity cannot be the fault or the responsibility of the observer; he contends: "it is only by accepting the impossible-to-fulfil requirement that (logical) certainty be attained that one finds oneself in a philosophical bind by recognizing that it is unattainable." [AVS, p. 326] Ayer replies that he is unsure how there

could be cases where one's claims are "incorrigibly justified" but ultimately false. [R, pp. 345-6] He grants that there are times where we have taken all reasonable steps to find out something for sure. But if our claim is found to wrong, this does not disbar us from admitting that the statement is mistaken. In fact, our judgement is characterized as being inferential in order to account for this possibility.

(4) Furthermore, Ayer argues, if it is true that our ordinary judgements go beyond the evidence on which they are based, and they thereby can be characterized as the conclusions of inductive inferences, then it should be possible to formulate these premises. [ARS, p. 126] To this point, Ayer had argued in FEK that a sense-datum is "directly seen" in the logical sense that to say of something that it is seen directly is to refer to it as a visual datum and not to imply its actual existence. [FEK, pp. 80-4] Sentences of this logical type would be experiential statements. Here, Ayer admits, the term "directly seen" is being used in a technical sense that is apart from its normal use: it is meant to refer to a specific logical relation and is not employed in its wider currency.

(5) Ayer contends that the significance of the argument from illusion turns on a matter of logic and not a matter of fact: the sense-datum theory is offered as a linguistic recommendation to accommodate the non-reciprocal nature of

the logical relations between material object and sense-data statements. Austin contends that to the extent that there is thought to be an issue at all, the argument from illusion serves to create a problem by misrepresenting the facts of normal perception and ordinary language. Austin claimed in S&S, then, that by carefully considering the facts as they are attested by the argument from illusion, we should be able to dismantle the sense-datum theory before it gets off the ground. [S&S, p. 142] For example, in the case of the partly immersed straight stick that looks bent, Austin noted that there is usually no problem in accounting for the fact that the stick looks bent because we see that it is partly immersed in water, and we do not suppose that something straight must look straight at all times and in all circumstances. [S&S, p. 30] Ayer agreed that the argument from illusion is "infelicitously named", as in many of the cases that are presented there is no illusion and no one is deceived by what they see. [ARS, pp. 128-9] However, he went on to argue that the possibility of illusion creates a prima facie difficulty for naive realism: the argument from illusion establishes the fact that there is not always a perfect coincidence between appearance and reality, and that if we were to always take appearances at their face value, we would sometimes go wrong. [ARS, pp. 129]

Forguson replies, however, that this argument against naive realism is not an argument against Austin. [AVS, p. 328] For Austin denies quite explicitly that he is

defending a realist position when this is taken as being a general theory about what we perceive. [S&S, pp. 3-4]

Rather, Austin's purpose towards the sense-datum theory was entirely negative: "He didn't wish to argue for any philosophical theory of perception, for the reason that, in his view, the problems these theories attempt to solve either aren't problems at all or, at least, aren't philosophical problems but scientific problems". [AVS, p. 329]

Forguson contends, then, that while the argument from illusion would establish that there is not a perfect coincidence between appearances and reality, this fact does not provide anything like the grounds for concluding that what we (directly) perceive are sense-data. [AVS, p. 327]

Ayer admits this point, but maintains that his claim has always been that the argument from illusion supplies a motive for adopting the sense-datum vocabulary by establishing a logical point. [R, p. 346]

This is not to say that alternatives do not exist: in FEK, Ayer considered H.H. Price's "theory of appearing" as just such an alternative. [FEK, pp. 46-57]

(6) At this point, we are able to offer a preliminary summation of the argument between Austin and Ayer. According to Austin, the argument from illusion serves to oversimplify the facts of ordinary language and normal perception in support of the sense-datum theory; hence, he attends to a myriad of details about what we ordinarily say and actually see in the effort to dismantle the doctrine

"before it gets off the ground". [S&S, p. 142] Ayer reduces Austin's several points to one point: that we do not ordinarily use words in the same way as does the sense-datum philosopher. According to Ayer, however, the sense-datum theory is aimed at the logical form of perceptual statements, and not at the facts of normal perception or ordinary language. Austin and Ayer are arguing past each other because there is no agreement as to role of a philosophical investigation. Austin maintains that a philosophical theory is quite typically oversimplistic: in S&S, he accused Ayer of using the words "looks", "appears", and "seems" interchangeably so that he is able to advance from a visual analogy (e.g., "It looks red") to a general theory where perception is presented as being akin to intellectual deliberation (e.g., "It seems red"). [S&S, pp. 33-43] Ayer maintains that a philosophical theory is essentially logical: in his reply to Austin in ARS, Ayer argued that the sense-datum theorist only requires the phenomenal sense of "looks" and "appears" so that the sense-datum statement is able to fulfill its logical role of describing the contents of experience and not entailing the existence of what is described. [ARS, p. 130] It is in this sense that the phenomenal use of these words is fundamental. [ARS, p. 130]

(7) While the sense-datum language is said to be useful in representing certain perceptual situations, further argumentation is required in order to establish that we

perceive sense-data in all situations. In S&S, Austin argued that the usual method is to deny that there is any intrinsic difference between 'veridical' and 'delusive' perceptions. [S&S, p. 44] According to Austin, this argument is based on the mistaken supposition that if veridical and delusive perceptions were distinguishable, then we would never be deceived. But the fact that we fail to distinguish one thing from another does not establish that these things are in fact indistinguishable; sometimes we are unable to recognize the distinctions. [S&S, p. 48-9] In ARS, Ayer conceded that it might always be possible to find some qualitative difference between veridical and delusive perceptions, but he went on to contend that it is not the case that we are always able to do so: "otherwise no one would ever suffer from nightmares". [ARS, p. 131] And it is this possibility of being deceived that is reflected in the contention that our perceptual judgments go beyond the data upon which they are based.

Forerguson replies on Austin's behalf, however, that even in the case of nightmares, it is not clear that we are taken in by our dreams:

Being frightened by a nightmare is very often more like being frightened by a horror show, when there is no question of really believing that what is on the screen is really happening, much less that we are the participants in the horror that is unfolding before us. [AVS, p. 331]

While Ayer maintains that there is nothing in experience itself which allows us to determine if it is delusive or

veridical, Forguson contends that this claim does not advance the sense-datum philosopher's position. All that is established is that perception is inferential in the sense that it involves complex processes and it is constructive, and this does not prove the existence of an "epistemologically potent half-way house occupied by sense-data". [AVS, pp.331] In R, Ayer replies that if Forguson is maintaining that there is always something in the intrinsic character of a delusive experience that distinguishes it from veridical experience, this claim is contradicted by the empirical evidence. [R, p. 346] For physiologists have produced perceptual illusions by directly stimulating points on the brain. But if Forguson is arguing that examples of delusive perception cannot of themselves establish that what we perceive are sense-data, then Ayer agrees with this claim. For the sense-datum theory is only a linguistic recommendation that is based on the logical point that is established by the argument from illusion

(8) But regardless of the fact of whether we are actually deceived by our dreams or by any other instance of 'delusive perception', Ayer maintained that if we concede the sense-datum philosopher's initial step of claiming that in any case where we are perceiving anything there is something that we directly perceive, and we choose to call that something a "sense-datum", then we have already established that in every case, regardless of whether our perception is delusive or veridical, we are perceiving

sense-data. [ARS, p. 300] Forguson replies that neither he nor Austin would allow the sense-datum philosopher the first step of maintaining that in each and every instance there is one kind of thing that we always (directly) perceive. [ARS, pp. 332] For if we presume that we are perceiving the same thing at all times, then what we are perceiving could not be an ordinary object. Furthermore, Forguson argues, in the same way that it has been assumed (but not shown) that what we immediately perceive is not often a material object, so it has been assumed (but not shown) that material objects cannot figure in experiential statements. [AVS, p. 332] Why could we not describe a pain as "piercing", or a color as "blood red"? Ayer replies that given its logical role as the basis for our perceptual judgements, an experiential statement must be ontologically neutral so that its truth does not entail the truth of any statement about a material object. Experiential statements are precluded from referring to material objects by 'linguistic legislation' because this is a consequent of the way that experiential statements have been defined. [R, p. 346] But this is not to say that the legitimacy of experiential statements is simply presumed: arguments are given in their favour. Ayer provides arguments in their favour; for example, he contends that experiential or sense-data statements allow us to refer to the familiar facts of perception in a "clearer and more convenient way". [FEK, p. 26]

(9) Austin maintained in S&S, however, that the sense-datum language can be considered clearer and more convenient only in the case where what we are describing is thought to be sense-data. [S&S, pp. 59-60, pp. 106-7] Ayer admitted in ARS that he does presume that we are presented with a "sensible manifold", and that we organize this along certain conceptual lines. [ARS, p. 133] In this regard, Forguson contends that Ayer makes two important assumptions. [AVS, p. 333] The first is that our present conceptual scheme is the "plain man's view", which is that of naive realism. But Austin has shown that the plain man is not so naive as to be a naive realist. The second assumption is that it is possible to identify and describe empirical facts without any conceptual scheme; as a result, experiential statements are characterized as being ontologically neutral. Forguson responds, however, that "it is no more possible for the sensible manifold to be described neutrally (independent of any interpretation imposed by any conceptual scheme) than it is for ordinary perceptual-claims to be independent of interpretation in terms of a conceptual scheme". [AVS, p. 333] And yet for his part, Ayer replies that he has never claimed that the plain man's way of talking was wholly inadequate: "the shoe pinches at times but it can be made to fit". [R, p. 346] In certain instances, the sense-datum language is found to be clearer. Ayer also denies that he has ever maintained that experiential statements do not require any interpretation whatsoever; rather, these are

held to be neutral with regard to the assumptions that are inherent with material object statements. [R, p. 346]

(10) Given that our material object claims involve certain assumptions, Ayer argued in FEK that we can choose to deny the assumption that the real shape of an object, say, a penny, remained the same when it was viewed from different angles: we might contend that the penny changed its real shape with a change in its appearance. [FEK, p. 16] In response, Austin complained that Ayer seemed to think that we can use words in any way we wish. [S&S, p. 59] However, Austin argues, the word "real" has quite specific uses, and we cannot call every shape that we see the "real shape". [S&S, p. 65] But Ayer replied that this misses his point. While it might not be consistent with our present conceptual schema to maintain that a penny changes its shape when it is viewed from different angles, what is being suggested is a revision of our ordinary criteria so that we might be able to employ a different method for determining the real shape of things. [ARS, pp. 300-1] Forguson agrees with Ayer on this point. [AVS, p. 333] He disputes the implication that our present conceptual view, typically characterized as the plain man's view, is in any way inconvenient and a revision is in order. However, Forguson also contends that "Ayer's doctrine is ... based upon a truth which is swept aside in Austin's attack on it: namely, that the conceptual scheme we do have is not a matter of natural necessity". [AVS, p. 334] While there might be room

for change, any proposed substitution must be based on the deficiencies of the present system. As a result, Forguson maintains (and contends that Austin would also agree) that it is important to describe our present conceptual scheme before taking up the question of its revision. [AVS, p. 334]

(11) As is the case with any serious study, Forguson contends that questions about the constitution of our present conceptual scheme can be properly answered only on the basis of a systematic and exhaustive study. Austin maintains, however, that philosophers are much too quick to generalize and that they often fail to adequately account for the facts that are under question. In S&S, Austin argued that Ayer is forced to distinguish between two senses of "see", one of which allows us to describe what we see and not entail its existence, only because he fails to consider the fact that we are able to describe what we see in many different ways, and that we do require different senses of "see" in order to do so. [S&S, pp. 99-100] Ayer replied that Austin is himself mistaken on the basis of a linguistic fact. [ARS, p. 135] For when we speak of a drunkard seeing pink rats, we do not imply that these pink rats in fact exist. Forguson contends, however, that this misses Austin's point. [AVS, p.335] For in speaking of seeing pink rats, we imply that they exist in some sense but not as external objects; "it is only by forcing the 'material object vs. 'sense-datum' dichotomy on us that this admission has any tendency to raise problems". [AVS, p. 335 n) There

is no reason to insist that what the drunkard is seeing cannot be a material object and must be sense-data. Hence, it is unnecessary to maintain that the drunkard cannot be mistaken about his hallucinations. Similarly, Austin had argued that it is unnecessary to refer to two senses of "see" in order to account for the fact that we can report what we see as being an enormous star and also a silvery speck. [S&S, pp. 91-7] For there is any number of ways of describing what we see, and we understand that an enormous star which is light years away will look like a silvery speck when it is seen from here.

