

Objective Poetics: Victorian Literature and the Aesthetics of Science

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how both Romantic and Victorian literature and science came together to produce the idea of “objectivity.” Whereas prior naturalists had tended to embrace an epistemic ideal of what they called “truth to nature” —which involved manipulating observed phenomena to capture their underlying structure—I argue that philosophers of science soon came to recognise that this tendency distorted, instead of elucidated, the objects which they set out to study. In attempting to uncover the abstract form beneath material facts, scientists often ended up merely projecting their subjective beliefs onto nature itself. To prevent this epistemic misunderstanding, I suggest, both scientists and literary authors came to emphasise the need for what they called “objectivity.” This meant attempting to regulate the unconscious biases of subjects through attending to the need for personal restraint in observation. Through this form of epistemic self-control, which sought to remove personal belief from science, Romantic and Victorian authors thus attempted to capture the underlying form of reality.

This dissertation considers three pairings of Victorian authors and scientists. In the second chapter, I argue that Alfred Tennyson adopted from the philosopher William Whewell a fundamentally dialogical approach to knowledge, in which the content of perception of was an objective reflection of material reality but its form was a subjective product of the mind. For Tennyson, this meant that the structure of nature itself was

inherently unknowable, but could be glimpsed through the form of poetry. In the third chapter, I contend that George Eliot and her partner George Henry Lewes attempted to redefine the idea of objectivity not so much as a retreat from subjectivity as an effort to bring together many different points of view. In doing so, both authors sought to develop an inclusive and situated — rather than detached or disembodied — conception of objective knowledge. In the fourth chapter, I consider the relationship between Thomas Hardy and George Romanes, and in particular the way in which both authors came to emphasise the limitations of objectivity for understanding the mind of another organisms. Throughout their work, I suggest, apprehending the thoughts of someone outside ourselves involved a different form of “ejective” reasoning that went well beyond the strictures of objective observation. In this sense, “Objective Poetics” not only attempts to chart the emergence and development of objectivity as a theoretical discourse within Victorian science and literature, but also to suggest the way in which this language was problematised and subjected to rigorous scrutiny within both mediums.

Dedication

For Jackie.

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1. Introduction: Victorian Objectivity

In his 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant famously set out to invert the traditional relationship between objective and subjective concepts of knowledge. Whereas metaphysical philosophers in the past had often tended to use the term “objective” to refer to those abstract ideas and beliefs that occurred only within the mind of the observer, Kant attempted to redefine “objectivity” in the opposite sense—namely as that which occurred outside of the mind and which was inherent in nature.¹ In particular, Kant suggested that propositional knowledge claims could be regarded as objectively valid if—and only if—they were a reliable reflection of things in themselves, and not simply a subjective product of the way in which objects appeared to the different people who perceived them:

In this way alone can there arise a true belief, that is, a relation which has objective validity, and is distinct from the same sensations with only subjective validity—for truths are conjoined in the object, without distinction as to the condition of the subject, and do not merely stand together in perception. (137)

In contrast to subjective theories—which were merely concerned with the way in which sensations manifested themselves to observers—objective forms of knowledge involved

¹ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison point out that prior to Kant the terms “objective” and “subjective” had almost the precisely the opposite meaning to that which they developed after his inversion. From the time of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham up through the work of Renes Descartes, they argue, the term “objective” referred to things as they presented themselves to consciousness, whereas subjective referred to things in and of themselves” (30).

attempting to understand the intrinsic structure of material phenomena. For this reason, Kant argued, propositions that had a claim to philosophical objectivity could be regarded as true not only for particular people, but instead for all rational beings that were capable of apprehending their meaning. Though he repeatedly called attention to the underlying difficulties with subjective perception, in doing so Kant was also careful to emphasise that observers could never step outside of sensations and perceive things in themselves. This was because subjective ideas necessarily structured the ways in which people perceived particular objects – and thus in their absence all forms of immediate knowledge would be not only impossible but also incomprehensible:

If we abstract in thought our own subjective ideas and beliefs from the sensations which we observe, the object perceived – with the properties ascribed to it through sensuous intuition – entirely disappears, because it was only this subjective nature that determined the form of the object as a phenomenon. (181)

While objective facts provided the underlying content of thought, Kant argued, subjective ideas gave form to this content – and in doing so rendered nature legible. This meant that if observers were to perceive things in themselves, they would have to do so not through dismissing subjective sensations out of hand – but through using them as a starting point for deducing something of the reality beneath. In this regard, he suggested, reliable truths could only emerge through bringing together objective and subjective forms of thought, and thus attempting to integrate them within a coherent philosophical program.

Though Kant was among the first to deploy the terms objective and subjective in the particular way in which they are used today, the language he developed soon became widespread in philosophy. This language was in fact common not only in metaphysics, but also in various different fields of study. In his 1817 *Biographia Literaria*, for instance, the poet Samuel Coleridge used the words objective and subjective to denote the opposing ideals which he believed underpinned all instances of verifiable knowledge:

[Whatever] is merely objective, we will henceforth call nature, confining this term to its passive and material sense, as comprising all phenomena through which its reality is made known to us. [In contrast] whatever is only subjective we will call self or intelligence. Both conceptions are in necessary antithesis, [and] in all acts of positive knowledge there is needed a reciprocal occurrence of both. (174)

In response to Kant's arguments about the structure of knowledge — which he first came into contact with shortly before he began writing — Coleridge held that the term objective was best understood as referring to those material entities that occurred outside the mind, while the word subjective described the self which perceived these entities and gave them discernible meaning and purpose. Thus in a sense similar to his illustrious predecessor — though with a different emphasis — his philosophy was predicated upon the belief that all truth was a product of the relationship between the thing observed and the person who did the observing. Though Coleridge often pointed out that the production of knowledge necessarily involved bringing together object and subject, he also followed Kant in noting

that certain forms of thought called for an emphasis upon the first of these. In particular, he argued, the material sciences — or what he termed natural philosophy — needed stricter attention to concrete facts than transcendental epistemology:

In pursuit of these [ideals] success in each depends on an austere and faithful adherence to its own principles, with a careful separation of that which appertains to the opposite. [For] as the natural philosopher, who directs his views to the objective, avoids above all the interjection of the subjective in his knowledge, [so] the transcendental or intelligent philosopher precludes all interpolation of the objective into the subjective principles of his theories. (176)

In contrast to metaphysical concepts of knowledge — which were largely interested in the subjective structure of thought — Coleridge pointed out that the material sciences involved attempting to discern the underlying form of nature itself. This meant that proponents of natural philosophy had to suppress their personal ideas and beliefs — insofar as these often distorted their perception of the thing itself. In this sense, he argued, while objective and subjective forms of thought were inherently connected, in the case of science the second had to be removed from the first — an impossible but also necessary ideal that has in many respects underpinned the progress of thought ever since this problem first emerged.

Throughout studies of the philosophy of science — and especially those concerned with so-called historical epistemology — observers have in fact often called attention to the

importance of this redefinition of objectivity for the development of knowledge.² Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, for instance, have argued that the idea of objectivity — at least in the way that the term is commonly used today — came about at this point as a result of a particular set of emerging difficulties in theories of mind, many of which have continued unabated up to this moment. In particular, they suggest, Kant’s claim that subjective ideas necessarily structured the form of perception led to a widespread worry that the evidence of the senses was untrustworthy — and thus needed to be corrected through processes that could restrain personal biases and put observers in contact with objective reality itself:

Starting in [this period] men of science began to fret openly about a different kind of obstacle to knowledge — themselves. Their fear was that the subjective self was prone to prettify, idealise, and, in the worst case, regularise observations to fit with theoretical predictions: to see what it wanted to see. [Their] predecessors were also beset with epistemologies worries, but theirs did not concern the projections of the observing naturalist. (34)

Though philosophers had always in some respects confronted concerns about the status and limitations of knowledge, Daston and Galison point out that these difficulties often

² Though critics have offered a variety of definitions for historical epistemology, the underlying thread which connects them is a sense that past scientific theories are to be understood not in relation to some absolute or disembodied conception of truth but instead merely as a product of the underlying material circumstances which produced them. In perhaps the clearest articulation of this approach, Hans-Jorg Rheinberger suggests that this “historicisation of epistemology means subjecting the theory of knowledge to an empirical-historical regime, grasping its object as itself historically variable, not based on some abstract supposition or a priori norm” (3). For an analysis of this discourse in relation to the French tradition of historical epistemology that runs from Georges Canguilhem to Michel Foucault see also Arnold Davidson (192-208).

changed over time. In their conception — and that of critics who have followed their lead — the problem of attaining objectivity through restraining our ideas and beliefs only became pertinent within an emerging conceptual paradigm in which subjective thought was seen as capable of deforming immediate sensation. Before this point, personal self-control was simply less important in the wider scheme of epistemic ideals. In response to this unease with the apparent idealisations of the subject, they suggest, naturalists in fact set out to develop a variety of so-called “technologies of the self” — which could be used to prevent the worst manifestations of epistemological perversion and theoretical preference. These included not only mechanical inventions devised to remove subjectivity from observation, but also a broader emphasis within published material on the importance of recognising impositions of the will and restraining them whenever possible:

[In science of this period] the subjective self was viewed as overactive and prone to impose its preconceptions and hypotheses on data. Therefore, scientists strove for a self-denying passivity, which might be described as the will to willessness. The only way for the active self to attain the desired receptivity to nature was to turn its will inward — to engage in self-discipline, self-restraint, self-abnegation, and many similar forms of self-imposed selflessness. (203)

In an attempt to correct the distortions of the conscious mind, Daston and Galison observe, natural philosophers encouraged their readers to engage in a form of strict self-reflection, which involved carefully attending to potential sources of bias and attempting to contain

them at all necessary costs. Though subjective ideas could never be removed from science, they note, they could at least be reduced to acceptable limits. In this respect, the purpose of objective forms of thought was not so much to entirely reject subjectivity out of hand—which was in any event an impossible desire—but instead to regulate them in particular ways so that observers could better understand the structure of material phenomena.

This belief that objectivity developed at a particular moment and in response to a particular set of conditions is in fact apparent not only in the work of philosophers such as Daston and Galison, but also throughout studies of Victorian literature. Peter Garratt, for instance, in a useful analysis of the development of empiricist approaches to aesthetics, notes that the influence of idealist epistemology was evident not only among naturalists—but also among poets and novelists too. Following the arguments of Kant, he points out, a variety of different writers came to emphasise that truth could only be obtained through turning away from subjective idealisation and toward objective self-control:

In the second half of the nineteenth century [there] was a historical moment when objectivism reached its height, becoming dominant or paradigmatic across fields as varied as natural science and anthropology. [For observers] truth to nature required above all the effacement of subjectivity, which dangerously threatened to distort natural speech. (27)

In this argument, Garratt observes, the idea of objectivity was not merely restricted to the realm of abstract philosophy, but was instead evident in many distinct forms of thought—

including literary fiction. Though particular fields of study often approached this concept in slightly different ways, he claims, there was at least for a time a widespread consensus among all of them that the pursuit of verifiable knowledge needed to be conducted within the limits of what might be referred to as the problematic of objectivity. This problematic has in fact informed the work of a variety of different critics — including many who set out to recover oppositional conceptions of knowledge. Christopher Herbert, for instance, in his provocative analysis of Victorian relativity, notes that it has often been something of a critical commonplace to observe the emphasis that science-minded writers of this period placed upon the need to restrain the beliefs and biases of particular subjects:

[For many observers] there was a pervasive and wholly unprecedented fear of interpretation among Victorian scientists and a corresponding insistence on a rigidly strictly code of objectivity as the prerequisite of achieving truth to nature, [and] scientists were required by this code to display at all times the relentless self-discipline necessary to keep their work free of any trace of contamination. (11)

In a sense similar to Garratt — and in response to many of the same sorts of arguments — Herbert points out the broad agreement amongst historians of science and aesthetics over the importance of objective approaches to truth. Though his own writing attempts to step outside of this conception and delineate an entirely different relativistic tradition, in doing so he nonetheless admits that the concept of objectivity itself remained a crucial aspect of Victorian thought. In this sense, even when objective ideals have been problematised — as

has often been the case throughout literary criticism — their underlying significance for a variety of fields within this period has never been seriously called into doubt.

Though critics such as these often noted that objectivity had an important place in the history of science and aesthetics, there have so far been no full-length studies entirely dedicated to considering this concept in and of itself. This absence is important, I suggest, insofar as the use of objectivity as merely a secondary term has at times led to a reductive oversimplification of this ideal. In particular, literary critics have often tended to regard objective approaches to knowledge as merely a retreat from subjectivity.³ While there is a partial truth to this claim, I argue that for many Victorians the idea of objectivity itself was predicated upon a situated model of epistemology. Throughout the opening sections of his 1871 *Problems of Life and Mind*, for instance, the philosopher George Henry Lewes famously pointed out that all ideas — no matter how seemingly abstract — were invariably a reflection of the subjective conditions under which they were produced:

Whether we affirm the objective reality of something distinct from the affections of consciousness, or affirm that this is simply a reflection from consciousness, in either of these cases we declare that objective truth is to every man the totality of

³ This understanding of objectivity as merely a rejection of situated perspectives involves a form of what the philosopher Thomas Nagel famously refers to as the “view from nowhere.” Within this fallacious conception, Nagel suggests, “an objective standpoint is created through leaving a more subjective, individual, or even just human perspective behind—but there are things about life and ourselves that cannot be properly understood from an objective standpoint, however much it may develop our understanding beyond the point from which we first started” (7).

his sensations — which are bounded on every side with what he thinks and feels—
and appear in a form structured through the reactions of his organism. (185)

In response to those who held that the concept of objectivity necessarily involved stepping outside of any particular point of view and attempting to apprehend things in themselves, Lewes observed that in reality this abstract ideal could never be obtained. There was no such thing as a transcendental standpoint from which to perceive the underlying nature of material phenomena, he claimed, only a variety of situated perspectives — all of which were limited to the confines of human perception. For this reason, Lewes argued, attaining objective forms of knowledge involved not so much escaping from the inherent strictures of particularity, as instead attempting to bring together a variety of partial and relative points of view. Through connecting the subjective perspectives of many different people, he claimed, philosophers could begin to apprehend those facts that were common to all, and which for this reason had a strong claim to the status of objective validity:

Truth presents an invariable relation to all minds, and reflects objective relations that are unchanging and undisturbed through any subjective variations. These are communicable truths that all minds must apprehend when the terms are distinctly depicted, even though no one will say that a personal incommunicable truth is less certain than an impersonal communicable truth. (429)

In contrast to subjective forms of thought — which were valid only for the person within whose mind they occurred — Lewes held that objective beliefs were true for all observers who could grasp their meaning. Thus while philosophers could never perceive things in themselves, he argued, they could at least consider how they appeared to certain people — and in doing so begin to recognise the continuities and discontinuities between different perspectives. In this sense, objectivity was best regarded not as a rejection of subjectivity, but instead merely as an attempt to integrate a disparate collection of ideas and beliefs so as to negate the potential biases inherent within any particular person or group.

This embodied concept of objectivity has in fact become increasingly important in studies of the history and philosophy of science — in part because of the difficulties with transcendental models of knowledge. In particular, critics have often pointed out that the desire to obtain an entirely detached point of view is inherently untenable — insofar as all truth is necessarily the product of a particular set of concrete conditions. For this reason, they argue, objectivity should be seen less as an abstract ideal than as an attempt to bring together a wide variety of situated perspectives — and in doing so to develop an inclusive form of knowledge. In her well-known work on standpoint epistemology, for instance, Donna Haraway has influentially claimed that the concept of objectivity was predicated upon bringing together the embodied ideas of different people:

In many respects, the problem of science within feminism is about objectivity as a positioned rationality. For [objective truths] are not a product of escape from or transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and

halting voices into a collective subject position, which promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment. (590)

In this conception, Haraway suggests that obtaining objectivity was not so much about evading any particular perspective as instead attempting to integrate as many different points of view as possible. Through doing so, she claims, observers could restrain their own underlying biases and preconceptions without appealing to the impossible ideal of a disembodied standpoint outside of history. This attempt to redefine objectivity in situated and inclusive terms has in fact structured the work of a wide variety of authors, including many critics interested in the so-called “sociology” of science. In particular, Bruno Latour has famously suggested that objective knowledge was a product of the relationship not only between different people—but also a variety of non-human objects. To be objective, he observed, was thus to speak on behalf of those entities without any voice of their own, and to ensure that they were accounted for within wider epistemological debates:

Being objective means that no matter strong the efforts of disbelievers are to sever the links between you and what you speak for, the link resist. [In contrast] being subjective means when you talk in the name of people or things the listeners understand that you only represent yourself, [and] depending upon the trials of strength, spokespersons become either objective or subjective. (78)

In contrast to subjective concepts — which only reflected the ideas of a particular person — Latour argues that objective beliefs were instead a result of the connection between many different people and things. For this reason, he suggests, they could be regarded with a degree of certainty — insofar as they were less susceptible to the accusation of being merely a product of personal preferences or preconceptions. Through bringing together a wide variety of phenomena, in short, researchers could trace the relationships between them — and in doing so develop a reliable understanding of nature as a whole.

Though philosophers and historians of science such as these have often tended to embrace an inclusive conception of objectivity, literary critics have sometimes relied upon a transcendental understanding of this term. This tendency is apparent not only among proponents of particular theories, but in fact within a variety of critical traditions — from deconstructionist to historicist.⁴ In the first of these traditions, for instance, J. Hillis Miller has influentially argued that the realist aesthetic often associated with Victorian literature was derived from a wider philosophical emphasis on rejecting subjective preconceptions, and instead aspiring toward a form of objective impartiality:

Realism in the novel is associated with the appearance of philosophical realism in science. For both the philosophical realist who puts everything in doubt and the

⁴ Though Victorian literary critics have often tended to adopt a transcendental conception of objectivity, there have also been notable deviations from this rule. In particular, Susanne Anger has argued that the failure of disembodied concepts of objectivity does not necessitate a rejection of this language altogether: “In agreeing that absolute objective knowledge is unattainable — acknowledging that belief is conditioned, that observation is always theory-laden — we do not have to slip into a form of radical scepticism and a fundamental distrust of efforts to come up with better conceptual schemas” (11).

objective narrator of the realist novel adopt the position of the scientist, rejecting traditional assumptions, effacing their own preconceptions, and perceiving reality as directly and immediately as possible. (34)

In this reading, Miller suggests that the emergence of an objectivist ideal in philosophy—predicated on suppressing personal beliefs and biases—led directly to the development of a detached form of omniscient narration within the realist novel. Though his own work attempts to undermine this disembodied model of storytelling—and to demonstrate the oppositions and contradictions contained within the appearance of authorial disinterest—his reading nonetheless begins with the assumption that the idea of objectivity involves a wholesale rejection of subjectivity. In a sense similar to Miller—albeit writing within an entirely different tradition—George Levine has also called attention to the importance of transcendental models of objectivity for realist fiction. Through negating the underlying influence of material circumstances, he argues, a wide variety of writers believed that they could step outside of their own limited perspective and depict reality itself:

[For them] it was only through clearing the mind itself of the intellectual debris of history, through wrenching consciousness from its conditions, and developing a coherent method that would release the mind from its limitations, that genuine intellectual development and an objective understanding of natural phenomena became possible. (53)

In response to the widespread belief that material embodiment was merely an obstacle to the pursuit of knowledge, Levine notes, many authors — both fictional and non-fictional — attempted to rid themselves of this troublesome subjectivity through escaping from the strictures of particularity. Throughout works of this period, he observes, writers returned time and again to stories that emphasised the necessity of negating the conscious self and adopting a disembodied form of objectivity. In this sense, attaining objective truth thus involved rejecting the limitations of situated knowledge and instead attempting to adopt a transcendental perspective entirely removed from the confines of particularity.