Ayer replied that Austin is confused about the speck and the star. [ARS, p. 304] If in claiming that the silvery speck is an enormous star Austin means that the same object is both a small speck and a large star, then he is committing himself to a self-contradictory proposition. In so doing, he is assuming that the "is" in the statement that the silvery speck is a star is the "is" of identity. However, the properties that are ascribed under one descriptor are incompatible with those ascribed by another. This seems to be a violation of the law of identity until we recognize that in talking about the speck we are not referring to the star but to the way the star appears to us. [ARS, p. 304] To the extent that we represent the speck as an object of sight, Ayer maintains that we are allying ourselves with the sense-datum theorist. [R, p. 347]

But in claiming that the silvery speck is an enormous star, Forguson contends that the properties that we are ascribing are incompatible only if they are understood to apply in the same respect. [AVS, p. 337] Of course, it was Austin's claim in S&S that both these remarks must be considered in their respective contexts. [S&S, p. 98] According to Forguson, Ayer accuses Austin of mistakenly assuming the "is" of identity only on the basis of his own failure to recognize the significance of Austin's comments concerning identity and description. [AVS, p. 339] Ayer replies, however, that Forguson is also making a logical blunder. [R, p. 347] He is surprised to find Forguson claiming that the drunk's pink rats must exist in some way. In so doing, Forguson is being misled by the assumption that "if we ascribe qualities to anything we must be implying that the thing in question exists in some sense in order to have these qualities". [R, p. 347] Providing an example, Ayer contends that if I hope to have a handsome son, my statement is not rendered senseless by the fact that the son that we hope for might never exist. In the case of the drunkard, we could follow Forguson in making the decision to maintain that there is something that he sees. But in so doing we would be taking a crucial first step in adopting a sense-datum vocabulary. [R, p. 347]

(12) In S&S, Austin had argued that statements describing our experience are not necessarily incorrigible. [S&S, pp. 112-3] In ARS, Ayer replied that he is inclined

to agree that our experiential claims can be mistaken. [ARS, p. 138]. However, he maintained the "slightly weaker" principle that the subject is the final authority for the truth of any experiential statement because the experience is the subject's own. But even if this claim is found to be false, i.e., the subject does not have the last word about his own experiences, Ayer argued that this fact would not undermine his general claim that "the truth of statements claiming perception of physical objects is founded on the truth of experiential statements". [ARS, p. 138] This is a logical point based on a rule that determines the literal meaningfulness of statements, i.e. the criterion of verification. As a result, in response to Forguson's contention that statements about experience can in fact be physical object statements (AVS, pp. 339-40), Ayer is able to admit that one material object statement could be used to justify another, but he goes on to maintain that this is in no way inconsistent with his logical claim that the justification of each material object statement must terminate in the truth of an experiential statement. [R, pp. 347-8]

(13) While Austin denied the claim that experiential statements are intrinsically incorrigible, he contended that there are numerous cases where our statements about physical objects are in fact incorrigible. [S&S, pp. 114] Ayer replied that while the truth of a particular material object statement might be practically certain in the sense that

there is no reasonable grounds for its challenge, the truth of the statement is not logically certain in the sense that denial of its truth entails a logical contradiction. [ARS, p. 138] Similarly, Ferguson denies the contention that any statement about a physical object is absolutely true. [AVS, p. 339] Austin is said to confuse the fact of a statement's incorrigibly justified with its being incorrigibly true: "some perception-claims are unretractable but, for some perhaps bizarre reason, untrue". [AWS, p. 339] Austin had objected that by arguing that perceptual judgements are not conclusively verifiable, it is implied that the perceptual situation is one where we are never in the practical position to know something for sure, and that the conclusive verification of statements is an end which is never attained. [S&S, pp. 117-8, 119-20] Ayer replies, of course, that his point is purely a logical one: it is simply that it is logically consistent for a set of experiential statements to be true, while the perceptual judgement that is made on this basis is false. [ARS, pp. 118-9] However, in an effort to avoid the suggestion of an untenable logical criterion for the practical certainty of statements, he characterizes the formal relationship between perceptual judgements and experiential statements as being one where "statements about physical objects are at a theoretical level with respect to experiential statements". [ARS, p. 138] Hence, like theoretical statements, physical object statements would

always be revisable, but the subject would determine what revisions are deemed to be necessary.

(14) Taking Austin's viewpoint, we could contend that the overriding (and over-simplistic) analogy here is that the perceptual situation is one which is akin to advancing a theory. Hence, a perceptual statement is characterized as a "hypothesis" which is said to be predictive in the sense that material object statements are understood to embody assumptions which can be tested. For example, in ARS, Ayer argued that even so unambiguous a statement as 'This is a table' commits us to a series of assumptions which include that it occupies a positions in three-dimensional space, that it will endure through a period of time, that it will be accessible to touch and to sight, that it will accessible to other observers as well, and that it will continue to exist even when it is not perceived. [ARS, p. 123] In the same way that Ayer had compared our perceptual situation to one in which we must make an inductive inference based on evidence, in this case our perceptual situation is characterized as one where we are advancing an empirical hypothesis. Ayer argues, then, that every perceptual statement describing a physical object must be testable, i.e., verifiable. In S&S, Austin denied that evidence is necessarily required in order to determine the truth of an assertion about a physical object, and that statements about physical objects are necessarily verifiable. Austin wondered how and why someone would go about verifying the

assertion that they lived in Oxford: not only does the speaker lack the need to verify this statement because he already knows it to be true (or, if he is lying, false), but since he already knows it to be true (or false), nothing he can do could count as his having verified it. [S&S, p. 118] Similarly, we might wonder how one would go about testing that statement.

(15) In S&S, Austin's general point was that it was wrong to suppose that we can talk about the properties of classes of statement, e.g., the incorrigibility of experiential statements, and not consider the specific circumstances where certain sentences are used. [S&S, pp. 110-1, 123] He concluded, then, that Ayer had failed to establish either that there is a type of sentence that is evidence-providing, or that these statements always provide the support for another kind of sentence, i.e., a material object sentence. [S&S, p. 123] Ayer replied that while there might be good reasons for accepting these conclusions, Austin's comments about our ordinary use of particular sentences or certain words are entirely beside the logical point of any analysis of the formal relations between classes of statements. [ARS, p. 140] Experiential statements are characterized as the evidence for material object statements in the logical sense that it is necessary for any material object statements to be true that some statement or set of statements about experience must also be true. [ARS, pp. 118-9] As a result, material object

statements are characterized as the conclusions of inductive inferences. [ARS, p. 126]

Forerguson argues, however, that to the extent that Ayer would restrict his thesis to the formal relations between classes of statements, he misses Austin's main point: "one of the main burdens of S&S is to argue that what we have to deal with in the assessment of perception-claims is always a sentence issued in a specific context: namely, a statement". [AVS, p. 340] As a result, each statement must be assessed in its own terms and on its own merits. However, Ayer replies that if Austin is referring not merely to types of series of marks, but to types of signs to which meaning is attached in accordance with some standard linguistic rule, then these are "statements" in the sense that they bear literal significance. [R, p. 348] However, Austin does not consider the logical structure that determines the meaningfulness of sentences; hence, his investigation of the use of language is non-essential and secondary to a logical analysis of the conditions for language, i.e., for meaning.

In summary of the somewhat torturous twists of the Austin-Ayer argument, we conclude that Austin and Ayer are arguing past each other because each presumes the validity of his own method in criticizing the validity of the other. In considering the logical structure beneath sentences, Ayer maintains that Austin's comments concerning ordinary language are superficial and beside the point of logical analysis of sentences. Austin studies ordinary language,

and contends that Ayer's logical analysis of the formal relations between sentences is misrepresentative of the ways in which we actually use words. Each philosopher challenges the legitimacy of the other's method based on the legitimacy of his own method, and defends his method on this same basis. As a result, Ayer is able to admit most of Austin's points in S&S, but maintain that these are unimportant and beg the logical question of a philosophical thesis. Speaking for Austin, Forguson contends that it is possible to admit the fact that "statements such as 'This is a table' have implications which commit one to a number of 'assumptions' about space and time, accessibility to other observers (and other senses), and about the constitution, history and future behaviour of the object itself." [AVS, p. 318] But this does not commit us to the contention that ordinary perception is inferential, and allow us to isolate the "premises" of these perceptual inferences. For on the evidence provided, to say that perception is inferential is simply to denote the above facts about perception. [AVS, p. 318-9]

According to Forguson, the intractable positions that are characteristic of the Austin-Ayer dispute are characteristic of philosophical disputes in general. He argues:

philosophical doctrines seldom succumb to direct refutation. The proponents of the target positions are usually too nimble, managing to find a way to meet the objection in a manner convincing

to themselves if not to the objectors. [AVS, p. 310]

Rather than constituting a disagreement about any particular point, the dispute between Austin and Ayer is best characterized as clash of philosophical vision, that is, as a disagreement over the specific role of an "analysis of language" for a philosophical inquiry. With what is to follow we will consider the philosophical vision of Austin and Ayer, and more particularly the supposed philosophical relevance of a linguistic investigation in each case. In Chapter Five, we will show how for Austin an investigation of our ordinary use of words is meant to dismantle certain philosophical doctrines. In Chapter Six, we will consider Ayer's contention that a logical analysis of sentences solves certain philosophical problems by showing that they are based on pseudo-propositions and are not properly problems at all. In each case, we will argue that the philosopher presumes the validity of the criteria that he means to establish. Austin refers to certain rules for the use of words, but presumes that there is a structure for language that mirrors that structure of facts. Ayer refers to a rule for the literal significance of sentences, i.e., the criterion of verifiability, but bases this logical thesis on an empirical theory. In Chapter Seven we will show that the critical authority of a linguistic investigation in each case is based on the presumption of an objective basis so that the results are independent of the analysis by which they are derived. Austin and Ayer will be

seen to be presuming the point that they must establish, that is, the objective validity of the linguistic criterion to which each refers (the ordinary use of words and the criterion of verifiability). As a result, the linguistic critique fails in each case.

1 The addition of this chapter was suggested by Professor Andrew Lugg.

2 I am grateful to Professor Forster for clarifying this point.

3 The structure of this chapter was suggested to me by Professor Andrew Lugg. I am responsible, of course, for any limitations in its content.

4 L.W. Forguson, "Has Ayer Vindicated Sense-Datum Theory?," Symposium on J.L. Austin, ed. K.T. Fann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 309-41.

5 A.J. Ayer, "Rejoinder to Professor Forguson", Symposium on J.L. Austin, pp. 342-48.

Chapter 5

Linguistic Phenomenology

The aim of this chapter is to consider Austin's philosophical method, particularly as it is reflected in his treatment of sense-data theory in Sense and Sensibilia (S&S). In S&S, Austin has very little to say about the assumptions behind his argument, although he does provide some general indications in "A Plea for Excuses" and "Ifs and Cans"¹. [Plea, pp. 181-9; I&C, pp. 231-2] This is not an oversight. Austin is actively opposed to generalities about philosophy, to large questions about method; these he calls "cackle". [Plea, p. 182] He is reported to have distrusted programmatic discussions for two reasons: first, they involve vague and sweeping generalizations which are often inaccurate.² Second, he held that only particular issues were worth discussing: methodological discussions were deemed little more than distractions from the serious business of getting down to cases.³

The philosophical relevance of Austin's interest in ordinary language is not always obvious. Given that philosophers have been traditionally concerned with matters other than language, some justification for a linguistic critique of philosophy is called for. For example, Roy Harrod denies that a study of the "niceties of language" can serve as the main avenue to the discovery of philosophical truths; he argues that "it is idle to suppose that progress

can be made in a great subject (i.e. the existence of sense-data) ... by the study of language alone, and without arduous and sustained reflections on the underlying facts."⁴ Of course, in the case of the philosophy of language, language is a subject-matter within the discipline and an investigation of how we actually use words could serve in developing a model of language. But in cases where philosophers have been talking about matters other than language (e.g., perception, logic), a specific philosophical nomenclature is said to be required: "if there are things to be said in philosophy which no one would say in talk about brick-laying or golf, the philosopher must either stretch ordinary usage or coin new words."⁵ In this chapter, we will consider the relevance of Austin's investigation of ordinary language for philosophy. Austin contends that by carefully considering what we say, and why we say it, we are often able to dissolve some (but not all) kinds of philosophical "worries". [S&S, p. 5] This seems to imply that certain philosophical problems are caused by the misuse of ordinary language, e.g., by taking a word with a specific use and gradually stretching it until it is at first metaphorical and then ultimately meaningless. [S&S, p. 15] We will argue that at the bottom of Austin's appeal to ordinary language is the methodological presumption that the uses of words are sufficiently definitive to be objects of analysis, and that we can determine certain conditions or rules for these uses; Austin's analysis aims to make this

implicit structure explicit.⁶ But the fact of this presumption will be seen to undermine the validity of the critique that is made on this basis.

Perhaps the most obvious point to recognize when considering Austin's method is that it does not concern itself solely with the use of words.⁷ In S&S, Austin contended that some of the premises of the argument from illusion are factually untrue. The straight stick in the water simply does not look exactly like a bent stick out of water. Seeing a bright green after-image against a white wall is not exactly like seeing a bright green patch actually on the wall. The common man does not believe that everything that he perceives is always a "material thing". Nor is there a simple contrast between what the ordinary man believes when all is well, i.e., he is perceiving "material things", and when something is amiss, i.e., his senses are deceiving him. [See above, pp. 30-2, 32-4, 36-40, 40-2]

But Austin also maintains that philosophers have overgeneralized and misrepresented the use of words: by lumping together "illusions", "delusions" and "dreams" as if each constituted a case of perceiving a non-material thing; by using "looks", "seems" and "appears" interchangeably despite differences in their meaning. [See above, pp. 36-40] Austin's commentators often focus on these comments concerning the ordinary use of words, complaining that his investigation is restricted to language in its "narrowest sense".⁸ But it is Austin who argues in S&S that language

is considered much too narrowly by philosophers, and criticizes their presumption that they can talk about language in general and not consider the circumstances in which words are used. [See above, pp. 48-51, 52-3] Ayer is a case in point, as he distinguishes two senses of "see" in order to account for the fact that we can describe what we see and not imply its material existence. Austin maintains, that it is unnecessary to distinguish these different senses if we keep in mind that what we see can be described, identified, and classified in many different ways; hence, a question about what we are seeing will solicit different correct answers to the extent that it is used for different purposes. [See above, pp. 46-7] As a result, we are able to answer in the notorious case of the partly immersed straight stick that looks bent that what we are seeing is "something straight" when a categorical description is required. But if we are meant to describe our immediate experience, i.e., how the object looks to us at that moment, then we can rightfully answer that what we are seeing is "something bent". Of course, this does not imply that we think that the what we are seeing is something bent; for we know that a straight stick does not necessarily look straight at all time and in all instances. [S&S, p. 29]

Another common charge is that Austin considers ordinary language to be sacrosanct.⁹ But he does not maintain that ordinary language is irreformable, nor does he see it as an absolute criterion of truth. Once we have discovered how a

word is actually used, Austin contends that this is not 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". [S&S, p. 63] At this point, however, some of Austin's critics accuse him of being disingenuous: R.J. Hirst maintains that while Austin is careful to leave loopholes and does not say that we must never amend ordinary language, "his whole tone is unduly hostile to amending it."¹⁰ We might reply, however, that while Austin is conservative, he does introduce several neologisms of which the term "trouser-word" is only one example. [See above, pp. 34, 44-5] But Austin cautions that the distinctions which are embodied in our ordinary language are ancient and are almost never arbitrary. [S&S, p. 63] This of itself does not entail the primacy of our everyday words: sometimes a technical vocabulary is required for technical purposes. Austin warns, however, that we should carefully consider our ordinary stock of words before indulging in any tampering on our own account: this due to the fact that the distinctions embodied therein are "likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon - the most favoured alternative method." [Plea,

pp. 181-2] For example, by characterizing illusions and delusions as instances of "delusive perception", we lose the original distinction between "illusions", in which we not dispute that we are perceiving something, and "delusions" which are more akin to disordered thoughts and can be entirely without foundation. [S&S, pp. 22-5]

Austin contends, then, that by tampering with our ordinary use of words, we are liable to encounter unforeseen repercussions: "One can't abuse ordinary language without paying for it." [S&S, p. 15] This has led some commentators to surmise that something like Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason is in operation behind Austin's methods, i.e., Austin presumes that for every distinction that we find in common speech, there is some reason to be found that explains why this distinction exists.¹¹ Related to this is the claim that Austin's method is an application of a neo-Darwinian tendency to "preserve from change those descriptions of the world which happen to be the current ones, in the belief they would not be current if they were not worth preserving".¹² In so far as the distinctions which are embodied in ordinary language are adaptive, they are thought to be optimal. As a result, a study of our ordinary use of words will always show that the greatest number of distinctions has been obtained by the most economical means possible, and that the introduction of a philosophical term disrupts the natural economy of our ordinary language.