Whereas critics have at times tended to define objective knowledge in abstract and metaphysical terms, I argue that that this concept is better understood — at least within the Victorian period — as both a situated and inclusive ideal. Part of the difficulty with prior studies of objectivity is in fact not only that they have often emphasised detachment over embodiment, but also that they have privileged science over literature. This is especially evident among historians of science — who have tended to either ignore the role of fiction within debates about objectivity altogether or instead to claim that aesthetics was entirely opposed to this ideal. In their study of the history of objectivity, for instance, Daston and Galison argue that literary authors often rejected the limitations of objective description, and instead attempted to depict their own subjective perceptions of nature:

[These writers] railed against slavishly naturalistic [depictions], deploring them as so lacking in self respect as to prostrate themselves before reality. To “copy nature” was to forsake not only the imagination but also the individuality that Romantic

critics believed essential to true art. [Thus while] admirable in the hands of the naturalist or astronomer, the absolute material precision sought in science was inimical to aesthetics. (131)

Though objectivity was in many respects important for both philosophers and scientists throughout this period, Daston and Galison claim that fiction writers adopted an entirely different ideal—namely subjective abstraction. In this conception, they suggest, poets and novelists often rejected what they regarded as the constraints of having to depict the truth of nature. Instead, many authors simply set out to capture the ways in which particular phenomena appeared to them—often with little consideration for the factual veracity or plausibility of their descriptions. This emphasis on the aesthetic importance of personal belief was in fact not only a rejection of objectivity—but also in many respects a historical response to the emergence of this concept in the natural sciences. For Daston and Galison, the development of objectivity led to an opposition between philosophy and aesthetics—in which each field of study laid claim to an entirely different standard of validity:

The rise of the objective image polarised the space of art and science, just as the role of the two domains split over the role of the will. [For] only in the nineteenth century did Romantic artists begin to defend the imposition of the self as the *sine qua non* of art. For their part, scientists insisted on the opposite: their images must be purged of any trace of the self. (187)

In contrast to prior epistemological paradigms — within which both fiction and non-fiction aspired to broadly similar ideals — Daston and Galison argue that the advent of objective models of truth led science and literature in opposite directions. Whereas the first of these forms of thought came to emphasise the necessity of restraining personal ideas and beliefs, they argue, the second instead embraced these same subjective conceptions as the basis of all aesthetic production. In this respect, what began as merely a philosophical opposition between objective and subjective epistemologies in the end turned into a broader conflict over the intellectual priorities appropriate to these different genres of knowledge.

In the same sense as historians of science, literary critics have also at times tended to privilege philosophy over aesthetics — but in a different way. Though a wide variety of critics have noted the importance of objectivity for Victorian authors, in doing so they have often adopted so-called “influence” models of reading — which tend to see literature as merely reflecting certain debates about epistemology instead of engaging with them in a critical or oppositional manner.⁵ David Coombs, for instance, in an important study of the relationship between realist fiction and the philosophy of perception, has argued that the ideal of objectivity often found in novels of this period was an immediate response to certain changes within the science of mind:

⁵ Besides influence-based conceptions of science and literature, critics have also at times adopted what might be called “analogical” readings — which attend to the structural similarities between these forms of thought and their shared intellectual foundations. In an influential instance of this approach to interpretation, Sally Shuttleworth thus points out the resemblances between George Eliot’s novels and positivist science: “While it is scarcely surprising that that George Eliot, with her noted interest in positivism, should see a comparison between her own procedures and those of a scientist, the actual basis of the analogy is rather startling, [and rests] on their shared need for imaginative construction” (1).

Writers responded to developments nineteenth-century perception science [by] embracing an ethos of self-abnegation that aimed to 'repress the aspiring, desiring, emotion-ridden self and everything personal, contingent, historical, material that might get in the way of knowledge.' (17-18)

Through their encounters with the perceptual sciences, Coombs suggests, many different authors came to embrace an objectivist approach to reading and writing — in which novels were often regarded as a direct reflection of material reality. In this respect, he contends, both philosophy and aesthetics were in agreement over need for objectivity in the process of observation. This sense that ideas about objectivity only ever moved from science to literature — and never the opposite way around — has in fact underpinned a wide variety of critical studies on this topic. George Levine, for instance, in his influential analysis of the desire for abstract disembodiment often apparent within realist fiction, has similarly suggested that Victorian novels adopted from philosophy a sense of the need for personal detachment and epistemological disinterest. In his case, Levine traces this aspiration all the way back as far as the initial work of Rene Descartes — whom he sees as having had an ineluctable influence upon the development of knowledge ever since:

In its broad dissemination and influence, [his writing] had an almost foundational quality, [which led to a] story about the release from history through the appeal to history, the establishment of a view from nowhere also paradoxically in this time, in this place. (56)

In a manner similar to Coombs—though across a significantly longer historical period—Levine suggests that the concept of objectivity often found within realist fiction was in many ways simply a reflection of certain ongoing philosophical debates. Though he does go on to point out that particular literary forms engaged with this ideal in different ways, in important respects his argument remains indebted to an influence-based approach to the relationship between science and aesthetics. For this reason, literature itself is unable to contribute anything entirely different or meaningful to the progress of knowledge.

Though historians of science and Victorian literary critics have at times tended to subordinate aesthetics to philosophy, I want to instead treat both of these forms of thought as similarly important participants in the dissemination of objectivity as an ideal—albeit with somewhat distinctive functions. In adopting this approach, I thus structure each of the chapters of this study around the relationship between a particular philosopher and an author—some of whom were personally connected and some who were not. Through bringing together these different figures, I attempt to demonstrate both the similarities in their beliefs and also the variations between their approaches. Specifically, I argue that while the “philosophical” side of each pairing was better able to tease out the technical difficulties connected with objectivity, the “aesthetic” side was better able to demonstrate the underlying importance of this concept within everyday life. In an untitled 1851 article on realist aesthetics, for instance, George Eliot concisely captured this precise point:

Truth is only to be attained through a humble and faithful study of nature, and not through substituting vague forms in place of definite, substantial reality. But it is not enough to simply teach this idea. That may be done, as we all know, to empty walls, and within the covers of unread books. Instead, we want it to be so taught as to compel the attention of men and also their sympathy. (273)

While philosophical treatises were useful for detailing particular theories of knowledge, Eliot suggested, their technical language often meant they only ever reached a small set of dedicated followers—and in doing so failed to have a significant impact upon society as a whole. In contrast, novels such as her own were not only widely read, but also easily intelligible to different groups of people. For this reason, they were often better suited to engaging with ordinary readers than abstract epistemology. Through both their narrative perspective and their unfolding of character, she noted, realist works of fiction could thus render the importance of inclusive knowledge legible to members of the wider public.

Though debates about objectivity have often been associated with the realist novel, in the second chapter of this dissertation I start prior to the development of this aesthetic language—and outside of even the novel—with an analysis of the relationship between the poet Alfred Tennyson and his sometimes intellectual mentor, the philosophers and historian of science William Whewell. In considering these two figures, I argue that both were particularly interested in the connection between the categories of material content and immaterial form. For both of these authors, I hold, content was an objective property of material reality, whereas form was a subjective phenomenon that was supplied through

the interventions of the conscious mind. However, while they shared a common set of philosophical principles, I argue that Tennyson's aesthetic method allowed him to accept that the subjective form of nature could never be directly observed through the senses and thus regarded with absolute certainty. In contrast, Whewell's philosophical method led him demand a form of absolute truth, and for this reason to suggest that observers could — with sufficient scientific rigor — see things from the perspective of the divine. In this sense, whereas Tennyson's avowedly fictional musing were entirely consistent with suspense, Whewell's factual treatise was driven by an impulse toward complete certainty.

In the third chapter, I turn to the works of George Eliot and her longtime partner, the literary critic and philosopher George Henry Lewes. In discussing these two well-known writers, I contend that both adopted a positivist belief that objective knowledge came not from adopting a transcendental perspective on nature — as idealists including Whewell claimed — but instead through bringing together a wide variety of situated points of view. Through setting out to see things from several different vantage points, they suggested, observers could negate the underlying biases of any particular person — and in doing so develop a broader and more accurate understanding of life itself. But while Lewes's multivolume treatises were largely directed at a specialist audience made up of dedicated positivists like himself, I attempt to demonstrate that Eliot's work was instead aimed at changing the behavior of ordinary people. For this reason, I argue, the narrative structure of her writing sought to embody certain debates about objectivity in concrete form — using the successes and failures of her different characters to demonstrate

the dangers of overt idealisation and alternative benefits of adopting an inclusive and pluralistic approach to the production of knowledge.

In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, I consider the writing of Thomas Hardy alongside the philosophical and scientific works of George Romanes. In doing so, I argue that both figures were particularly interested in a phenomenon called “ejective” reasoning. This phenomenon occurred when people used the objectively observable behavior of another organism—in conjunction with their own subjective sense of how they would feel under similar conditions—to enter into the mind of that creature and in a sense see things from their perspective. In many respects, I suggest, ejective reasoning demonstrated the inherent limitations of objectivity, insofar as there were certain things—including the conscious mind—which could never be fully understood through a rigidly objective methodology. Though both Hardy and Romanes theorised this concept, I argue that they did so in different ways. Specifically, whereas Romanes was largely concerned “telling” people how ejective reasoning worked, Hardy instead sought to “show” them this same phenomenon in action. Through the often failed attempts of his characters to perceive the thoughts and feelings of one another—and also the identification with them that he invited on the part of the reader—Hardy in a sense attempted to train his audience in both the uses and misuses of ejective reasoning within ordinary society.

2. Ideal Forms: Alfred Tennyson, William Whewell, and the Poetics of Objectivity

2.1 Introduction: Subjects of Objectivity

In an 1850 article on Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Charles Kingsley called attention to the unusual capacity of his poetry to bring together objective and subjective forms of thought. Whereas in prior publications, the author complained, Tennyson's "objective pieces were too overtly objective, and his subjective pieces too subjective," sometime "between 1830 and 1842 the needful interfusion of the two forms occurred" (178). Though his poems had initially tended to depict either the material "object" of sensation or the immaterial "subject" who reflected on them, they observed, Tennyson's recent poetry had overcome this opposition and developed a philosophical structure through which to articulate both of these perspectives at the same time. That Tennyson's poetry was understood through the language of "objectivity" is in many respects unremarkable—not only because the idea had become widespread in Victorian criticism but also because this discourse in fact emerged from the same historical conditions that produced his own thought. In particular, Tennyson had studied under William Whewell, who was among the first people to introduce the idea of "objectivity" into Victorian philosophy. For Whewell, in a sense similar to Tennyson, both subject and object—mind and matter—were needed to produce knowledge. That part of the understanding that comes from the "faculties and occupations of his own mind is subjective," he claimed,

“while that which comes upon him from nature is objective, and there is in every part of knowledge both a subjective and an objective component” (32-33). In this argument, perception was a product of neither sensation nor reflection alone, but developed from the relation between them. To understand nature, whether in philosophy or aesthetics, thus involved both an outward and inward turn in human thought.

This theory regarding the necessary relation between object and subject was in fact implicit in various responses to Tennyson’s poetry. In an 1831 article, for instance, Henry Hallam, who also studied under Whewell, adopted the language of objectivity to elucidate his poetics. Though critics have observed that Hallam often depicted Tennyson as a “poet of sensation” rather than a “poet of reflection,” there were also important parts of his argument wherein he attempted to undermine this opposition. In the midst of “all the variety of sensations,” Hallam declared, “we are never permitted to lose sight of the idea which gives unity to this variety” (44).¹ This claim that Tennyson’s poetry brought together different sensations under a unifying “idea” in fact implicitly espoused Whewell’s own concept of object and subject. For him, ideas were forms of thought within the subject which functioned to regulate sensation and enable the perception of objects. “If we adopt the metaphor of matter and form,” he noted, “our sensations, from their first reception, have their form not changed, but instead given through the ideas, [for] without

¹ While critical readings of Tennyson in relation to Hallam have agreed that Tennyson’s initial writing was consistent with a poetics of sensation, they have also pointed out that as his work progressed and evolved Tennyson seemed to leave behind this aesthetic conception. Isobel Armstrong thus that “in theorising the ‘two-fold’ consciousness of the poet of sensation, who is aware of his latter-day understanding of his ideas as sensation not quite concurrently with his ideas themselves, Hallam was preparing the way for an unusual Tennysonian exploration of the double poem. Tennyson seems to have worked with the grain of Hallam’s assumptions in the 1830 poems and more and more against the grain as he subjected it to a critique over the decade” (64). For a similar reading of Tennyson as a poet of sensation see also David Shaw (315-336)

these relations of thought that we here term ideas, sensations are merely matter without form" (31). In this theory, ideas were thus a necessary part of perception, without which sensation remained disordered. Through these innate concepts—which included everything from the "idea of causation" to the "idea of resemblance" — objects obtained meaning for the subject. In the same manner that form structured the content of a poem, therefore, ideas organised sensation so that they could be understood.

While subjective ideas were necessary to regulate objective sensations, however, Whewell also observed that the second was an important part of knowledge insofar as it could correct the inherent biases of the first. Though ideas provided order to sensations, he argued, they could also sometimes be mistaken, and assume a regularity where none actually occurred in nature. For this reason, attention to objective sensations was needed to avoid subjective biases. "Things give reality to our knowledge," Whewell observed, "and make objective reality a corrective of our subjective imperfections in the pursuit of knowledge" (667). Without ideas, he suggested, sensations were inherently disordered, but without sensations ideas were merely arbitrary assumptions about the nature of reality. Both of these ideals—objective and subjective—thus encountered epistemological problems that needed to be solved by scientists. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, for instance, observe in their study of Victorian conceptions of objectivity that whereas the "sensationalist self was problematic" insofar as this concept "required that they actively select, sift, and synthesize the sensations which flooded the too-receptive mind," the "subjective self" appeared "overactive and prone to impose its preconceptions and pet hypotheses upon data," thus requiring a "self-denying passivity, which might be

described as a will to willessness" (203). For Whewell, therefore, who was acutely aware of the difficulties attending both subjective and objective forms of thought, true knowledge required a mediation between the two extremes.

Though ideas and sensations could be theoretically separated, then, in practice both were an integral part of the understanding. To comprehend nature thus required the production of what I term the "subject of objectivity," a form of scientific individual who was self-consciously able to unify different sensations into useful theories, yet was also wary of impressing their own beliefs upon phenomena without sufficient evidence. This model of the self, I argue, is what Tennyson's mature poetry attempts to theorise. Through his use of what Isobel Armstrong terms the "double poem," in which the poet "turns their expressive utterance around so that it becomes the opposite of itself, not only the *subject's* utterance but the *object* of analysis and critique," Tennyson models the ideal balance between objectivity and subjectivity that Whewell puts forward in his philosophy of science (12). In particular, I suggest, Tennyson's poems tend to be structured through a dialogic form, which consisted of two voices respectively representing the tendency toward sensation and ideas.² Whereas the first voice sees nature as filled with disorder and purposelessness, the second instead emphasises the underlying unity, yet worries that this may be merely a projection of their subjective biases. Through the tension

² In a useful reading of Tennyson's poems in relation to Victorian theories of psychology, Gregory Tate has overtly related this two-fold aspect of his writing to an opposition between objective and subjective forms of thought. "That perception of a relation between poetic and philosophical approaches to human nature," he argued, "was not a Victorian innovation, but it was transformed by the Victorian's increasing positivist view of both, as psychology made room for the study of objective activity as well as mental processes, and as poets and poetic theorists accepted, sometimes reluctantly, that poetry could involve scientific analysis as well as the affective expression of psychology" (20).

between these two perspectives—and the partial resolution of their opposition—Tennyson puts into poetic form an emerging conception of knowledge which developed from the Victorian discourse of objectivity.

In bringing together objective and subjective forms of knowledge in this manner, Tennyson thus not only reflected the ideals of Whewell's philosophy, but also articulated the wider epistemic problems of Victorian scientific thought. Philosopher Henry Sidgwick, for instance, pointed out that what struck him most about Tennyson's poetry was its "defence of 'honest doubt'" and attempt to reconcile "knowledge and faith." For him, Tennyson was "pre-eminently the Poet of Science" precisely insofar as his work neither collapsed into the scepticism of seeing a world without order, yet also avoided imposing a set of metaphysical assumptions without due process. "The scientific view dominates his thoughts," Sidgwick noted, "even when he utters the intensest feelings": "Had it been otherwise, had he met the atheistic tendencies of Science with confident defiance, confident assertion of the Intuitive Faculty of theological knowledge, overriding results laboriously reached through empirical science, I think his antagonism toward these tendencies would have been far less impressive" (303). Through neither blindly accepting the evidence of objective sensations nor subjective ideas, he argued, Tennyson provided a model for responding to controversial scientific theories, particularly within evolutionary biology. For this reason, his poetry did not merely reflect Whewell's beliefs about scientific method, but contributed to producing the "subject of objectivity" in Victorian discourse. Even scientists themselves adopted his writing as an exemplar of epistemic virtue. Thomas Huxley himself, who perhaps more than anyone else helped

defend evolutionary theory, noted that Tennyson both adopted ideas from science, yet also provided crucial “insight into scientific method” (143). In analysing his work alongside Whewell’s, therefore, what emerges is not merely the way in which they influenced each other, but the fact that both – in their particular genres of writing – helped develop a different way of thinking about scientific knowledge.

Nevertheless, while both Tennyson and Whewell produced broadly convergent theories of the relation between object and subject, they also diverged in important aspects. In particular, Whewell argued that through connecting sensations and ideas in the way he espoused, scientists could uncover true facts about nature. For him, this was because “ideas,” when properly regulated through the sensations, reflected the underlying structure of reality which was put in place by God. “Ideas,” he declared, “are given to us by the same power that made this world” (373). Because the ideas which people used to organise sensations were instilled by the divine, Whewell held, there was good reason to suppose that the theories which they produced would reflect that nature which the divine had also created. Tennyson, in contrast, was more skeptical about the possibility of knowing either objects in themselves or the nature of the divine. While the subject could “believe” or have “faith” in an inherent order beneath the appearance of phenomena, the ultimate structure of reality remained unknowable. This difference between Tennyson and Whewell, I argue, was not only a product of their personal predilections, but a reflection of the formal tendencies of their respective projects. Though Whewell set out to develop a functional methodology for scientists to use when pursuing truth, and thus needed to reassure his readers that uncovering the form of reality was in

fact possible, Tennyson's poetry — with its emphasis upon philosophical nuance instead of practical ends — was better able to cope with uncertainty and the affective difficulties of living with epistemic suspense. What united the two authors, therefore, was not a common belief about how the relation between object and subject could produce knowledge, but that they both helped to develop a language through which to engage with an emerging set of problems within Victorian scientific discourse.