But Austin does not argue that our ordinary language is at all times and in every instance optimal. He argues, rather, that the distinctions which we ordinarily make are probably the most effective, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters. [Plea, p. 185] While ordinary language has no claim to being the 'last word', Austin maintains that it is invariably the first word: we must first determine what we do say, and why we say it, before we can hope to pass judgment upon what we should say.¹³ A difference in idiom gives us a prima facie reason for supposing that a difference should be recognized.¹⁴ Of course, a technical vocabulary might be required for distinctly technical purposes, but we should not forget the specific purpose for which these words are used. Towards this point, Austin accuses philosophers of taking the specific use of a word and expanding this without limit so that its application is understood at first to be obscurely metaphorical, and finally it is senseless. [S&S, pp. 110-3] For example, he argues that by characterizing every (non-analytic) perceptual statement as the conclusion of an inductive inference, Ayer infers that every perceptual situation is one in which we must rely on evidence to determine the truth of an assertion. But by considering the specific instance of perceiving a pig, Austin maintains that in certain cases we might be required to infer the truth of our perceptual statements from the evidence at hand, e.g., from a few buckets of pig-food and pig-like markings on the

ground. [See above, pp. 49-50] But by characterizing every perceptual situation as one where evidence is required, Austin argued that Ayer is neglecting other ways in which we describe what we see, e.g., when a pig is in plain view, there is no question of collecting evidence for its existence.

Oversimplification, Austin argues, is an "occupational disease" of philosophers, if it is not their entire occupation. [HTW, p. 38; PU, p. 252] Philosophers are much too quick to pronounce on a subject, and as a result their theories are oversimplistic and do not adequately account for the phenomena that they are meant to explain.¹⁵ In S&S, Austin refers to the old philosophical habit of "Gleichschaltung, the deeply ingrained worship of tidy-looking dichotomies." [S&S, p. 3] He contends that any philosophical theory should at least begin with a thorough survey of the facts at issue, and a careful determination of the questions to be asked.¹⁶ Austin's critics question whether attention to fine distinctions can, of itself, solve philosophical problems.¹⁷ They question the supposed philosophical relevance of a wide-ranging study of facts with no obvious organizing principle, and seemingly no relevance to any particular problem in philosophy.¹⁸

Jonathan Bennett, for one, says:

In philosophy, as in science, we need to carry into our investigations something in the nature of a hunch, a hypothesis, a general question, if we are to solve problems and not merely amass impeccably random data.¹⁹

But if one of the principle tasks of philosophers is to make distinctions (and it is), then the crudity and fatuousness of the distinctions that are typically made by philosophers are revealing.²⁰ This is not to say that discrimination is the only task of a philosopher. But with respect to philosophical treatment of language, attention to the diversity of the uses of words blocks the tendency to take a word which is meaningful in a particular context and give it a general meaning which is independent of any context. Austin argues, then, to the extent that philosophers make distinctions, and these distinctions are of crucial significance to their philosophical theories, then an investigation of our ordinary use of words should prove useful in avoiding the misrepresentation of facts.²¹ We can conclude, then, that "if we want to know, as in philosophy we often do, whether some two cases are to be discriminated, we should at least begin by considering whether we speak of them in the same way, for if we do not, then probably they can be distinguished, and probably the distinction is of not negligible significance."²² This is not to say that the whole of philosophy should be concerned with the details of ordinary language. But if certain philosophical problems are caused when we overlook distinctions, then an investigation of the distinctions that we normally make should prove enlightening as it reveals the possibility that the distinctions which the philosopher makes are fatuous or wrong.

Austin's contention, then, is that by studying what we say, and why we say it, we should be able to dissolve at least some kinds of philosophical problems. [S&S, p. 5] The modesty of this claim is disarming. Several commentators contend that, aside from this claim, Austin requires no specific philosophical justification for his method. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock maintain that Austin has no need for a theory of philosophical method, and therefore has no need for a theory of philosophy: "His regard for 'truthfulness and accuracy' in the use, and in the description of the use, of words and phrases stands in no need of a specially philosophical justification; and he regarded it as merely premature to make any general claims for the efficacy of his method."²³ Rather than a theory of philosophy, Austin merely has a systematic way of doing things. Similarly, Stuart Hampshire contends that Austin was "constitutionally unable to refrain from applying the same standards of truthfulness and accuracy to a philosophical argument, sentence by sentence, as he would have applied to any other serious subject matter."²⁴ In distinction from Urmson and Warnock, however, Hampshire attributes to Austin the "weak" philosophical thesis that it is necessary to accurately describe all the facts on a subject like perception before we erect a theory on their basis. But all agree that for Austin the chief philosophical failings are inaccuracy and over-simplification; hence, he stresses the chief virtues of truthfulness, industry, and patience.²⁵

Austin's investigation of ordinary language is not strictly linguistic: he also considers the facts. Neither is it necessarily philosophical: in S&S, he argues that his 'hope' is that a careful consideration of what we say, and why we say it, will prove useful in dissolving some philosophical problems. [S&S, p. 5] However, to the extent that an investigation of ordinary language is meant to dissolve philosophical problems, it is understood to have specific philosophical significance. Austin characterizes his approach as being a matter of unpicking a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies, and of exposing a wide variety of concealed motives, so that we are left, in a way, just where we began. [S&S, pp. 4-5] On this account, Austin's method is massively negative as it involves taking up and challenging the first words of an argument, and thereby dismantling an entire philosophical doctrine before it gets off the ground. [S&S, p. 142] But Austin also hopes that by studying the ordinary use of words, we may ...

learn something positive in the way of a technique for dissolving philosophical worries (some kinds of philosophical worry, not the whole of philosophy);

and also something about the meanings of some English words ("reality", "seems", "looks", &c.) which, besides being philosophically very slippery, are in their own right interesting. [S&S, p. 5]

Austin's explicit contention, then, is not only that an investigation of ordinary language is interesting and important in its own right, but also that the application of the results from such is expected to dissolve certain

philosophical "worries". This statement is a direct challenge to the often repeated claim that Austin was interested in making linguistic distinctions for their own sakes, and saw the application of his results as only a by-product.²⁶ For example, Zeno Vendler argues:

While other linguistic philosophers have had a thesis, or at least a problem, which prompted them to gather some facts of language to support their positions or 'dissolve' their puzzles, with Austin ... the thesis or the problem becomes secondary, and they often serve as mere occasions to explore some fascinating aspect of language for its own sake.²⁷

But Austin's study of the ordinary use of words differs from descriptive linguistics proper.²⁸ First, the scope of the investigation is restricted to the use of words that are germane to a particular philosophical topic: C.G. New notes that "[t]here is no philosophical interest in the study of expressions like 'grin', 'smile', 'laugh', 'chuckle', 'cackle' and 'guffaw'."²⁹ We have seen that the words "appear", "look", and "seem" are of interest to Austin because of their prominent role in the argument from illusion. [See above, pp. 39-40] Second, the account of ordinary usage that Austin provides is inherently prescriptive. As a description of what we should say, and not merely of what we do say, the investigation serves as the basis for a linguistic critique of the philosophical use of words. For example, Austin argued that sense-datum philosophers typically slip between the specific uses of "appear", "look", and "seem" to advance from a visual

analogy (e.g., "It looks blue") to a general theory where every perceptual statement is construed as a premise for an inductive inference (e.g., "It seems blue"). By distinguishing the use of these words, then, Austin means to dismantle the general theory of sense-data from the ground up.

But, of course, philosophers - sense-data philosophers included - will complain that their theories are not about language, and a linguistic critique is not to the point. However, philosophers use language. Hence, the prescriptive authority of Austin's method is based on the contention that there are certain rules for the use of words, that is, certain informal principles to which our actions conform or are intended to conform. For example, in S&S, Austin argues that the notion of not perceiving "directly" is most at home where it retains a link with a kink in direction (e.g., looking through a periscope or a mirror, but not through binoculars or spectacles), and is not at home with senses other than sight (e.g., Do I hear a shout indirectly when I hear an echo?). Furthermore, he maintains that we would not want to say that we perceive something "indirectly" if it is impossible to just perceive it. [See above, pp. 34-6]

Admittedly, when distinguishing the proper circumstances for the use of words, Austin rarely refers to "rules".³⁰ However, he does talk about "conventions". In "Truth"³¹ (Truth), Austin considers how a statement is true and distinguishes a descriptive convention that correlates a

sentence with the type of situation, thing, or event in the world (e.g., "The cat is on the mat"), and a demonstrative convention that correlates a sentence with an historical situation in the world (e.g., "The cat was on the mat"). [Truth, pp. 121-2] In "How to Talk"³² (HT), Austin offers a simplified model of the speech-situation where we use language to talk about the world and reduces every sentence to only one form, "I is a T". [HT, pp. 135-6] He goes on to distinguish between "I conventions" which are conventions of reference in that they fix the item to which an I-word refers, and "T conventions" which are conventions of sense in that they associate a T-word with an specific item type.

In both of the above cases, the investigation of the use of language is presented as the basis for a linguistic critique of philosophy, that is, the features of language are taken as the basis for criticism. In Truth, Austin contends that philosophers have confused the descriptive and demonstrative use of words:

In philosophy we mistake the descriptive for the demonstrative (theory of universals) or the demonstrative for the descriptive (theory of monads). [Truth, p.122(n)]

Hence, the fact that we can describe several different things with the same name has been taken as proof that the descriptor names a common aspect in each thing, that is, a universal. Conversely, the fact that we can name everything individually has been taken as proof that the world can be described as being constituted of simple, discrete,

irreducible, indestructible units, that is, of monads. An investigation of language is also taken as the basis for a linguistic critique of philosophy in "How to Talk". Austin argues that the names for speech-acts are more numerous than is generally allowed: "none of them can be safely used in philosophy in a general way (for example, 'statement' or 'description') without more investigation than they have ... yet received." [HT, p. 150] But the application of speech-act theory to philosophy is understood.

To the extent that Austin's investigation of the ordinary use of words is meant to provide a critique of philosophy, its role is normative; hence, it establishes a set of standard types of uses. The prescriptive authority of this typology is meant to be derived from its independent status such that the uses of words are discovered by the method, and are not simply the product of such. Hence, Austin's linguistic investigation is seen to be independent of philosophy. For example, in HTW, Austin argues that he has resisted embroiling his theory of speech-acts in philosophical problems. He contends: "The real fun comes when we begin to apply it to philosophy." [HTW, p. 163] Similarly, we saw in S&S that Austin presents the philosophical relevance of his investigation as being independent of his study of the ordinary use of words. His hope, however, is to learn something in the way of a technique for dissolving certain philosophical problems, as well as something about the meaning of some English words.

[S&S, p.5] But because of their normative role, Austin's pronouncements about the ordinary use of words are more than empirical generalizations, i.e., they are not natural laws. For the fact that we do not use a term under certain circumstances is no argument against the contention that perhaps we should do so; Herman Tennessen notes: "the non-occurrence or extraordinarily infrequent occurrence of a certain locution offers per se no clue or argument for its impermissibility".³³ It is impossible to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. But neither is this prescriptive authority deduced from First Principles, i.e., from any a priori truth. In S&S, Austin argues that the validity of his criticisms will be demonstrated by the results: the proof will be in the pudding. [S&S, p. 5] In this case, the rules for the uses of words are not compelling in any absolute sense; they are valid to the extent that they account for instances where we use certain words, and hesitate to use other words. Towards this point, R. Brown complains that "permissible syntax appears to suggest, or be consistent with, rather than entail [Austin's] conclusions."³⁴

The prescriptive authority of the linguistic investigation in Austin's case is meant to be derived from its explanatory power, that is, the results are compelling to the extent that they account for instances where we use (or hesitate to use) an expression, and clarify cases where we are confused as to what we should say.³⁵ There are reasons for the fact that we use one word in one situation

and another word in another situation, and certain things follow from the ordinary use of a term: "it entitles you (or, using the term, you entitle others) to make certain inferences, draw certain conclusions."³⁶ But the statement of these implications ("When we say ... we imply (suggest, say) ---"; "We don't say ... unless we mean ---") is not strictly analytic as it is possible for the premise to be true, while the consequent is false. There are extenuating circumstances. For example, in S&S, Austin argues that when we claim to "see" (or "perceive") something, we ordinarily imply that the thing exists. [S&S, pp. 89-91] In the exceptional case of double-vision, however, we might claim to be seeing two pieces of paper, but this does not imply that two pieces of paper exist, or require that we distinguish a second sense of "see" whereby it is possible to claim to be seeing something and not imply its existence: we simply recognize the special circumstances and stretch our ordinary usage to cover these. Austin argues, then, that our ordinary language is not the last word, and that it is possible to coin new words or use ordinary words with very specific implications. [Plea, p. 185] But these statements of implications are not strictly empirical either, as they constitute rules which tell us what words we should use in what situations, and not merely what words we do use in situations. [Plea, p. 182]

An investigation into the rules for the use of words is relevant to the extent that it can dissolve philosophical

problems. Austin argues, then, that the validity of his method must be gauged by its results. But it is precisely the validity of those results that is questioned by Austin's critics. Ayer, for one, argues that Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are beside the logical point of a philosophical thesis: the fact that we would not ordinarily say that our knowledge of the existence of a pig was "uncertain" if the animal was in plain view is irrelevant to the logical point that the truth of a statement or set of statements describing the experience in such a case is logically consistent with the falsity of the perceptual judgement that is made on this basis. [See above, pp. 57-60, 72-3] Austin characterizes his method as being a matter of unpicking a mass of seductive (and mainly verbal) fallacies. [S&S, p. 5] For example, he maintains that by characterizing every statement about an ordinary object as the conclusion of an inductive inference, Ayer implies that every perceptual situation is one where we are only presented with evidence for the truth of our statements and we can never know for sure, and Ayer is wrong on this point. [See above, pp. 49-51] In this case, the results of Austin's investigation are understood to apply outside of the methodological framework from which they are derived; hence, Ayer's logical analysis of sentences is thought to contravene the rules for ordinary use of words. Similarly, Austin contends that philosophers have misused the word "real" in discussing the Nature of Reality, that is, in

presenting a general ontological theory. [See above, pp. 43-6] Here the misuse of the term does not mean the violation of its dictionary definition: the use of "real" and "reality" by philosophers is certainly included in the Oxford English Dictionary. Rather Austin contends that the term is being used outside of the specific circumstances where it operates and is understood: while we can talk about "real silk" or "real ducks", the word "real" of itself has no positive content because it is the negative use that wears the trousers. Hence, we should be suspicious of the philosopher's attempt at establishing a general theory of Reality, that is, an ontological theory. For it is unlikely that we would ever find a general attribute like Reality that is a characteristic of all real things.

But in proposing a general theory of Reality, philosophers have not been concerned with the ordinary use of the word "real". For example, A. R. Greenburg argues that cases of non-veridical perception which are shown by the argument from illusion provide clear counter-examples to the "principle of exemplification", which is the view that every property is the property of something.³⁷ Rather than arguing that qualities can exist without belonging to anything, the sense-data philosopher maintains the every presented property is the property of something, i.e., a sense-datum. But if by calling something a "sense-datum" we are accommodating a general principle of exemplification, then on Austin's account the sense-datum theory is

misleading. For by attempting to accommodate a general theory of things, i.e., an ontological theory, we are ignoring not only the differences between things, but also the differences between the properties of things. Is the property of being real the same as the property of being red? According to Austin, we probably should not think so, as the word "real" lacks any positive content. Hence, it is unlikely that what is real, i.e. Reality, could ever be an object for theory. In this case, the significance of the sense-datum theory is ontological only in the sense that it allows us to make baseless generalizations which equivocate every property and every thing. As a result, the sense-datum theory can be seen to be otiose. Ayer recognizes as much in arguing that it makes no difference to the object if we call it a physical object or a collection of sense-data. [FEK, p. 27] Of course, his point is meant to be that the sense-data vocabulary is ontologically neutral. But in this case, Austin argues, the sense-data theory is pointless and empty.

According to Austin, philosophers have been misled by supposing that the properties of language are the properties of facts in the world. [Word, p. 69] The fact that we use "real" in various ways has led to the notion that in each case there is something that is real to which we are referring. Similarly, the fact that we are able to call several things the same name has led to a theory of universals where the common name is understood to name the

same thing in each instance. [Word, p. 61] But in these cases, Austin argues, it is important to realize that words are not facts or things:

we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can relook at the world without blinkers. [Plea, p. 182]

By studying the various ways in which we use words, we find that all words do not function as proper names, and therefore do not stand for or designate something in the same way that a proper name does. [Word, p. 61] In realizing this fact, we are less tempted to assume that the general use of a term entails the existence of some general object. The world is essentially independent of language; and yet, the complex world of facts finds its expression in the subtle distinctions of ordinary language.³⁸ Austin contends that by examining "what we should say when", that is, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking not merely at words but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: "we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena." [Plea, p. 182] To the extent that a difference of expression is expected to correspond to a difference in cases, he suggests "linguistic phenomenology" might be a good name for his way of doing philosophy. [Plea, p. 182] His method is "phenomenological" in the sense that the structure of language, that is, the set of conditions for the proper use of words, is taken to

indicate the structure of the phenomena. Where a verbal distinction is usually made, it is thought likely that there is in fact a distinction to be made, that a difference in expressions will mark some difference in cases.³⁹

On the one hand, then, Austin argues that we are able to grasp the distinctions in the world by looking at the distinctions in language. On the other hand, he argues that we must "prise" words off of the world so that we can relook at the world without blinkers. Hence, while the world is essentially independent of language, a distinction in what we say is expected to mark some objective distinction in the world. Austin argues, then, that ordinary language is not necessarily the last word for an investigation, but it is most certainly the first word. [Plea, p. 185] The presumption that a difference in expression will correspond to some difference in cases is characterized as a working assumption, the validity of which will be shown by the success of the investigation that is made on this basis. In this case, Austin is not arguing for the efficacy of his method in advance of its application: his hope is that an investigation of our actual use of words will prove both enlightening and useful. [S&S, p. 5] However, a systematic investigation of our use of words is expected to yield systematic results. By carefully considering what we say, and why we say it, we are meant to determine the uses of words. Austin argues, then, that we should not despair and

talk, as some philosophers do⁴⁰, of the infinite number of uses of words:

Philosophers will do this when they have listed as many, let us say, as seventeen; but even if there were something like ten thousand uses of language, surely we could list them all in time. This, after all, is no larger than the number of species of beetles that entomologists have taken the pains to list. [PU, p. 234]

As is the case with any scientific investigation, the study of the uses of words will be restricted by certain practical limitations. For example, we are limited by the amount of accumulated knowledge in the field. But this only points to the need for further research: Austin argues that a complete account of what we say, and why we say it, must await a mature "science of language" which encompasses the results of other studies, most notably psychology and grammar. [I&C, p. 232]

At this point, we are able to distinguish two key tenets of Austin's method.⁴¹ The first is that there are standardized uses for words: outside of this presumption, the study of ordinary language is irrelevant for philosophy. The second is that with diligence, and perhaps a concerted effort, it is possible to list all of these uses. The presumption that there are certain standardized uses for words is at the heart of Austin's method, as it validates and gives sense to his research strategy, and provides a basis for his linguistic critique of philosophy. Hence, in setting out to determine the ordinary use of philosophical terms, Austin is confident in achieving definite results.

Clarification, he argues, should at least be a preliminary for any philosophical study: "Clarity ... I know, has been said to be not enough: but perhaps it will be time to go into that when we are within measurable distance of achieving clarity on some matter." [PU, p. 189] In this case, Austin does not believe that philosophical inquiries are essentially and by their nature inconclusive. On the contrary, he considers the inconclusiveness that is characteristic of philosophy as being scandalous⁴² To the extent that the history of philosophy consists of the endless pendulum of rival theories, each as plausible and as partially founded as the next, Austin maintains that this is due to the impatient ambition of philosophers to ask impossibly large questions, e.g., 'What do we perceive (at all times)?', 'What do we know (in every case) to be certain?', and to settle too much too quickly.⁴³ Hence, in the effort to securing a less comprehensive but more stable basis for philosophy, Austin proposes a case by case approach wherein a group of philosophers is able to collect a sufficient range of graded examples so as to allow for well-founded generalizations in a particular field. [Plea, pp. 186-9] Otherwise, we are left with hasty improvisations and the merry-go-round of rival theories.⁴⁴

While Austin presumes that there are certain rules for the use of words, he accuses Ayer of believing that we can use language in any way that we wish. [See above, p. 43] Ayer suggested in F&K that it might be possible to deny the

assumption the real shape of a penny remains the same when we change perspectives: we might contend that the real shape changed with each appearance. [See above, pp. 21-2] Austin maintains that there are certain rules for the use of "real", and referred to the rules for the use of "real". However, if Ayer does in fact believe that we can use language in any way that we want, and Austin does presume that there are certain rules for language, then Austin's criticism begs the question against Ayer. Supposedly, the validity of this criticism is based on its results. But it is precisely the validity of these results that are in question: Ayer denies that Austin has refuted the sense-datum theory and argues that an investigation of ordinary usage is trivially linguistic to the extent that it concerns our actual use of words and does not consider the formal relations between classes of statements. Ayer bases this charge on a rival conception of the role of the analysis of language for philosophy. Chapter Six will discuss Ayer's philosophical vision.

- 1 J.L. Austin, "Ifs and Cans," Philosophical Papers, pp. 205-32. Hereinafter referred to as I&C.
- 2 Stuart Hampshire, "J.L. Austin, 1911-1960," Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 35. [Austin]
- 3 G.J. Warnock, "John Langshaw Austin, A Biographical Sketch", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 17. [Biography]
- 4 Sir Roy Harrod, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia," Philosophy 38, 1963, p. 228.
- 5 W.F.R. Hardie, "Austin on Perception," Philosophy 38, 1963, p. 263.
- 6 I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for making this point.
- 7 Roy Harrod, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia", Philosophy 38, 1963, pp. 227-41. [Review]
- 8 A.J. Ayer, "Introduction", Logical Positivism, (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960), p.9.
- 9 W.F.R. Hardie, "Austin on Perception", Philosophy 38, 1963, p. 263; Leon J. Goldstein, "Discussion on Austin's Understanding of Philosophy," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 25, 1964, pp. 223-32.
- 10 R.J. Hirst, "A Critical Study of Sense and Sensibilia", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 252.
- 11 Hampshire, Austin, pp. 35-8.
- 12 Keith Graham, J.L. Austin, A Critique of Ordinary Language Philosophy (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1977), p. 37.
- 13 L.W. Forguson, "Austin's Philosophy of Action," Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 133. [Action]
- 14 Mats Furburg, "Review of J.L. Austin: A Critique of Ordinary Language Philosophy", Synthese 42, 1979, p. 467.
- 15 Forguson, Action, p. 128.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Stanley Cavell, "Austin at Criticism", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 63. [Criticism]
- 18 F. Copleston, "Review of How to Do Things with Words", Heythrop Journal 4, 1963, pp. 177-8.

- 19 Jonathan Bennett, "Real", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 281.
- 20 Cavell, Criticism, p. 62.
- 21 I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for making this point.
- 22 Warnock, Biography, p. 19.
- 23 J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock, "Comments on Stuart Hampshire's Article, J.L. Austin, 1911-1960", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p.47. [Comments]
- 24 Hampshire, Austin, p.34.
- 25 Warnock, Biography, p. 12.
- 26 J.O. Urmson, "Austin's Philosophy", Symposium on J.L. Austin, p. 32. [Austin]
- 27 Zeno Vendler, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia and How to Do Things with Words," Foundations of Language 3, 1967, p. 304.
- 28 C.G. New, "A Plea for Linguistics," Symposium on J.L. Austin, pp. 148-65.
- 29 Ibid., p. 150.
- 30 I am indebted to Professor L.W. Ferguson for making this point.
- 31 J.L. Austin, "Truth," Philosophical Papers, pp. 117-33. Hereinafter referred to as Truth.
- 32 J.L. Austin, "How to Talk: Some Simple Ways," Philosophical Papers, pp. 134-53.
- 33 Herman Tennessen, "Vindication of the Humpty Dumpty Attitude Towards Language", Inquiry, 1960, p. 193.
- 34 Robert Brown, "Review of Philosophical Papers and Sense and Sensibilia", Australasian Journal of Philosophy 40, 1962, p. 351.
- 35 Urmson, Austin, pp. 24-5; J.O. Urmson, "A Symposium on Austin's Method: I", Symposium on J.L. Austin, pp. 77-81.
- 36 Stanley Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?", Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 11.

37 A.R. Greenburg, "Defending the Argument from Illusion", The Personalist 58, 1977, pp. 124-30.

38 F. Copleston, "Review of Sense and Sensibilia", Heythrop Journal 3, 1962, p. 389.

39 Warnock, Biography, p. 18.

40 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992), Part I, Section 23.

41 I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for showing me these points.

42 Hampshire, Austin, p. 39.

43 Ibid., p. 37; Warnock, Biography, pp. 7, 12-13, 17.

44 Hampshire, Austin, p. 40.

Chapter 6

Linguistic Phenomenalism

In this chapter we will consider Ayer's conception of the proper role of a linguistic investigation for philosophy, and how it informs his dispute with Austin. Ayer contends that Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are superficially linguistic in that they concern our use of particular words or sentences and do not consider the formal relations between classes of sentences. A linguistic investigation is properly philosophical to the extent that it concerns these formal relations between statements. Ayer argues in ARS that the sense-datum theory is meant to address the logical point that while the truth of a material object statement entails the truth of an experiential statement, the contrary is not also the case: the truth of an experiential statement is logically consistent with the falsity of the material object statement to which it gives rise. [See above, p. 75] As a result, Ayer is able to concede to Austin that the sense-datum philosophers have tended to misrepresent the facts of perception and misuse our ordinary words, but he maintains that these criticisms are beside the logical point of their philosophical theory. For cases of non-veridical perception, e.g., illusions, hallucinations, delusions, are meant to show that "the occurrence of the experience which gives rise to the perceptual judgement is logically consistent with the

judgement's being false". [ARS, pp. 118-9] Ayer argues, then, that the essential philosophical point of the argument from illusion survives Austin's criticisms based on the facts of actual perception and ordinary usage.