2.2 Sensations and Ideas: Whewell and Tennyson

To understand how Tennyson adopted and deployed the language of objectivity, however, we need to first understand the history of this discourse.³ In many respects, the history of objectivity begins with Immanuel Kant's 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which the author sought to instigate what he called a "Copernican Revolution" which would shift the grounds of knowledge from the objects of sensation to the ideas of subjects. In his 1840 *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, Whewell thus quotes Kant's famous argument:

'Hitherto,' he says, 'men have assumed that all our knowledge must be regulated by the objects of it; yet all attempts to make out anything concerning objects *a priori* by means of our conceptions must, on this foundation, be unavailing. Let us then try whether we cannot make out something more in the problems of metaphysics,

³³ In beginning with the history of objectivity before turning to Tennyson's, I follow Ian Hacking's suggestion that this concept must be understood in terms of "the sites in which words cognate with 'objective' were used, the practices in which they were deployed, who had authority when using them, and the actual modes of inscription" (19)

but assuming that objects must be regulated by our knowledge, since this agrees better with the assumption that we can know something of them *a priori*.' (318)

In this argument, the human understanding of nature could not develop from sensations alone if we believe that there can be deductive truths. For Kant, indisputable theories — including those of logic or geometry — could not be reduced to observed facts, insofar as their validity was not contingent upon any external sensations, hence our understanding of these phenomena was better achieved through assuming their necessary truth was a product of internal ideas within the mind of people. Though Kant believed that in addition to these *a priori* truths there were also *a posteriori* truths, which were based upon observation and facts of nature, his crucial philosophical intervention was to demonstrate that sensation alone was not sufficient for knowledge. “Ideas and Things, the Subjective and the Objective elements of our knowledge,” Whewell noted, “were, by Kant’s system, brought into opposition and correlation, as equally real and indispensable” (319). Through this antithesis, in effect, the particular branches of scientific study could be understood as different manifestations of the same underlying theoretical structure.

While Whewell’s theory was clearly influenced by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he read in German in 1825, there were also evident differences between their philosophies. Indeed, Whewell himself noted that though he had “adopted Kant’s reason concerning the nature of space and time, it will be found by anyone acquainted with the system of that acute metaphysician, that my views differ widely his” (9). Though Whewell never explicitly spelled out these differences, they seemed at least in part to involve

rejecting many of the idealist conclusions Kant reached, which he regarded as tending to cast doubt upon the possibility of objective knowledge concerning nature. While both agreed that ideas and sensations were necessary to know anything about reality, Kant repeatedly emphasised that knowledge of “noumena” or “things-in-themselves” was impossible. Humans could only ever know how objects appeared to the senses, not how they were in actuality. In contrast, Whewell believed that our sensations, when combined with the right ideas through judicious scientific study, could in fact lead us to true beliefs about nature.⁴ This was in part because he thought that nature was organised according to certain ideas which existed in the mind of God, hence if we could cultivate the correct ideas then people would have access to the true conception of nature as it appeared to God. “Propositions of space and number,” he argued, “should be supposed to be what they are through an act of the divine mind” (276). In other words, because nature reflected the ideas of God, and because God had instilled innate ideas in people, then if we could discern how our ideas were related to nature then we could see reality as it appeared to God. Theology, in this sense, underwrote scientific belief in the order of nature.

In adapting Kant’s philosophy for his own purposes in this manner, Whewell thus sought to push back against what he regarded as the hitherto dominant form of “Sensationalist” theory within Victorian epistemology. “In the constant opposition of the philosophies which consider our ideas and our senses respectively as the source of

⁴ Laura Snyder points out that within Whewell’s philosophy abstract conceptions could in fact provide a form of reliable access to the underlying structure of nature itself. “Ideas in his view,” she observes, “accurately represent features of the world independent of the process of mind, and we can use these Ideas in order to have knowledge of these objective features” (45).

knowledge," he argued, "at the period of which we now treat the tendency was to exalt the external and disparage the internal" (295). This tendency, for Whewell, was largely attributable to the influence of John Locke and David Hume, who were influential in disseminating the view that all knowledge was a product of the senses. In their work, the mind itself was merely a blank slate that received information from nature and then developed complex ideas through the association between these sensations. While Locke himself, as Whewell observed, did not "assert that all our ideas are derived from Sensation, but from Sensation and Reflection," his followers had "resolved [reflection] into a mere modification of sensation," and thus denied the innate autonomy of the ideas which was central to his own philosophy (297). There were, however, various problems with this Sensationalist philosophy, which provided the basis for Kant and Whewell's critique. In the first place, as Hume noted, without ideas sensations merely appeared disconnected and unrelated. "David Hume asserted," Whewell pointed out, "that we are incapable of seeing in any of the appearances which the world presents anything of necessary connection; and hence he inferred that our knowledge cannot extend to any such connection" (72). However, while sensations themselves could not indicate the existence of causal connections between phenomena, for Whewell this suggested "not that we can know nothing of natural connection, but that we have some other source of knowledge than experience" —which he argued was the innate ideas. Secondly, in contrast to the arguments of Locke and Hume, the mind itself never merely passively received sensations, but instead always interpreted and manipulated them through the act of interpretation. "Even in the case in which our perceptions appear least to involve

any interpretations of our own,” Whewell observed, “who does not know how much we, by an act of mind, add to that which our senses receive” (23). For Whewell, in this argument, ideas were not only necessary to order sensations but they were also inseparably bound up in perception. Objective matter, therefore, could not be distinguished from subjective mind.

In addition to drawing on the work of Kant in developing his theory, Whewell was also in many ways influenced by recent poetry. Besides writing his own verse and publishing translations of German poems, while studying at Cambridge Whewell’s 1814 epic “Boadicea” had in fact won the prestigious Chancellor’s Prize — an award Tennyson himself would subsequently win for his “Timbuctoo” in 1829.⁵ Indeed, the language of objectivity in many ways appeared in poetic theory before it entered into scientific discourse through Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, which sought to reintroduce the “words *objective* and *subjective*, of such constant recurrence in the schools of yore” (98). While Whewell’s theoretical project differed from Coleridge’s in important respects, he did nevertheless repeatedly use Romantic poetry to articulate his understanding of objectivity, especially the work of William Wordsworth. In attempting to elucidate the relation between ideas and sensations, for instance, he quoted Wordsworth’s line from “Tintern Abbey” concerning “all the world / Of eye and ear, both

⁵ Though Whewell was best known as philosopher and historian of science, he was also an amateur poet, and in fact translated a variety of poems — including selections of Goethe — from German to English. James Brooke-Smith argues that this background influenced the way in which he conceived of knowledge — and in particular the figurative language found in his writing. Throughout his work, Brooke-Smith notes, “Whewell often used a common template to indicate the occluded though fundamental unity of knowledge: the form of the well-made verse” (303). For a further analysis of Whewell’s poetics see Richard Yeo (65-70).

what they half create / And what perceive" (25). For Whewell, Wordsworth's line suggests that in engaging with the outside world, the mind both creates yet also perceives phenomenon through the ideas and the sensations respectively. This use of poetry to articulate philosophical concepts may in part explain Tennyson's own affinity for Whewell, who served as his tutor at Trinity college from 1827 to 1831 —the period during which he first developed his theory concerning the relation between object and subject. Beyond merely their academic relationship, Tennyson was evidently particularly fond of his teacher. Not only did he refer to him as a "lion-like man," but Tennyson's son recounted an incident which revealed his evident regard for Whewell:

Once, when Whewell made himself unpopular, a tumult arose among the undergraduates, who lined the street from the Senate House to Trinity Gate and hooted him shouting "Billy Whistle!" (Whewell's nickname). As he passed between them, Hallam, Spring Rice, and my father, raised a cheer for him. He saw my father and bade him come instantly to his rooms. Whewell began, "I was sorry to see, Mr Tennyson, that you were at the head of that very disorderly mob outside Senate House." "But," answered my father, "my friends and I were not heading the mob, we were cheering you!" (39)

Besides their common poetic and philosophical interests, therefore, Whewell and Tennyson were evidently united through a mutual affection.

This personal connection with Whewell was evident in Tennyson's own ideas, which often reflected those of his tutor. Though later in life Tennyson claimed to "have but a gleam of Kant," in truth he had in fact owned a copy of Kant's introductory *Prolegomena to Metaphysics* since 1831, while the Cambridge Apostles—an intellectual circle in which he actively participated—were known to have discussed Kant in detail while he studied at university (158).⁶ Indeed, Tennyson's friends evidently believed that Kantian thought had influenced him. William Knight, for instance, claimed that he was "an Idealist at heart": "Faith in the Kantian triad (God, Duty, Immortality) dominated his life" (30). In addition to this interest in Kantianism, Tennyson also shared Whewell's distrust of Lockean sensationalism. While Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was assigned reading at Cambridge, Tennyson proclaimed to find his work "so uninteresting, so matter of fact" (8). Beyond this stylistic distaste, however, he also took issue with Locke's underlying argument: namely, that human consciousness could be reduced to sensations. "If a man is merely to be a bundle of sensations," he reportedly told a friend, "he had better not exist at all," for "self-reverence, self-knowledge, [and] self control, these three alone lead life to sovereign power" (317). Whereas Locke suggested that human action and belief was merely a product of material sensations, for Tennyson it was precisely the autonomous internal subject and the decisions which they made that

⁶ Leonee Ormond points out that while Tennyson himself often claimed to know little of idealist philosophy, there was good evidence to suggest that this was not the case: "Tennyson read Hegel's *Philosophy of History* with his wife in 1858, and twelve years later she records that he read to her sections of Kant's *Prolegomena*, the work, originally published in 1783, in which Kant summarised the central arguments of his *Critique of Pure Reason* on 1781" (15)

gave order and purpose to life. Without this subjective capacity to act upon nature, in effect, people would be no different from the objects which they observed.

This attempt to mediate between ideas and sensations, objects and subjects, was evident throughout Tennyson's 1830 *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. In particular, his "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind not in Unity with Itself," the longest poem in the volume, set out to elucidate the problem of epistemic doubt and the way in which this was animated by the division between objective and subjective forms of knowledge. As the title would suggest, Tennyson's poem is structured around the vacillating and divided thoughts of an unnamed speaker, in their attempts to discern an underlying metaphysical structure beneath the apparent disorder of nature. Recent studies of the poem, influenced by the critical tone of the title and the poem as a whole, have often tended to regard the speaker as a failure, and the divided state they embody as anathema to Tennyson's philosophy. John Reed, for instance, suggests that the failure of the speaker comes from their lack of self-will, insofar as for Tennyson "the will itself must solve the problem of doubt, since argument cannot" (193). For Victorian readers, however, this internal conflict was not an indication of epistemic failure, but a partial success. Henry Hallam himself thus noted that "the mood portrayed in this poem, unless the admirable skill of delineation has deceived us, is rather the clouded season of a strong mind, than the habitual condition of one feeble and 'second-rate': "ordinary tempers build up fortresses of opinion on one side or another; they will see only what they choose to see" (47). In this reading, the self-doubt evident in the speaker is not an instance of failed will, but instead the philosophical caution of one who does not merely commit to a blind faith

without careful weighing different arguments for and against the existence of divine order in matter.⁷ Through alternating between an emphasis upon the material evidence of the senses and the idealising impulses of the subject, Tennyson elucidated the difficulties of objective knowledge.

From the opening of the poem, Tennyson's speaker signals his desire for some outward sign that there is a divinity which orders nature, both to give purpose to life and demonstrate that there is existence after death. Though acknowledging that most people accept the reality of God based upon faith, the speaker demands material proof:

Even now

In this extremist misery

Of ignorance, I should require

A sign! and if a bolt of fire

Would rive the slumbrous summer noon

While I do pray to Thee alone,

Think my belief would stronger grow! (22)

Despite the mental anguish which metaphysical doubt seems to entail here, Tennyson's persona requires evidence of the senses to support his beliefs. Subjective faith here is not

⁷ Isobel Armstrong points out that this was in fact precisely the point of Tennyson's poem. Through subjecting received ideas to strict philosophical about, she argues, Tennyson sought to undermine the comfortable beliefs often evident throughout Victorian society: "Poems such as 'Supposed Confessions of a Second Rate Sensitive Mind' attack the defensive 'fortress of opinion' which 'ordinary tempers' construct for themselves" (110).

enough, insofar as objective facts are also needed to satisfy his epistemic criteria. However, while the speaker demands sensory proof of the divine, they also yearn for a transcendental ideal which can unify the apparent disorder of nature. In particular, the persona wants to believe that life is not merely made up of the random interactions of matter, but is instead part of a wider metaphysical order. They want, that is:

To stand beside a grave, and see
The red small atoms wherewith we
Are built, and smile in calm, and say—
 ‘These little motes and grains shall be
 Clothed on with Immortality
 More glorious than the noon of day’ (23).

Whereas the speaker is committed in some respects to an objective model of knowledge, wherein material evidence of the senses is required to accept some proposition as true, they also emphasise that this criteria is unable to capture the subjective yearning for an underlying structure in nature, which comes from the often naive—yet nonetheless comforting—ideas which are innate within people. This inherent faith in a transcendent order is thus embodied for Tennyson in the figure of a “trustful infant on the knee,” who believes that there is a life beyond decay of “red small atoms,” and a divine being who organises them into different forms. Though the infant is naive in trusting that such a plan

exists compared to the sceptical speaker, they nonetheless represent the underlying desire in people to believe in a unity beneath the flux of sensational experience.

While these respectively objective and subjective perspectives on knowledge both represent compelling epistemic desires, Tennyson suggests that it is in fact through the relation between them that truth emerges. In particular, his speaker observes that doubting the immediate evidence of the senses can itself help reveal the underlying form of nature:

‘It is man’s privilege to doubt,
If so be that from doubt at length,
Truth may stand forth unmoved of change,
An image with profulgent brows,
And perfect limbs, as from the storm
Of running fires and fluid range
Of lawless airs, at last stood out
This excellent and solid form
Of constant beauty.’ (26)

In this passage, Tennyson emphasises that the function of doubt and debate is to discern the innate structure of scientific truth beneath the unregulated disorder of sensation—embodied in the “storm” which he details. Whereas erroneous belief will fall away when subjected to the scrutiny of doubt, the persona observes, truth will emerge from among

the multitude of unsupported conjectures. For the speaker, uncovering this underlying truth involves understanding the way in which human thought is divided between objective and subjective forms:

‘Shall we not look into the laws
Of life and death, and things that seem,
And things that be, and analyse
Our double nature, and compare
All creeds till we have found the one,
If one there be?’ (26)

To discern those “things that be” from the appearance of “things that seem,” Tennyson suggests here, involves a form of comparative methodology. Instead of merely accepting the evidence of the senses or the suppositions of the ideas, like Whewell the speaker desires to synthesise both creeds within a singular philosophical framework which can acknowledge the “double” nature of human thought. In bringing these disparate perspectives together — and indeed playing them off against one another — truth can thus emerge from the competition between beliefs.

While Tennyson emphasises the need to bring together objective and subjective forms of thought, the conclusion to “Supposed Confessions” suggests that the speaker merely oscillates between these two perspectives without resolving them into a unified philosophical outlook. In the final lines, they thus lament:

Oh weary life! Oh Weary death!

Oh spirit and heart made desolate!

Oh damned vacillating state!

This unresolved ending demonstrates that though under the influence of Whewell's early thinking, Tennyson was at yet unable—either personally or poetically—to develop a way of reconciling the apparent divide between ideas and sensations. Nevertheless, Tennyson returned to this problem at numerous points throughout his career, notably in his verse dialogue “The Two Voices” which came out in his 1842 *Poems*. If in “Supposed Confessions” the division between objective and subjective conceptions of knowledge was in a sense internal to the speaker, who demonstrates a yearning toward either ideal at different points, in his later poem Tennyson embodies this divide in the form of the poem itself, which alternates between the two voices of the title.⁸ Whereas the first “voice,” that of the *dramatis persona*, puts forward a case for believing in a divine idea which orders nature, the second, which represents his or her internal doubt, argues that only knowledge of sensations is possible, and that consequently there is little cause for faith. Tennyson's friend James Spedding thus summarised the issue at hand in his poem:

⁸ Gregory Tate concisely captures the underlying opposition which structures not only this particular poem but almost of all of Tennyson's initial writing: “While the poems gestures towards a belief in an immortal spiritual element of identity, its attention persistently drifts back to an embodied mind that is shaped by physiology and by empirical experience” (3).

In 'The Two Voices' we have a history of the agitations, the suggestions and the counter-suggestions of a mind sunk in hopeless despondency, and meditating self-destruction; together with the manner of its recovery to a more healthy condition.... Others would have been content to give the bad voice the worst of the argument; but, unhappily, all reasoning must rest on the evidence of the senses; and where this is disordered, logic can conclude nothing, because it is first principles that are at issue. Mr. Tennyson's treatment of the case though is more scientific. (193)

For Spedding, here, Tennyson's poem is implicitly about the problem of whether the divine exists, and thus whether or not suicide can be justified. Though most Victorian authors would merely dismiss the nihilism of the "bad voice," he notes, Tennyson instead takes seriously the difficulty in knowing the underlying structure of nature, particularly when confronted with the disorder of the senses. While eventually the poem achieves a form of mental recovery, which is absent from the end of "Supposed Confessions," this is not before the speaker has engaged in a more rigorous and scientific scrutiny of both arguments in order to determine which "first principles" can be brought to bear upon them. In doing so, Tennyson thus attempts to develop a dialectical form which can synthesise sensations and ideas without occluding the philosophical difficulties of each.

In many ways, the underlying crux of the debate between the two voices is articulated in the first lines of Tennyson's poem. Here we are introduced to the "bad"

voice, which urges suicide in the face of the purposeless of nature, and the speaker, who resists this nihilistic impulse:

A still small voice spake unto me,
'Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?'

Then to the still small voice I said
'Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made.'

In this passage, the persona asserts that despite their own internal suffering—in Tennyson's case a product of the recent death of Hallam—suicide is philosophically unacceptable because life in general, and the human life in particular, is a manifestation of the divine. Because each individual represents a particular idea in the mind the God, to end one's life is an affront to that power which organises the universe. From there, however, the debate turns to the questions of whether it is in fact possible to know that this power exists beneath the randomness and disorder of nature. While accepting that such knowledge is as yet impossible, the speaker nonetheless contends that in time this understanding will develop:

I said that 'all the years invent;

Each month is various to present

The world with some development

'Were this not we, to bide mine hour,

Tho' watching from a ruin'd tower

How grows the day of human power?'

For the speaker, in this sense, suicide is inadvisable because, while doubt exists in the present, it may be obviated through future human discoveries. Eventually, the divine idea will emerge from amidst the appearance of sensations. Indeed, Tennyson's persona imagines that they themselves could be the one to discern this underlying unity in nature.

'I sung the joyful Paeon clear,

And, sitting, burnish'd without fear

The brand, the buckler, and the spear —

'Waiting to strive a happy strife,

To war with falsehood to the knife,

And not lose the good of life —

'Some hidden principle to move,

To put together part and prove,

And mete the bounds of hate and love —

'As far as might be, to carve out

Free space for every human doubt,

That the whole mind might orb about —

'To search thro' all I felt or saw,

The springs of life, the depths of awe,

And reach the law within the law.' (175-176)

In this extended meditation, which in many ways reveals Tennyson's own understanding of his philosophical project, the speaker sees themselves as a warrior against "falsehood." In attempting to defeat erroneous beliefs through subjecting them to doubt, they hope to create a space for the truth which exists beneath what they feel and see — that "law within the law" that regulates nature. If this subjective idea can be reconciled with objective sensations, therefore, metaphysical doubt can be overcome, and the challenge of nihilism thus defeated.