As distinct from the lexicographer's interest in language, which is factual and concerns the use of an expression in a linguistic community, Ayer argues that the philosopher's interest is logical and concerns the formal relations between classes of statements.¹ In LTL, he maintains that philosophy is a 'department of logic', and that the mark of a purely logical inquiry is that it is analytic, and is concerned with the formal consequences of definitions and not with matters of fact. [LTL, p. 57] Philosophical propositions are not synthetic, that is, "they do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions." [LTL, p. 57] Philosophical propositions about language, then, are analytic, and are true solely in terms of the meaning of their constituent symbols. [LTL, p. 16] This is in contrast to the empirical propositions of descriptive linguistics, where the truth of an assertion about language is conventional and depends upon the relation of a particular sentence with some contingent matter of fact.

Ayer's strict distinction between an empirical investigation and a philosophical analysis is based on a mutually exclusive and exhaustive distinction between

analytic tautologies and empirical statements. [LTL, p. 41] Analytic propositions include the a priori propositions of logic and pure mathematics, and are certain in the sense that they are simply the expression of a rule concerning the substitution of symbols. [LTL, pp. 31, 57, 74-87] Ayer maintains that the "principles of logic and mathematics are true universally simply because we never allow them to be anything else." [LTL, p. 77] However, empirical propositions are either true or false, and as hypotheses are always subject to test by further experience. [LTL, pp. 9-11, 37, 77-9, 94, 135-6] Philosophical propositions are not empirical because they cannot be confirmed or confuted by sense-experience. [LTL, pp. 31, 57; FEK, pp. 27-8] Ayer argues, then, that between the philosopher who says that what he sees are "sense-data" and another who says that what he sees are "material objects", there is no disagreement about any matter of fact; for our experience is the same on either account. Their dispute is logical, and each is expressing a resolution about the use of words. [FEK, p. 28]

However, Ayer argues that a philosophical theory like the sense-data theory is often taken as an empirical theory about the existence of a material fact, i.e., something called a "sense-datum". The similar surface structures of empirical and philosophical statements is found to be deceptive. [LTL, p. 45] For example, the fact that the philosophical statement "I never see material objects but only sense-data" has the same grammatical form as an

empirical proposition like "I never see gold sovereigns but only Bank of England notes" has led philosophers to construe the sense-data theory as an empirical theory about a particular (and peculiar) object. [FEK, pp. 27-8] While these two sentences are grammatically similar, they are logically distinct: the latter expresses a proposition about some matter of fact which can be either true or false; the former expresses a resolution concerning our use of the word "sense-datum" which (provided that it is self-consistent) can be clarifying or obscurantist, convenient or inconvenient, but cannot be true or false. [FEK, p. 28] This is because a philosophical statement is not about facts, but about the representation of those facts, i.e., the rules for the formation and transformation of statements. The truth or falsity of statements is something else besides.

According to Ayer, certain philosophical problems can be solved once philosophical propositions are recognized as linguistic recommendations and not empirical hypotheses: philosophers will be seen to be fighting over the formal properties of distinct languages and not over the factual properties of distinct things. [LTL, pp. 65-6, 133-53] For example, if the dispute between the sense-datum philosopher and the common-sense realist is held to be an empirical one, then it is interminable because there is no specific fact to which either could refer as conclusive evidence. And yet once the contention that "I never see material objects but

only sense-data" is recognized as being analytic and valid by definition, then any disagreement about this statement will be seen to be unwarranted. For if a dispute about an analytic statement is not immediately resolved, this is only because one of the parties has failed to detect a logical error which involves either the denial of a proposition that is necessarily true, or the assertion of a proposition which is necessarily false. [LTL, p. 133] Otherwise, it is simply a dispute about the practical use of sense-data language, and this is not a matter of truth or falsity but a matter of convenience and relative to purpose.

According to Ayer, the sense-datum language is useful because it allows us to deal with the epistemological problems that arise from the fact that material things can appear to have qualities that they do not have and can seem to exist when they do not exist. [FEK, pp. 68-9] A sense-datum vocabulary is adopted as a convenient way of describing what we perceive regardless of its material existence. For example, in the case of the 'bent stick', we are able to describe the quality that we perceive, i.e., being bent, and yet avoid implying the material existence of an object for which this is a property. Whereas the sense-datum theory constitutes a linguistic recommendation, Ayer argues that any issue about sense-data should be judged in terms of the clarity or convenience of a certain way of speaking, and not in terms of the truth or falsity of what is said. This is in contrast to critics who maintain that

the alleged properties of sense-data are illegitimate because they are strange. W.H.F. Barnes contends that sense-data are objectionable entities on two grounds: (i) To the extent that every appearance can claim to be an existent, sense-data are unlike physical objects in that their properties do not always obey the Law of the Excluded Middle. Hence, in the case where we are unable to determine whether the letter at the bottom of an eye chart is either an M or an N, we must conclude that the sense-datum that we are seeing is neither an M nor an N. Furthermore, (ii) given that a sense-datum can only be what it appears to be, there is no possibility of making any further discoveries about its nature.² "It is", Barnes argues, "a very odd fact, if true, that there are existents such that their being known at all entails their being completely known."³ But according to Ayer, the existence of a sense-datum is precisely not the point at issue when considering the sense-data theory. In the "The Terminology of Sense-Data"⁴ (Terminology), he argues that once we find ourselves talking about sense-data as if they were another kind of thing that interjects between us and the real thing, certain questions will inevitably arise. [Terminology, pp. 295-6] We might ask, for example, 'Are sense-data mental or physical, public or private?', 'Do they exist only when someone is perceiving them, or can they exist when no one is perceiving them?'. Ayer argues that the only way to settle these questions is to decide how we are prepared to use the term "sense-datum".

[Terminology, p. 296] Philosophers must realize that in debating the supposed compatibility of sense-data with material objects, they are not arguing over the nature or essence of some kind of object but merely "hesitating over the choice of alternative verbal conventions." [Terminology, p. 298] As a result, questions concerning the supposed properties of sense-data are settled by merely stipulating how the term is to be used. Ayer recommends that we should not allow sense-data to have characteristics which they do not appear to have. For by reintroducing the distinction between apparent and real qualities into the sense-data vocabulary, we defeat the original purpose for which it was devised, i.e., to allow us to describe what we perceive and not to imply its actual existence. [FEK, pp. 68-70, 122] Similarly, Ayer recommends that it should not be possible for a sense-datum to have any unnoticed characteristics. [FEK, p. 123] For example, in the case where I am hit in the head and see stars but cannot tell how many, I may be tempted to maintain in regard to the sense-data which are involved that they can have undiscriminated constituents. [FEK, pp. 124-5] But it would be philosophically inexpedient to do so: we are applying the linguistic conventions which are appropriate for talking about material objects to sense-data, thus giving up the advantages of the sense-data language. Ayer argues, then, that we should say that while I do see a number of stars, there is no specific number that I see. [FEK, pp. 117-8, 124-5; Terminology, pp.

303-4] Moreover, with regard to the question of whether a sense-datum can exist unperceived, he advises that we should use the term according to the rule that the existence of a sense-datum is dependent upon its being perceived on a particular occasion: in so doing, we minimize the danger of confusing sense-data with physical objects, the properties of which are thought to exist independent of perception. [FEK, p. 117; Terminology, p. 302]

The sense-data language is meant to be ontologically neutral so that, by saying of a given object that it is a "sense-datum", this leaves open the question of whether it discloses a property of a material thing. [ARS, p. 137] Just as 'X is perceived' does not entail 'X is mental', 'X is a sense-datum' should not be taken as entailing either 'X is mental' or 'X is physical'. [LTL, p. 145] A fortiori, sense-data should not be considered as parts of the material things of which they are constitutive: "the sense in which a material thing is reducible to sense-contents is simply that it is a logical construction and they are its elements; and this ... is a linguistic proposition which states that to say anything about it is always equivalent to saying something about them." [LTL, pp. 140-1] Material objects are logical constructions out of sense-data in the sense that statements about the former can be translated into logically equivalent statements about the latter. Ayer explains:

When we speak of certain objects b, c, d ... as being elements of an object e, and of e as being constituted by b, c, d, ... we are not saying that they form part of e, in the sense in which my arm is part of my body. ... What we are saying is that all the sentences in which the symbol e occurs can be translated into sentences which do not contain e itself, or any symbol which is synonymous with e, but do contain symbols b, c, d, ... In such a case we say that e is a logical construction out of b, c, d. [LTL, p. 63]

Hence, the assertion that material objects are logical constructions out of sense-contents is not a factual assertion. It is a linguistic claim to the effect that sentences in which a symbol significantly occurs can be translated into equivalent sentences which contain neither the defininendum itself, nor any of its synonyms. [LTL, p. 64]

According to Ayer, then, perceptual claims are based on experience just in the sense that it is necessary for any perceptual statement to be true that some experiential statement should also be true, and yet it is possible for an experiential statement to be true even though the perceptual claim that is made on this basis is false. [ARS, p. 139] Experiential statements are logically prior to material object statements because, while referring to experience is not necessarily a way of referring to physical objects, referring to physical objects is necessarily a way of referring to experience. [Terminology, p. 312] Ayer argues, then, that the translation of material object statements into statements about experience, or the possibility of experience, is guaranteed by a logical rule which determines the literal significance of any (non-analytic) sentence: no

statement can be empirically significant unless it is somehow expressible in terms of sense-data. [LTL, p. 45] In this case, verifiability is the criterion for the meaningfulness of any (non-analytic) statement, where verification involves the testing of the experiential statements that are entailed by a proposition. [LTL, pp. 5-16, 31, 35-8, 41, 119-20, 136-7] Ayer concludes: "And thus we see that we have not to enquire whether a phenomenalist 'theory of perception' or some other sort of theory is correct, but only what form of phenomenalist theory is correct." [LTL, p. 53]

Rather than factual phenomenalism which asserts that a material thing or object consists of a group of actual and possible sense-data or sense-content, Ayer opts for a linguistic version according to which a material object statement is logically constructed out of statements about sense-data or sense-contents. In this case, linguistic phenomenalism is less misleading than the factual variety because it employs the hypothetical form of a proposition to express the possibility of perception when no perception is actually taking place.⁵ With factual phenomenalism, the objectivity of an object can only be expressed in terms of the possibility of perception for ourselves or for others. The problem is that in so doing the phenomenalist is treating a possible sense-datum as an actual component of an object, and "commits the absurdity of making what is actual depend on what is possible instead of making what is

possible depend on what is actual."⁶ Linguistic phenomenology avoids the difficulties that are inherent to referring to the ontological status of possibles, e.g. possible sensations, possible sense-data.⁷ According to Ayer, we can readily admit that it is possible for a sentence to be hypothetical. [LTL, p. 141] Hypothetical statements can be used to account for the continued existence of a material object when none of its properties are actually experienced: "it is sufficient that they could be capable of being experienced - that is, that there should be a hypothetical fact to the effect that, if certain conditions were fulfilled, certain sense-contents, belonging to the thing in question, would be experienced." [LTL, p. 141] As a result, there is no logical contradiction for the phenomenalist in accounting for the continuous existence of a material object. For in the use of hypothetical statements, Ayer contends that "we are asserting only that certain sense-contents would occur if a particular set of conditions was fulfilled; and such a hypothetical proposition might very well be true, even though the antecedent conditions are never fulfilled." [LTL, p. 141]

According to Ayer, the phenomenalist theory is meant to address a logical point about the non-reciprocal nature of the entailment relations between two classes of propositions. J.J. Ross contends, however, that the supposed "logical gap" between experiential and material object statements is created by the conclusion drawn from

the argument from illusion that what we perceive are "appearances", or "sense-impressions", or "sense-data".⁸ Ayer's principle error is said to be one of reification, i.e., of converting an abstract notion like "appearance" into an actual object, i.e., an appearance. In a similar vein, A.I. Melden maintains that the problem of justifying statements about physical objects on the basis of statements about experience is inevitable once the objects of perception are divested of any logical connection with the physical objects with which we have commerce in our day-to-day activities. He argues:

Once the notion of an experience has been stripped of its logical connection with the objects of which they are experiences, small wonder that the transition from experiences to objects becomes problematic.⁹

Hence, while Ross accuses Ayer of presuming the objective instantiation of sense-data, Melden charges that the objective instantiation of sense-data is neglected by Ayer. But Ayer maintains that the sense-datum vocabulary is devised with the specific intent of avoiding any ontological commitment: we are meant to be able to describe what we perceive and avoid implying anything as to its actual existence. The theory of sense-data is properly based on a logical point about the non-reciprocal nature of the entailment relations between classes of statements and not on any empirical, i.e., psychological, theory about our sense-contents and its possible objective instantiation.

[Thesis, pp. 56-61]

In substituting linguistic for factual phenomenalism, Ayer's intention is to establish empirical principles on logical (and not psychological) grounds. [LTL, pp. 71, 136-8] The analysis of propositions is meant to take the place of the analysis of ideas. For example, Hume argues that when we analyze out thoughts or ideas, we will always find that they are copied from a precedent impression or sentiment; and where we cannot find such an impression, we can be sure that there is in fact no idea.¹⁰ In this case, the criterion which would condemn the works of the 'divines' or the schools of metaphysics is derived from a psychological theory about the acquisition of ideas. But rather than being justified on the basis of an empirical theory, the analysis of material object statements is meant to be established on the grounds of the logical principle that no proposition which refers to a material thing can be "empirically significant" unless it is "somehow expressible in terms of sense-data". [FEK, p. 231] As a result, Ayer condemns metaphysical statements on the basis of "the rule which determines the literal significance of language". [LTL, p. 35] A sentence is said to have literal meaning if, and only if, the proposition it expresses is either analytical or empirically verifiable, i.e., it is analyzable into some set of statements about experience whereby it might be tested. [LTL, p. 5] Metaphysical sentences which refer to a "reality" that transcends the limits of all possible sense-experience are neither analytic nor

empirically verifiable, and are deemed to be nonsense as a result. In this case, the impossibility of a transcendent metaphysics is a matter of logic: it is determined by the bounds of sense, i.e. the rules of language, and not by matters of fact or the psychological limits of knowledge.

[LTL, p. 34]

The logical analysis of propositions constitutes a reductive method which leads to statements about experience, and not experience itself.¹¹ As the terminus of a truth-functional analysis, the incorrigibility of basic statements is thought to be derived from their logical role, and not from any material reference. Whereas they provide the evidence by which other statements are verified, these statements are unverifiable and are thereby incorrigible. As a result, Ayer is able to admit that perhaps experiential statements are not the most basic statements, that it might be possible to be mistaken about our own experience.

[Thesis, 69-70] But he contends that some foundation for analysis is required: "the admission of incorrigible propositions puts a stop to what otherwise threatens to become an infinite regress". [ARS, p. 137] In particular, Ayer argues that if we hold that to know proposition p to be true normally involves accepting it on the basis of some other true proposition q which strongly supports p, then it is required that we should also know q to be true; and this leads to an infinite regress unless we come at some stage to propositions which are "knowable in their own right", i.e.,

propositions which do not require support from other propositions. [Thesis, pp. 70-1] But if certain statements must be deemed "basic", we should remember that the translation, i.e., analysis, of (non-analytic) sentences is justified by the logical rule that a proposition must be verifiable in order for it to have any literal significance. [LTL, p. 35] According to this formal criterion, any basic statement would be senseless: a statement must be corrigible in order to avoid the consequence of not being able to say anything by it. [LTL, pp. 10-11, 91-3] But if these statements are corrigible, then they are not "basic" as their truth or falsity is determined by the evidence furnished by other seemingly more basic statements.

Ayer's dilemma is that basic propositions are either corrigible and not basic, or incorrigible and nonsense.¹² In fact, much of Ayer's philosophical career could be construed as an effort to reconcile these two positions. In LTL, he initially accommodates the criterion of verifiability by maintaining that every synthetic proposition is an empirical hypothesis and no proposition is ever conclusively verified. [LTL, pp. 37, 94, 135-6] However, Ayer subsequently argues that certain basic propositions can refer solely to the content of a single experience, and "what may be said to verify them conclusively is the occurrence of the experience to which they uniquely refer." [LTL, p. 10] Rather than being incorrigible by definition, i.e. as the terminus of a truth-

functional analysis, basic statements are deemed to be true by reference to the empirical facts. [PEK, pp. 85-8, 113-4] In The Central Questions of Philosophy¹³, this position develops into full-blown factual phenomenalism, and what we perceive is understood to be the "contents of experience". [Questions, pp. 89-111]

The source of Ayer's difficulties (and also of his inspiration) stems from his attempt at expressing empiricist principles in logical positivist terms. Under the influence of Carnap, Ayer employs formal modes of speech and avoids material modes because of the tendency to consider such principles as statements describing the structure or constitution of material objects.¹⁴ [LTL, pp. 32, 58n, 59n] "Pseudo-object statements", Carnap had claimed, are formulated in such a way that they seem to refer to objects when, in fact, they refer only to the "forms of the designation of those objects with which they appear to deal".¹⁵ For example, he argued that while the sentence "Five is not a thing but a number" is taken as expressing a proposition concerning a property of the number five, in reality, it concerns the word "five" and stipulates that it is to be treated as a number-word and not a thing-word.¹⁶ Similarly, Ayer argues that in philosophy, propositions and questions which are linguistic in nature are often expressed so as to appear factual. [LTL, pp. 57-8] Hence, he is careful to separate logical statements concerning the formal relations between symbols, i.e. between definitions and

their consequences, from empirical propositions concerning matters of fact. However, Ayer goes on to argue that the formal role of any particular statement cannot be kept entirely separate from its material reference. [FEK, pp. 84-92] In "Verification and Experience"¹⁷ (V&E), he argues that if certain sentences are considered basic solely by virtue of their place in a formal system, then there would be "no more justification for [this designation] than there would be for making a collection of all the propositions that could be correctly expressed in English by sentences beginning with the letter B, and choosing to call them Basic propositions". [V&E, p. 231; FEK, pp. 84-92, 113-4]

On this point, both Austin and Ayer agree: they both argue that if a linguistic analysis has any serious claim to being true, then there must be some non-verbal reality of which it is true or false, i.e., it is not enough that statements should be consistent with each other. [S&S, p. 108] But Austin disagrees with Ayer in arguing that there is no one kind of sentence, "experiential" or otherwise, which provides evidence for all the rest. Just as there is no special kind of sentence which as such is true (or false), so there is no special kind of sentence which as such is evidence-providing: whether a specific statement constitutes evidence, or itself requires evidence, will depend upon the circumstances in which it is uttered. [Thesis, pp. 48-9] The problem in all of this, Austin argues, is in supposing that we can talk about the truth or

corrigibility or certainty of sentences without considering the circumstances where any particular sentence is found to be true, corrigible or certain. He writes:

It seems to be fairly generally realized nowadays that, if you take a bunch of sentences (or propositions, to use the term Ayer prefers) impeccably formulated in some language or another, 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. [S&S, pp. 110-1]

Austin argues in S&S, then, that in the case where an utterance is incorrigible, the fact that nothing can be produced as a reasonable ground for retracting the statement is due to the further fact that the speaker is in, or has got herself into, the very best situation for making the statement. [Thesis, p. 47] She can have complete confidence in what she is saying, not because of the type of sentence that she is using, but due to the circumstances in which the statement is made.

Now we are in a position to sketch the fault lines that divide Austin's and Ayer's linguistic investigations. Ayer formulates a logical rule for the meaningfulness of sentences that is based on the formal relations between types of statements. Austin studies the use of words, and maintains that the meaningfulness of any particular sentence cannot be considered outside of the circumstances in which it functions. Ayer is interested in the logical relations between classes of statements apart from their context;

Austin considers the actual use of words in context. According to Ayer, then, Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are superficial and beside the point because they do not concern the logical structure of our statements. Austin argues, on the other hand, that the logical relations between classes of statements are in fact determined by the circumstances where a particular sentence is used and makes sense. [See above, pp. 47-9] He maintains that "it is not enough simply to examine the words themselves; just what is meant and what can be inferred (if anything) can be decided only by examining the full circumstances in which the words are used." [S&S, p.41] For example, in the case where we find pig-like marks and a few buckets of pig-food on the ground, and are able to discern pig-like sounds and pig-like smells, this can be taken as evidence for the existence of a pig. But if a pig steps into plain view, this does not furnish us with still more evidence that it is a pig; for we can see it is a pig and the question is settled. [See above, pp. 49-50] Austin charges that by arguing that every ordinary statement is based on evidence, Ayer is (over-) extending a situation where we use language into a general theory of language. In so doing, Ayer presumes that every perceptual situation is akin to one where we are only presented with evidence for the truth of an assertion. Here, Austin argues, it can be seen that "the apparent sophistication of Ayer's 'linguistic' doctrine really rests squarely on the old Berkeleian, Kantian ontology of the

'sensible manifold'". [S&S, pp. 60-1] [See above, 42-3]

Ayer eventually concedes this point. [See above, 67-8]

At this point, we might conclude that Ayer has given up the game to Austin. For having conceded that sense-datum philosophers have tended to misuse the facts of our ordinary language and actual perception, Ayer had contended that their point is essentially logical and offered a linguistic reformulation, i.e., that the relations of entailment between material object and experiential statements are found to be non-reciprocal. [See above, pp. 57-62, 63-4, 72-4] This defence no longer holds because Ayer's linguistic form of phenomenalism is found to depend on the factual variety. But Ayer does not recant. Rather, he claims that Austin's criticisms do not engage the sense-datum theory because they miss the general purpose of any philosophical theory. A philosophical theory is properly understood to concern the formal, i.e., logical, relations between classes of statements. The sense-datum philosophers have offered a general theory of perception instead of a general theory of perceptual statements, but the scope of the investigation is large. But Austin does not seem to allow any general theory or general problem to be proper in philosophy; "All he offers is a general recommendation to refer all inquiries to an investigation of the unique occurrence of the utterance of a perceptual proposition."¹⁸ To the extent that philosophy has traditionally been concerned with questions concerning the general characteristics of things (ontology),

or the general limits of knowledge (epistemology), or the general principles of conduct (ethics), Austin's efforts at eschewing generality miss the larger point of a philosophical thesis.¹⁹

Ayer charges that Austin is not properly playing the game of philosophy. But, of course, that is Austin's whole point.²⁰ In S&S, he argues that to the extent that the sense-datum theory has been built on "a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies", then by studying what we say and why we say it, we should be able to "dismantle the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground". [S&S, p. 142] In this sense, Austin's method is profoundly negative: his point-by-point critique seems to deny the possibility of any general answers or any general classifications.²¹ But Austin's critics duly note that he does manage to offer a fairly full classification of the uses of words like "look", "appear", "seem" and "real".²² [See above, pp.39-40, 44-5] Elsewhere he offers a typology of uses of language, e.g., the use of "constative" and "performative" statements, and the "speech-act theory". [HTW, pp. 1-82, 83-163; PU, 233-52] In this case, it seems that Austin does not eschew all general questions, but maintains that the answers that are offered are typically much too simplistic.²³

We can conclude, then, that Austin and Ayer are arguing at cross-purposes. On the one hand, Ayer would effect a foundational reconstruction of knowledge in terms of precise rules. He strictly distinguishes the "class of significant

statements" as being comprised of analytic tautologies and empirical hypotheses, and argues that the criterion for the significance of any (non-analytic) statement is its possible analysis into a set of statements about experience which can be verified. On the other hand, Austin sets out to determine the circumstances where certain utterances are used. In Ayer's view, an investigation of our use of language is irrelevant to building a foundation for knowledge. In Austin's view, however, it is a mistake to suppose that we can distinguish "classes" of sentences of which it can be said that as such they are incorrigible, provide evidence for other sentences, and must be checked in order to verify other sentences. [See above, pp. 49-51, 52-3] Nor is it true of statements about material things that as such they must be based on evidence; they stand in need of verification; and they cannot be conclusively verified. The problem is in supposing that we can talk about sentences in general and not consider the specific circumstances where certain things are said. It is a mistake to assume that there are answers to such impossibly general questions as what is evidence for what, what is certain, what needs or does not need evidence, can or cannot be verified. Austin argues: "If the Theory of knowledge consists of finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing." [S&S, p. 124]

But both Austin and Ayer are linguistic philosophers, and a linguistic analysis in both cases is meant to solve

certain philosophical problems. According to Austin, philosophers have abused ordinary language: for example, by gradually stretching a word with a specific use until it is at first obscurely metaphorical and finally senseless. [S&S, p. 15] In LTL, Ayer maintains that tautologies and empirical hypotheses constitute the entire class of significant propositions; as a result, certain metaphysical statements that are neither empirical or analytic are deemed to be senseless. [LTL, pp. 34-5] The linguistic categories to which Austin and Ayer refer (i.e., "ordinary language" or the "ordinary use" of words and the "class of significant statements" respectively) are understood to have a critical role. And yet the critical authority of these linguistic categories are derived from an extra-linguistic assumption, namely, that the structure of language reflects the structure of facts. Hence, Ayer's logical analysis of sentences is preceded by an empirical theory according to which the terminus of an analysis of sentences is understood to denote the "contents of our senses". Austin's description of our ordinary use of words is preceded by the methodological presumption that "if a distinction works well for practical uses in ordinary life ..., then there is sure to be something in it, it will not mark nothing." [Plea, p. 185] In Chapter Seven, we will show that while the presupposition of an objective ground is essential for a linguistic critique based on the logical form of sentences

or the ordinary use of words, the fact of this presumption undermines the criticisms that are made on this basis.

- 1 John Searle, "The Philosophy of Language: Dialogue with John Searle", Men of Ideas, interviewed by Bryan Magee (New York: Viking Press, 1979), p. 200.
- 2 W.H.F. Barnes, "The Myth of Sense-Data," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 45, 1944-5, pp. 89-117.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 97-8.
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20 D.F. Pears, "Wittgenstein and Austin," British Analytical Philosophy, eds. B. Williams & A. Montefiore, p. 24.

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Chapter 7

Grounds for Language

Austin and Ayer are each looking for something quite different. Ayer considers the logic of language, and formulates a criterion that precludes metaphysical sentences from the class of meaningful propositions. Austin studies the use of words, and on this basis develops a typology which shows that philosophers have been misusing their terms. In each case, the supposed philosophical relevance of a linguistic investigation is rooted in the notion that there are rules for language or for the use of words. In Ayer's case, the possible analysis of (non-analytic) propositions is meant to function as a criterion for distinguishing the class of meaningful statements. [LTL, pp. 34-5, 41] In Austin's case, he argues that there are specific circumstances under which we use words, and philosophers have tended to stretch these uses, without caution or limit, until they become meaningless. [S&S, p. 15] While Ayer refers to a rule which determines the literal significance of language, Austin distinguishes certain rules (e.g., 'When we say ... we imply (suggest, say) _____') for the use of words. The authority of these rules is based on the presumption that they have an objective basis, that is, they are in some sense independent of the analysis by which they are derived. Otherwise, Ayer's preclusion of metaphysical sentences from the class

of meaningful propositions becomes an ad hoc prejudice against certain kinds of sentences, and Austin's claim that he is studying ordinary language or the ordinary use of words is a self-serving conceit. Austin argues, then, that we can presume that "if a distinction works well for practical purposes in ordinary life then there is sure to be something in it, it will not mark nothing." [Plea, p. 185] Ayer comes to admit that his logical analysis of sentences is based on the assumption of an empirical claim about perception. [ARS, p.113] In each case, the structure of language is assumed to reflect the structure of facts.

The aim of this chapter is to consider the ground for Austin's and Ayer's linguistic critique of philosophy, and to argue that because these grounds are presumed, the linguistic critique fails in each case. This chapter might seem ill-conceived; for both Austin and Ayer reject the notion that language, or an analysis of language, stands in need of grounds. Ayer maintains that an investigation of the formal relations between classes of statements is separate from, and must be kept separate from, an empirical study of the relations of any particular statement with facts in the world. [LTL, pp. 41-5, 46-59] Hence, by considering the grounds for Ayer's logical analysis of sentences, we are importing factual concerns into what is properly a logical analysis. Austin argues, on the other hand, that it is impossible to study language in abstraction from the particular circumstances where words are used.