In contrast to this optimistic account of human knowledge, however, the "bad" voice notes various problems in Tennyson's epistemology, many of which involve issues with which Whewell himself struggled. In the first instance, the speaker's opponent observes that no matter how far scientific study progresses, it will be unable to transcend the limits of the senses and comprehend the true form of nature:

'Forerun thy peers, thy time, and let
Thy feet, millenniums hence, be set
In midst of knowledge, dream'd not yet.

'Thou hast not gained a real height,
Nor art thou nearer to the light,
Because the scale is infinite.' (174)

Though human knowledge will develop in time, the “bad” voice argues, it can never reach the inherent nature of things. This is both because there will always be something else to learn, a claim about infinite depth and subtlety of natural phenomena, but also because there is a form of category error in assuming that knowledge of that which transcends nature can be deduced from what is immanent within it. Similar to Whewell’s observation that sensations and ideas are fundamentally distinct orders of being, Tennyson is evidently aware that the second cannot be reduced to the first. “The highest-mounted mind,” he writes, “Still sees the sacred morning spread / The silent summit overhead” (174). In fact, the voice goes on to point out that the limits of human knowledge are to some extent limited by the biological structure of the senses:

'That men with knowledge merely play'd,
I told thee—hardly nigher made,

Tho' scaling slow from grade to grade;

'Much less this dreamer, deaf and blind

Named man, may hope some truth to find

That bears relation to the mind.

'For every worm beneath the moon

Draws different threads, and late and soon

Spins, toiling out his own cocoon.' (177)

In addition to the slow progress of knowledge from “grade to grade,” the antagonist here suggests the nature of the divine remains necessarily opaque to the human mind — which is necessarily “deaf and blind” to that which transcends matter. In a manner similar to the silk worm, which creates its surrounding cocoon from within itself, humans also create their sense of reality from an internal set of sensations that may or may not bear any relation to the true form of matter. Like Kant, Tennyson thus acknowledges that while we may have knowledge of “phenomena,” or things as they seem to the senses, we can never know the world of “noumena,” or things in themselves.

Despite these objections which the bad voice urges against the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, Tennyson’s speaker attempts to demonstrate that there is nonetheless good reason to believe in a divine order within nature. In doing so, he not only articulates a philosophical doctrine which is indebted to Whewell’s own ideas, but

also provides a poetic model for bringing together ideas and sensations—and thus imagining the “subject of objectivity.” In the first place, Tennyson’s persona observes that while the senses seem to indicate that life is merely a purposeless process of birth, death, and decay, the ideas intuit a wider order in nature:

‘The simple senses crown’d [man’s] head:

“Omega! Thou art Lord,” they said,

“We find no motion in the dead.”

‘Why, if man rot in dreamless ease,

Should that plain fact, as taught by these,

Not make him sure that he shall cease?

‘Who forged that other influence,

That heat of inward evidence,

By which he doubts against the sense?’ (179-180)

For Tennyson, here, though the evidence of our senses indicates that death is the end, and there is no soul which transcends life, humans intuitively doubt this proposition. The mind, he observes, cannot accept that being would merely involve the meaningless composition and decomposition of matter: there must be some higher purpose. Crucially, however, the speaker argues that far from an erroneous assumption, this underlying belief

must have come from the divine, insofar as it directly contradicts what we observe in nature.⁹ In this sense, Tennyson contends—qua Whewell—that our innate ideas help us understand the inherent form of nature precisely because they were instilled by God. Through these subjective intuitions, man is able to discern “that type of Perfect in his mind” which “in Nature can he nowhere find” (180). Indeed, though Whewell himself was reluctant to accept the idea that species could change over time, Tennyson’s speaker argues that this perfect biological type will in fact eventually manifest itself in material form. They observe:

‘Yet how should I for certain hold,
Because my memory is so cold,
That I first was in human mould?

‘I cannot make this matter plain,
But I would shoot, howe’er in vain,
A random arrow from the brain.

‘It may be that no life is found,

⁹ In a fascinating reading of the relationship between the different points of view within the poem, William Brashear points out that there are in fact not two but rather three voices which interject at different points in the narrative. While the first two voices reflect the perspectives of subjective doubt and objective belief, he argues, the third voice—which appears only at the end of the poem—seems to embody the underlying ideas of a transcendental entity: “Though the first is that ‘still small voice’ that initially addresses the poet and tells him it were better not to be, the second voice is that of the poet attempting to refuse this claim. But from whatever objective source the argument is derived, it is feeble and impotent against the subjective fact until the third voice enters at the conclusion of the poem” (283).

Which only to one engine bound
Falls off, but cycles all around.' (181).

In this reading, which Tennyson puts forward less as a devout belief than a cautious speculation, the speaker suggests that death is not the end of the individual but merely a point of transition from one body to another, which progresses through different organisms as they move up an ascending chain of evolutionary being. While personal identity and individual memories are largely wiped away through each successive shift, certain parts also remain and provide distant insight into the world beyond material sense. "Thro' lower lives I came," Tennyson writes, 'Tho' all experience past became / Consolidate in mind and frame":

'Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

'Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.' (182)

While neither language nor memory can adequately capture the divine, the speaker argues, our inherent ideas are able to intuit something of this metaphysical realm. Instead

of limiting our forms of knowledge to what is available to the senses, as Locke and Hume would claim, Tennyson thus suggests that a better and more comprehensive epistemology would include these compelling, if not always rigidly verifiable, beliefs. To bring together objective and subjective forms of thought in this manner, he implies, is to expand — rather than contract — the limits of philosophical theory.

2.3 Faith and Form: In Memoriam

Throughout “The Two Voices,” in this sense, Tennyson repeatedly emphasises the way in which both the sensations and the ideas work together to uncover the underlying form of nature. However, whereas the senses seem to suggest the disorder and impermanence of life, the ideas are able to intuit the evolution of matter from one form to another in the ever-advancing progression of organisms. Indeed, Victorian readers of Tennyson’s poetry found in this conception a convincing articulation of evolutionary ideas which were developing at the same time in scientific circles. For instance, Herbert Spencer — who would later go on to champion quasi-Darwinian ideas about the evolution of life and the struggle for existence — wrote to Tennyson in 1855 to note that the poet’s thinking about evolution in “The Two Voices” prefigured his own theories. “Coming to the verse ‘Or if thro’ lower lives I came,’” he wrote, “it occurred to me that you might like to glance through a book which applies applies to the elucidation of mental science, the hypothesis to which you refer. I therefore beg your acceptance of [Spencer’s Principles of] *Psychology* which I send by this post” (411). That Spencer should have observed evolutionary themes in “The Two Voices” is in many ways important for understanding

Tennyson's relationship with biological science. Recent critics have tended to suggest that Tennyson's understanding of evolution was largely indebted to his reading of Robert Chamber's anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* which first came out in 1844, and have thus often read his later work—especially *In Memoriam*—through this lense.¹⁰ While Tennyson did write to his publisher Edward Moxon in 1844 to request a copy, his neighbour James Henry Mangles noted in 1871 that although “he had been accused of having copied *Vestiges of Creation* in his *In Memoriam*,” he had in fact “never read it, when he wrote” (85). In fact, Tennyson's friend William Allingham recalled in 1867 that though Tennyson had hoped that the book would provide him with “some real insight into the nature and prospects of the human race,” for him in the end there was “no satisfaction there” (148). This evident dissatisfaction with Chamber's work may in part be explained by the fact that Tennyson had developed his own theories of evolution considerably earlier—as evident in “The Two Voices.” Hallam Tennyson, for instance, notes that his father “seems to have propounded in some college discussion the theory, that the ‘development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated, vermicular, molluscous and vertibrate organisms’” (44). Though there are no surviving records which elaborate on how exactly Tennyson understood this proto-evolutionary process, save his poems themselves, Hallam's recollections indicate that his father's

¹⁰ In perhaps the best-known version of this argument, James Secord argues Tennyson's reading of Chambers led him away from the seeming confusion of disconnected sensations and toward an evolutionary view in which nature progressed every closer to an absolute ideal: “Up to that point in his writing, science had been used to portray a disorienting cycle of extinction in which human beings seemed to occupy no particular place. Not only the ‘single life,’ but humanity itself (the ‘type’) would disappear. But the second half of *In Memoriam* begins another cycle, drawing from a vision of union with God that leads towards an optimistic conclusion implicated in *Vestiges*” (530). For a similar analysis of Chamber's influence on Tennyson see also Anna Barton (153-156).

interest in evolution predated, and indeed exceeded, the ideas contained within Chamber's influential treatise.