Hence, there is no need to inquire into the grounds for language, or for an investigation of language: our language is always already grounded in the world. [Plea, p. 182]

Both Ayer and Austin deny the suggestion that a linguistic investigation needs to be grounded, but each does so for a different reason. Ayer argues that it is possible to talk about language, i.e., the logical relations between sentences, and not consider the circumstances where words are used; Austin contends that it is impossible to do so. In Ayer's case, the 'logical form' of sentences provides the basis for the application of certain logical laws. The logical form of a sentence is simply the sum total of the propositions that it implies. [LTL, pp. 22-4, 60-2, 70-1] Because it is a contradiction to assert the antecedent of a conditional but deny the consequent, a sentence is logically well-formed when it conforms to these implications, and senseless (self-contradictory) when it does not. [LTL, pp. 31, 34-5, 57, 59-71] Ayer argues, then, that the truth of a material object statement entails the truth of some set of experiential statements whereby it might be verified. This criterion of verifiability is meant to be expressed solely in terms of the formal deduction of classes of statements: according to Austin, the analysis of sentences should lead to statements about experience and not to experience itself.

Ayer's explicit intention is to ground empiricist principles on a logical (rather than psychological) basis. [See above, pp. 153-4] Verifiability is meant to constitute

a logical criterion which serves as the basis for a linguistic critique of philosophy, that is, of metaphysics, as it excludes metaphysical statements from the class of meaningful propositions. [LTL, p. 41] However, Ayer has considerable difficulties in formulating a criterion that accomplishes this task - various versions either prove "too much" or "too little".¹ On the one hand, he argues that if we hold that a sentence is significant if, and only if, the proposition that it expresses is either analytic or empirically verifiable, this proves too much as it precludes statements that we wish to admit. First, if conclusive verifiability is taken as the criterion for the significance of any (non-analytic) statement, then this eliminates scientific statements which express general laws: laws cover a potentially infinite number of cases, and no finite series of observations can prove them to be true. [LTL, pp. 37-8] Second, there are obvious difficulties in conclusively verifying statements about the past by our present sense-experience; for at present we are not in a position to directly perceive past events. [LTL, pp. 18-9, 37, 101-2] As an inductive inference based on evidence, an assertion about the past cannot be conclusively verified; hence, it is precluded from being a meaningful proposition. On the other hand, Ayer argues, if we admit general laws and statements about the past by instituting the "weaker" criterion of inconclusive verifiability, this proves too little; for in this case we can no longer exclude metaphysical statements

from the class of significant statements. [LTL, p. 38] If a statement is said to be factually significant if, and only if, some observation is relevant to determining its truth or falsity, then it is difficult to imagine any situation where a metaphysician could not claim that some observation was relevant to the truth of his pronouncements. For any metaphysician is free to claim that any observation is relevant to the truth of the claims of his system.²

Recognizing the above problems, Ayer offers a reformulation of the verification principle:

it is the mark of a genuine proposition, not that it should be equivalent to an experiential proposition, or any finite number of experiential propositions, but simply that some experiential propositions can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from those other premises alone. [LTL, pp. 38-9]

Whereas the previous criterion based on the supposed relevance of observations was found to be nondemonstrable and therefore was unable to exclude statements, in this case the criterion of verifiability is operationally defined in terms of the possible deduction of a set of experiential statements, i.e. statements describing experience, from a putative statement of fact. While this criterion serves to exclude statements purporting to represent facts outside of experience, Ayer argues that it is "liberal enough" to include general propositions and propositions about the past: an experiential proposition is a proposition which records an actual or possible observation. [LTL, p. 38] But this criterion remains far too liberal, as it allows meaning

to any statement whatsoever.³ Ayer makes this point in his introduction to the revised edition of LTL, and gives the following example:

the statements "the Absolute is lazy" and "if the Absolute is lazy, this is white" jointly entail the observation-statement "this is white", and since "this is white" does not follow from either of these premises, taken by itself, both of them satisfy my criterion of meaning. [LTL, pp. 11-2]

The same could be said for any other nonsensical statement that we put in the place of "the Absolute is lazy", the only provision being that it has the grammatical form of an indicative sentence. And a criterion of meaning which allows such latitude is obviously unacceptable.

Ayer attempts to meet this difficulty with the following reformulation of the criterion of verifiability:

a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation-statement, or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation-statements it entails at least one observation-statement which is not deducible from these other premises alone; and ... a statement is indirectly verifiable if it satisfies the following conditions: first, that in conjunction with certain other premises it entails one or more directly verifiable statements which are not deducible from these other premises alone; and secondly, that these other premises do not include any statement that is not either analytic, or directly verifiable, or capable of being independently established as indirectly verifiable. [LTL, p. 13]

In this case, the premises that are deduced from empirically significant statements are meant to contain at least one observation statement which "records an actual or possible observation." [LTL, p. 11] As a result, a statement can be said to have factual meaning if it is either 'directly' verifiable and is thereby an observation statement, or is

'indirectly' verifiable and it entails one or more observation statements in conjunction with other premises. The latter provision will include hypothetical statements, e.g. scientific laws. But this revised criterion also grants factual significance to any sentence whatsoever. Given the conjunction of two sentences S and N (S&N), where S is a sentence that satisfies Ayer's criterion and N is a sentence that violates that criterion, Carl Hempel argues that

whatever consequences can be deduced from S with the help of legitimate subsidiary hypotheses can also be deduced from S&N by means of the same subsidiary hypotheses, and as Ayer's new criterion is formulated essentially in terms of the deducibility of a certain type of consequence from the given sentence, it countenances S&N along with S.⁴

Hempel's point is that if sentence S is allowed to satisfy Ayer's criterion, then the conjunction S&N must do so as well, because whatever is entailed by S is also entailed by S conjoined with any other sentence. Since N adds no new consequences and adds no new content, then any sentence can get through as part of the conjunction S&N.⁵

In response, Ayer refines his criterion even further. Rather than determining the possible significance of any (non-analytic) statement, the criterion of verifiability constitutes a description of one proper use of the term "meaning" according to which it would be incorrect to say that a factual statement is meaningful if it is not verifiable: "Unless it [i.e., a factual statement] satisfied the principle of verification, it would not be capable of

being understood in the sense in which either scientific or common-sense statements are habitually understood." [LTL, p. 16] Here the claim is that unless a statement is verifiable, it cannot be considered a member of the class of scientific or common-sense statements. Verifiability is no longer an exclusive criterion of meaning, that is, it no longer serves to exclude statements from the class of significant propositions. As a result, Ayer goes on to argue that:

it is indeed open to anyone to adopt a different criterion of meaning and so to produce an alternative definition which may very well correspond to one of the ways in which the word "meaning" is commonly used. And if a statement satisfied such a criterion, there is, no doubt, some proper use of the word "understanding" in which it would be capable of being understood. [LTL, p. 16]

But in this case, the criterion of verification is no longer by itself sufficient for the elimination of metaphysics.

Ayer concedes as much in arguing:

Although I should still defend the use of the criterion of verifiability as a methodological principle, I realize that for the effective elimination of metaphysics it needs to be supported by detailed analyses of particular metaphysical arguments. [LTL, p. 16]

Ayer has come a long way from his original pronouncement that the verification principle was a general criterion of meaning, capable of eliminating all metaphysics and of solving all outstanding philosophical disputes.⁶ The criterion of verifiability is now meant to apply to a particular class of statements, namely, to empirical and common-sense propositions. We are advised to confine our

attention to verifiable claims, that is, to statements about which it would be incorrect to say that a statement was meaningful unless it satisfied the principle of verification. [LTL, p. 15] As a linguistic recommendation, the entreaty to restrict ourselves to statements which satisfy the principle of verification will be made for particular reasons, for specific purposes. Concerning this point, C.E.M. Joad comments: "Anybody can issue a proposal or make a recommendation, but whether the recommendation is accepted and the proposal adopted by philosophers will depend upon considerations which are independent of the verification principle."⁷ Outside of a general theory of meaning, the criterion of verifiability becomes the suggestion that we restrict our statements to those that can be confirmed or confuted by the facts of experience. Why should we do this? Ayer argues that the criterion of verifiability is not "entirely arbitrary" because a statement which does not satisfy this criterion cannot be understood in the same way as scientific and common-sense statements. [LTL, p. 16] But all this means is that unless a statement has the kind of verification a scientific or common-sense statement has, it will not be considered a scientific or common-sense statement.⁸ This does not preclude the possibility of other kinds of statements. Nor does it preclude the possibility of other kinds of meanings.

What has gone wrong here? Ayer's initial intention was to establish empiricist principles on logical grounds:

verifiability was meant to constitute a logical criterion for the meaningfulness of any non-analytic statement. But his attempts at formalizing the principle of verification have undermined its critical role. For if the verification principle is meant to refer to our actual use of the word "meaning", then its descriptive function in no way warrants its prescriptive use as a criterion for determining the possible meaningfulness of statements. The fact that we never say X is no rule against saying X.⁹ In support of this point, Ayer says:

In putting forward the principle of verification as a criterion of meaning, I do not overlook the fact that the word "meaning" is commonly used in a variety of senses, and I do not wish to deny that in some of these senses a statement may properly be said to be meaningful even though it is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. [LTL, p. 15]

Mystics and metaphysicians would use "meaning" in a different way. Ayer argues, however, that there is at least one proper use of the word in which it is incorrect to say that a statement is meaningful unless it satisfies the principle of verification. [LTL, p. 15] But on what grounds is it recommended that we should use this rule? Ayer's critics contend that the validity of the verification principle is based on the metaphysical presupposition that the world consists only of sensory facts, i.e., the kind of facts that can be known in sense experience.¹⁰ Hence, John Dinneen comments that Ayer is a metaphysician in disguise.¹¹

The criterion of verifiability is not purely analytic, as the supposed analysis of sentences is based on an

empirical theory about what we perceive. [See above, pp. 57-8, 159-60] But neither is it simply an empirical statement, as the criterion is said to be a recommendation about what we ought to say and not merely about what we do say. Being neither an analytic tautology nor an empirical hypothesis, the criterion of verifiability enjoys the same status as a metaphysical proposition. This has brought charges of hypocrisy, that is, that the criterion is given a privileged position which exempts it from the strictures that it brings against other philosophical propositions.¹² The problem is that as an absolute criterion for the meaningfulness of sentences, the verification principle is meaningless by its own standards. As a result, Ayer eventually concludes that the verification principle is not absolute, and gives up his attempts at formulating the criterion of verifiability.¹³ He also comes to admit that it is impossible to reduce ordinary simple statements about cigarette cases and glasses and ashtrays to statements about sense-data. Nor is it possible to reduce statements about the past into statements about present and future evidence. Furthermore, Ayer questions the clear-cut nature of the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. Very few of the details of his linguistic theory survive. What remains, Ayer argues, is the "general rightness of the approach".¹⁴

Ayer's approach has been to try to establish a rule for the meaningfulness of sentences in terms of the formal relations of the statements that they imply; certain

sentences will be seen to be nonsensical when these statements are revealed as being contradictory. Previously, we argued that the supposed relevance of a linguistic investigation for philosophy is based on the notion that there are certain rules for language. [See above, pp. 114-5, 125-6, 135-6, 149-50] While philosophical theories are often not about language, the theories of philosophers must be conveyed through language and this has allowed the basis for a linguistic critique of philosophy. In Ayer's case, the criterion of verifiability is meant to establish epistemological limits: he argues that any (non-analytic) statement must be analyzable into some possible set of experiential statements; hence, it is impossible for a metaphysical statement which refers to a "reality" that transcends the limits of all possible sense-experience to have any literal significance. [LTL, p. 34]

Austin argues, however, that Ayer is misguided in his approach to language: we cannot talk about language, including the meaning of sentences, and not consider the specific circumstances where words are used. [See above, pp. 52-3] While Ayer distinguishes a structure under the surface of our everyday language which a logical analysis can bring to light, Austin maintains that in the case of any particular sentence, what is meant and what can be inferred can only be determined by examining the circumstances where the words are used [S&S, p. 41] Austin argues, then, that in any particular situation where we are asked to explain

the meaning of a word, we might do so by explaining the syntax of the word in the English language (e.g., "Rat" is a noun), or by demonstrating the semantics of the term by having the questioner imagine the situation in which the term would be appropriately applied. (e.g., We use "rat" to denote a rodent with sharp yellow teeth and a long tail).

[Word, pp. 56-69] While the syntax and semantics are distinguishable, this does not mean that they are separate: we might surmise that the syntactic role of "rat" as a noun is derived from its use as a name for the rodent. According to Austin, then, an 'ideal' language that separates syntax and semantics is an inadequate model of any natural language:

its careful separation of syntactics from semantics, its lists of explicitly formulated rules and conventions, and its careful delimitation of their spheres of operation - all are misleading. Any actual language has few, if any, explicit conventions, no sharp limits to the spheres of operation of rules, no rigid separation of what is syntactical and what semantical. [Word, p. 67]

According to Austin, it is impossible to abstract a semantic rule from the circumstances where words are used: the meaning of any particular word or sentence is a function of its effective use and nothing apart from it. [Word, p. 55-69] As a result, there can be no sharp distinction between pragmatics and semantics, between questions about the meaningfulness of sentences and questions about how they are used, i.e., their utility, informativeness, clarity. Hence, while Ayer characterizes the meaninglessness of a sentence in terms of the formal contradiction of a set of statements

which is implied, Austin contends that an expression can be nonsensical without being self-contradictory: the absurdity of certain statements rests on "some semantic convention ... about the way we use words in situations." For example, he argues that it is not syntactically incorrect but confusing to talk of indirect perception when it is impossible that we should just see something. [See above, pp. 34-6] We are puzzled by such uses, and feel that we don't understand what is being said: in this case, our criticisms are based on the clarity, informativeness and intelligibility of the statement.¹⁵

But what remains of the relevance of a linguistic investigation for philosophy? In LTL, Ayer set out to formulate the criterion of verifiability, a rule for the literal significance of sentences that is based on their logical structure. [LTL, p. 35] And yet, the set of verification statements that are entailed by the logical analysis of any particular proposition is found to be infinite. [FEK, p. 231] As a result, the set of conditions for the meaningfulness of a proposition is indeterminable: it is impossible to run through the all the members of an infinite series. [FEK, p. 45] There is no logical basis for the criterion of verifiability. Ayer admits, then, that he bases his analysis of sentences on an empirical theory of perception: the logic of language is no longer the absolute basis. Hence, he eventually abandons the criterion of verifiability altogether.

Similarly, Austin distinguishes certain rules for the use of words. He refers to the implications in using one word as opposed to another, and establishes specific circumstances for the use of particular terms. In so doing, Austin maintains that the types of uses of words are determinate: even if there are ten thousand uses, he argues that we should be able to list all of them. [PU, p. 234] The specific circumstances that establish these uses are thought to be determinable; hence, the study of ordinary language is said to be an area of field work in philosophy where consensus can be reached. [Plea, p. 183] In S&S, Austin distinguishes the specific circumstances for the use of words (e.g., "look", "appear", "seem", "real" and "reality") and establishes certain normative rules on this basis (e.g., "When we use "look", we imply the general sphere of vision"). [See above, pp. 39-40, 42-5] These rules are normative in the sense that they provide a linguistic critique of philosophy. Subsequently, Austin offers a much more general framework for discussing the uses of language. In PU and HTW, Austin distinguishes between two kinds of uses of language: "constative utterances" are used in order to state (or constate) something, and are either true or false as a result; "performative utterances" are used to accomplish something, and are neither true nor false. For example, he contends that "when I say that 'I do' (sc. take this woman to be my lawfully wedded wife), I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it." [PU,

p. 235] And yet, almost as soon as Austin makes the performative-constative distinction, he proceeds to show how these lines are blurred once we start looking for a general criterion by which the two can be distinguished. [PU, pp. 241-52; HTW, pp. 53-93] He then argues that when we state or describe or report something, we perform an act which is every bit as much an act as vowing or ordering or warning. [PU, p. 249] As a result, Austin dissolves the constative-performative distinction into a much more general theory of speech-acts. "Phonetic" acts (uttering certain noises) are distinguished from "phatic" acts (using words belonging to a certain vocabulary and conforming to a certain grammar) and "rhetic" acts (using words with a specific sense and reference). [HTW, p. 95] "Locutionary" acts (acts of saying something) are differentiated from "illocutionary" acts (acts performed in saying something) and "perlocutionary" acts (acts performed by saying something). [HTW, p. 95] The relation of speech acts to locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is ostensibly that of genus to species, while phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts are sub-species of locutionary acts.¹⁶

But more than a simple taxonomy of utterances, Austin's classification of speech acts shows an obvious hierarchy of dependencies. Walter Cerf notes in regard to phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts that each is not simply a subclass of locutionary acts but an essential part of that act - just as blossom, stem, leaf and root are parts and not classes of

flowers.¹⁷ While it is possible to make sounds without uttering words, it is impossible to utter words without making sounds. Similarly, while we can utter words which have no meaning, we cannot convey meaning in speech without uttering words. Phonetic acts, phatic acts, and rhetic acts form a hierarchy as essential aspects of a whole.¹⁸

Supporting this point, Austin argues that "the locutionary act embraces doing many things at once to be complete".

[HTW, p. 107] Similarly, it seems impossible to isolate a locutionary act from an illocutionary or perlocutionary act. In regard to the relation of any particular locution to the way in which it is used, i.e., its "illocutionary force", Austin contends that "to perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and eo ipso to perform an illocutionary act." [HTW, p. 98]

We have already noted that Austin's investigation of ordinary language is more than a linguistic description. [See above, pp. 124-5] In this present case, what appears to be the division of the genus speech acts into a number of sub-species is in fact the distinction of essential aspects which make up a whole. While Austin does not offer the same sort of a priori investigation as does Ayer, he establishes certain rules by examining the specific circumstances for the use of words. While in S&S these rules had a "normative" function in determining how we ought to use words, here their role has a constitutive sense in determining the conditions for a speech act.¹⁹ In the case

of the speech-act theory, the mandate to determine the circumstances for the use of words has been extended so as to provide a framework for discussing the circumstances for the uses of language in general. Hence, the development of Austin's distinction between "constative" and "performative" utterances into a more general theory of speech acts can be seen as the culmination of an effort to determine the conditions for language. Austin argues: "The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating." [HTW, p. 107]

Somewhat ironically, Austin's critics charge that his general theory of speech-acts is an oversimplification of the various ways in which we use language. For example, Walter Cerf points out that the phrase "performing an act" has a very limited use in everyday discourse, i.e., it is perhaps most at home when describing a circus or variety act.²⁰ But when it is extended to cover saying anything whatsoever, speaking is turned into something that must be called "performing an act". This is accomplished by a series of substitutions:

To say something or to speak is to issue an utterance. To issue an utterance is to do something. To do something is to perform an action. To perform an action is to perform an act. To say something is, then, to perform an act of speaking, that is, a speech act.²¹

As a result, we are led from ordinary expressions like "speaking" or "saying something" to the extra-ordinary use

of a phrase like "performing a speech act". In so doing, Cerf argues, we arrive at a general theory of speech acts which is much more amenable to formulation than any theory of speaking.

In S&S, Austin had accused Ayer of simplifying language in order to allow for its formulation. [See above, pp. 52-3] Now Cerf makes much the same accusation of Austin. The positive aspects of Austin's linguistic technique, and the restless movement of this theory towards totality, should be understood as essential to the supposed philosophical relevance of a linguistic investigation. The philosophical importance of an analysis of language is directly proportional to the absolutely fundamental nature of the structure that it uncovers. In Ayer's case, the logical analysis of the conditions for meaning were meant to determine the bounds of language (and thought, and knowledge). While Austin's investigation of ordinary language is initially quite piecemeal and its intentions are modest, his methodological viewpoint eventually becomes holistic and tends towards the Absolute - his avowed aim is the elucidation of the total speech act in the total speech situation. However, we have argued that Austin's method is based on the presumption that there is an objective structure for language, and that it is this methodological presupposition that gives sense to his technique. [See above, pp. 134-7] Hence, elucidating the total speech act is a methodological ideal.

By assuming that there is a structure for language or for the use of words, Austin and Ayer presume the validity of the criterion that they must establish. Ayer accuses Austin of ignoring the "logic of language", but proceeds under the supposition that there is a logical form for sentences, Austin charges Ayer with believing that we can use language in any way that we wish, but presumes that there are certain rules for the use of words. Each presupposes but does not establish the validity of his own method in attacking the validity of the other. As a result, the linguistic critique in each case fails.

- 1 An excellent summary of Ayer's various formulations of the principle of verifiability is provided by John A. Dinneen in "The Course of Logical Positivism", The Modern Schoolman 34, 1956, pp. 1-21. [Course] My discussion is largely indebted to this.
- 2 Isiah Berlin, "Verifiability in Principle," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 39, 1938-9, p. 233.
- 3 Dinneen, Course, pp. 15-6.
- 4 Carl Hempel, "Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," Revue Internationale de Philosophie ix, 1950, p. 50. (I have revised the symbolization).
- 5 Alonzo Church makes a similar objection in "A Note on the New Edition of Professor Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic," Mind 57, 1948, p. 418.
- 6 Dinneen, Course, p. 18.
- 7 C.E.M. Joad, "Logical Positivism and the Theory of Knowledge," Hibbert Journal 48, p. 63. [LP]
- 8 Dinneen, Course, p. 18.
- 9 Herman Tennessen, "Vindication of the Humpty Dumpty Attitude towards Language", Inquiry 3, 1960, p. 193.
- 10 Ralph W. Erickson, "The Metaphysics of a Logical Empiricist", Philosophy of Science 8, 1941, pp. 320-28; Joad, LP, pp. 57-65.
- 11 Dinneen, Course, p. 13.
- 12 Joad, LP, p. 62.
- 13 A.J. Ayer, "Logical Positivism and Its Legacy: Dialogue with A.J. Ayer", Men of Ideas, interview by Bryan Magee (New York, Viking Press, 1979), p. 131.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 I am grateful to Professor Paul Forster for this point.
- 16 Walter Cerf, "Critical Review of How to do Things with Words," Symposium on J.L. Austin, pp. 356, 368. [Review]
- 17 Ibid., pp. 356-7.
- 18 Ibid., p. 356.

19 This distinction between 'normative' rules (how one ought to use words) and 'constitutive' rules (saying "X" doesn't count as a case of X unless ...) was shown to me by Professor Forguson.

20 Walter Cerf, "A Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words", Symposium on J.L. Austin, pp. 359-60.

21 Ibid., p. 361.

Conclusion

We originally took up the dispute between Austin and Ayer in order to consider two distinct approaches to studying language in philosophy. Both philosophers contend that by studying language we are able to solve (or dissolve) philosophical problems, but each views language differently. Our aim was to contrast the philosophical vision of each philosopher by considering their respective criticisms of the sense-datum theory in general, and the 'argument from illusion' in particular. Chapter One outlined the argument from illusion: incidents of illusion, such as the famous example of the 'bent' stick, are taken as evidence for the theory that we do not directly perceive material objects but 'sense-data'. In Chapter Two, Austin was shown to argue that the argument from illusion systematically misrepresents the facts of ordinary language and everyday perception. In Chapter Three, Ayer was shown to reply that the significance of the argument is not factual but logical: it makes the logical point that while the truth of some set of experiential statements is entailed by the truth of a material object statement, the contrary is not also the case. The truth of an existential statement does not follow logically from any finite set of statements which are limited to describing the contents of one's experience; hence, the sense-datum philosophers have instituted a sense-datum vocabulary that allows one to describe the content of experience and not entail its actual existence. Chapter

Four showed how Austin's and Ayer's conflicting philosophical viewpoints informed their dispute about sense-data. According to Ayer, philosophy is a "department of logic"; hence, he maintains that Austin's comments concerning ordinary usage are trivially linguistic in that they fail to address the logical relations between classes of statements. Austin contends, on the other hand, that the implications of statements are determined by the circumstances for the uses of words; as a result, by attempting to formulate the logical relations between classes of perceptual statements, Ayer oversimplifies the perceptual situation where any particular perceptual statement is used. In this case, Austin argues, Ayer is being typically philosophical: oversimplification is an occupational disease of philosophers, if it is not their actual occupation. [PU, p. 252] We argued, then, that the dispute between Austin and Ayer centres on a fundamental difference in philosophical vision, i.e., in their conception of the role of a linguistic investigation in a philosophical inquiry. In Chapter Five, we considered Austin's methodological viewpoint: he argues that an investigation of ordinary language is philosophically relevant to the extent that it dissolves a philosophical problem and thereby dismantles the philosophical doctrine that is offered as its solution. Similarly, we saw in Chapter Six that Ayer's logical analysis of statements is meant to solve philosophical disputes by showing that

philosophical statements are essentially linguistic recommendations, and that philosophers are typically arguing over matters of language and not matters of fact. In both cases, the linguistic critique of philosophy is based on the notion that there are certain rules for language: Austin considers "what we should say when," and argues that philosophers typically abuse words by stretching the specific circumstances for their proper application. [S&S, p. 15] Ayer formulates a rule for the literal significance of language, i.e., the criterion of verifiability, and on the basis of this maintains that tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions: philosophical statements are analytic in that they are definitions or the formal consequences of definitions, while metaphysical assertions are neither analytic nor empirical and are senseless as a result. [LTL, p. 41].

In Chapter Seven, we maintained that the prescriptive authority of the rules to which Austin and Ayer refer is based on the presumption that there is a structure for language. According to Austin, we imply certain things by using one word instead of another, e.g., "look" and "seem", and these implications constitute a basis for a critique of the philosophical use of words. According to Ayer, the set of statements that is implied by a sentence constitutes a logical form and this provides the basis for the criterion of verifiability and a logical analysis of sentences. In

each case, the structure of language is understood to reflect the structure of facts. Austin argues, then, that the differences in ordinary language will mark objective differences in the world; he argues: "If a distinction works well for practical purposes in ordinary life ..., then there is sure to be something in it, it will not mark nothing".

[Plea, p. 185] According to Ayer, there is a structure of language which an logical analysis of sentences can bring to light; however, he comes to admit that this logical structure is supported by an empirical theory of perception.

[ARS, p. 133] For both Austin and Ayer, the critical force of an analysis of language is based on the presumption of an objective standard: Ayer's logical analysis of sentences is preceded by an empirical theory of perception; Austin's investigation of the ordinary use of words is based on the premise that the structure of the facts is reflected in the structure of language. But by presuming this basis, Austin and Ayer presuppose the validity of their method, and beg the question when criticizing the validity of the other's method. Ayer accuses Austin of ignoring the 'logic of language', but proceeds upon the presumption that there is a logical structure for sentences. Austin charges Ayer with believing that we can use language in any way we wish, and yet, he presumes that there are standard uses for words, and that these uses will have some objective validity. We conclude, then, that because each argument presumes the

truth of the claim that it is meant to establish, the linguistic critique in each case fails.

While Austin and Ayer end up begging the question by presuming the point that is in dispute, that is, the validity of their respective philosophical methods, this cannot be taken as being characteristic of philosophical arguments in general. First, the thesis does not have the scope to condemn the arguments of linguistic philosophers in particular or of philosophers in general. We have been studying one dispute between two linguistic philosophers - numerous linguistic philosophers and countless philosophical disputes remain. Second, this study has tried to effect a position of philosophical neutrality that does not beg the question by prejudicing the conclusion of our investigation. In this regard, Professor Forguson notes that "a philosophical openness to reason and argument which is not already partisan concerning (a) the relevance of the investigation of language to philosophy, and (b) the appropriateness of Ayer's or Austin's ways of bringing language to bear on philosophy, is a sine qua non of philosophical neutrality".¹ It is hoped that we have been successful in taking up this position.

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