Instead of reading Tennyson's poetry in the context of Chamber's writing, then, I argue that his evolutionary theories — particularly those put forward in *In Memoriam* — can be understood more productively in relation to Whewell's epistemology. This is possible, I suggest, not because Whewell endorsed evolution, which he did not, but instead because both believed that evolutionary biology could not be verified through appeal to the language of objectivity. However, whereas for Whewell this meant that evolution was theoretically untenable, Tennyson suggested that there was still a philosophical place for this mode of speculation, which poetry as a medium was uniquely suited to address. Through the lyrical form and poetic language which he adopts in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson thus attempts to capture in an objective manner those subjective beliefs which, strictly speaking, arise solely from the ideas rather than the sensations. In making this argument, I build on the recent work of Devin Griffiths, who has rightly sought to frame Tennyson's work "in terms of contemporary debates between William Whewell and John Stuart Mill over the logic of induction" (133). But while Griffiths uses the lense of Whewell's philosophy to theorise the role of "analogy" and "comparison" in Tennyson's scientific writing, and the way in which he uses these techniques to produce a unified metaphysical conception, I instead want to emphasise the uncertainties and tensions within the apparent resolution of his poem. In particular, I hold that though the conclusion to *In Memoriam* seems to suggest a form of underlying order within nature, Tennyson posits this idea only in a conditional sense — precisely because the ideal unity which he identifies

cannot be known through the senses and thus fulfill the necessary “objective” part of Whewell’s two-fold theory of knowledge. His friend James Knowles, for instance, recalled that despite the seemingly optimistic tone adopted of the conclusion to *In Memoriam*, Tennyson had told him that it was “too hopeful, this poem, more than I am myself” (95). Beneath the apparent affirmations of belief in a divine order within nature, in this sense, remains a note of sceptical doubt which calls into question the unsupported ideas of the subject. Without entirely dismissing them, Tennyson thus affirms that these beliefs need to be validated objectively if they are to be considered true.

This philosophical distinction between what the subject believes and what is objectively true is in fact evident in the first stanza of *In Memoriam*. In his famous opening Tennyson writes:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove. (309)

In this passage, which in many ways sets the both sceptical yet also affirmative tone for the rest of the poem, Tennyson thus suggests that belief in the divine is founded upon mere faith instead of actual proof. Whereas in “Supposed Confessions” he had suggested that “truth may stand forth unmoved of change, / An image with profulgent brows,” here Tennyson argues that the embodied face of the divine cannot be seen or otherwise

apprehended through the senses, and thus cannot be admitted to the domain of scientific knowledge. For him, underlying metaphysical causes in nature can only be theorised through the ideas, not known through the sensations. Hence:

We have but faith: we cannot know,
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Though the subject may believe or trust that there is an underlying order in nature, Tennyson notes, this faith does not meet the two-part criteria for knowledge which Whewell articulates within his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*. Indeed, the structure of Tennyson's poem itself suggests this unresolved relation between objective ideas and subjective sensations. Throughout his stanzas, in fact, Tennyson's ABBA rhyme scheme often uses the formal opposition between the first two lines (AB) and the last two lines (BA) to reinforce the tension between the content of these lines—as in this instance between the assertion that “knowledge” of the divine is impossible, and the alternative assertion that “faith” in God is possible. This dialogic form in fact fulfills a similar function to that of the two voices in his previous poetry. In bringing together opposing assertions about the nature of the divine, Tennyson subjects both to doubt, and thereby encourages a more rigorous accounting of truth—a process which models a form of dialectical thought structure for his readers. Indeed, this opposition between object and subject

becomes explicit when Tennyson's speaker enters into conversation with the voice of "sorrow":

'The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run;
A web is wov'n across the sky;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun:

'And all the phantom, Nature, stands—
With all the music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own—
A hollow form with empty hands.'

And shall I take a thing so blind,
Embrace her as my natural good;
Or crush her, like a vice of blood,
Upon the threshold of the mind? (311)

For Tennyson, personal grief over the death of Hallam leads him to confront the possibility of a life without inherent direction or purpose.¹¹ The question then becomes

¹¹ In a fascinating analysis of the role of astronomical metaphors within Tennyson's writing, Anna Henchman reads the confusion and desolation which the speaker feels at this moment as not only a response to the death of Hallam, but also a reflection on the so-called "Nebular Hypothesis." This theory held that the underlying

whether to accept the apparent evidence of the senses—that the divine is either non-existent or radically unknowable—or instead to reject this conception through appeal to those ideas that come from the “threshold of the mind.”

In many respects, the rest of *In Memoriam* develops as an attempt to answer this underlying philosophical question concerning the nature of knowledge. Throughout the poem, Tennyson often figures this problem in terms of whether or not it is possible to transcend the material limitations of human thought. In Canto XII, for instance, the speaker imagines himself leaving the confines of his physical body and looking out over the ocean:

Lo, as a dove when up she springs
To bear thro' Heaven a tale of woe,
Some dolorous message knit below
The wild pulsation of her wings;

Like her I go; I cannot stay;
I leave this mortal ark behind,
A weight of nerves without a mind,
And leave the cliffs and haste away. (316)

structure and regularity apparent in celestial bodies was merely a reflection of blind material forces—a fact that seemed to undermine the intentional conception of nature articulated in natural theology. “Tennyson was profoundly aware,” she argues, “of the metaphysical implications of such scientific revelations: that the solar system was probably one of millions of such systems in a universe with not center, that no sentient force governed the movement of the stars” (91).

In this scene, Tennyson suggests that the imagination provides a means of escape from those forms of thought—particularly the senses—which are immediately tied to the physiology of the body. In a moment of poetic rapture, the mind detaches itself from the embodied “nerves” which provide the basis of perception, and becomes able to conceive those parts of nature that are distant or in some sense abstract. However, while this speculative state seems to provide a means of communing with Hallam, whose body is being transported back to England across the North Sea, the speaker soon comes to doubt the veracity of his own vision:

Has the shock, so harshly given,
Confused me like the unhappy bark

That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
And staggers blindly ere she sink?
And stunned me from my power to think
And all knowledge of myself;

And made me that delirious man
Whose fancy fuses old and new,
And flashes into false and true,
And mingles all without a plan? (318-319)

Though the speaker has repeated transcendental visions that seem to indicate a divine order within nature, he is unable to convince himself that these represent a verifiable form of knowledge and are not merely the product of a disordered mind put out of joint by the shock of Hallam's death. In this sense, the ideas which the persona has about the divine cannot be trusted. While these subjective beliefs do bring together different sensations, fusing the "old and new," they are also unreliable and thus incapable of being definitively proven "false" or "true." Indeed, insofar as these visions are a product of subjective suffering instead of objective observations, they are divorced from proper scientific study. Thus another voice asks the speaker:

'Is this an hour
For private sorrow's barren song,
When more and more the people throng
The chairs and songs of civil power?

'A time to sicken and to swoon,
When Science reaches forth her arms
To feel from world to world, and charms
Her secret from the latest moon?' (321).

In this instance, even indulging these individual meditations on the divine appears unjustified when compared to the political and scientific progress evident in Victorian society. Whereas private and subjective speculations remain uncertain, the public and objective domain of science provides self-evident advances over time. For Tennyson, as for Whewell, scientific knowledge thus develops via slow but sure steps over time, whereas metaphysical speculations appear as sudden moments of affective intensity, which nevertheless can never be fully justified in interpersonal terms.

Part of the problem with subjective ideas, however, is not only that they cannot be verified in the same manner as objective sensations, but that they are difficult to articulate in language. For instance, Donald Hair notes that because “Tennyson’s experience is unique, words not shared with anyone else would fail to convey the nature of the moment, and he has to fall back on words that appeal to common experience. But they, too, fail, and can only work by inference” (15). Precisely insofar as the speaker’s visions of the divine are private and subjective, he struggles to find a form of language which is adequate to express them to other people. However, while literal denotative language is manifestly incapable of conveying metaphysical speculations, Tennyson nonetheless attempts to articulate these ideas through recourse to the metaphorical structures of poetic narrative. Throughout the poem, Tennyson in fact repeatedly and self-reflexively observes the limitations of philosophical language and the need instead for poetry to communicate abstract ideals. Thus within Canto XXXVI he observes that

Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,

Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought;

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef. (329)

In approaching the natural world, Tennyson suggests, those “closest” and most precise words that we associate with dense philosophical thought often fail to comprehend the underlying form of life. However, for him, the poetic mechanisms of narrative—embodied here in the biblical “tale” of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus—can give “breath” or living substance to an otherwise dry and formal conception of the divine. Through this story, which Tennyson understands as the apex of “poetic thought,” even the working classes are able to apprehend something about the nature of God. Indeed, at various points throughout *In Memoriam*, Tennyson also implies that the inherent order in

nature provided by the divine is similar to the metrical structure which the poet imposes on his or her poem. Without this framework, he argues, both natural and poetic material devolves into purposeless disorder:

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is;

This round of green, this orb of flame,
Fantastic beauty; such as lurks
In some wild Poet, when he works
Without a conscience or an aim. (328)

For Tennyson, in this sense, there needs to be an underlying direction and purpose in both nature and poetry if they are to avoid being merely a random assortment of disparate sensations. Through the narrative and formal continuity of a poem, therefore, the poet is able capture and to some extent reflect the implicit metaphysical structures which they intuit within the natural world.

In many respects, the most persistent rhetorical device that Tennyson deploys throughout *In Memoriam* is the image of biological development. In the first instance, this functions on a personal level, through his repeated references to the growth of the child.

Throughout the poem, in a sense similar to “Supposed Confessions,” the infant represents a naive state in which subjective beliefs about nature are accepted without critical scrutiny—insofar as the opposition between subject and object does not yet exist.¹² Thus he observes:

The baby new to earth and sky,
What time his tender palm is prest
Against the circle of the breast,
Has never thought that ‘this is I:’

But as he grows he gathers much,
And learns the use of ‘I,’ and ‘me,’
And finds ‘I am not what I see,
And other than the things I touch.’

So rounds he to a separate mind
From whence clear memory may begin,
As thro’ the frame that binds him in

¹² Ekbert Faas argues that the way in which the infant learns to differentiate themselves from their surroundings leads to a profound sense of isolation and detachment from material phenomena. In this poem, he suggests, Tennyson “develops a notion of the self as a gradually evolving act of negation, [and] points toward a sense of how such negation turns into a form of isolation, with ‘each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream world’ (72). Though there is some truth to this argument, I also want to emphasize that the distinction between self and nature which Tennyson describes here is also a necessary precondition of true belief.

His isolation grows defined. (333-334)

Whereas adults can distinguish between their ideas about the world and how it exists in reality, the infant assumes that there is no difference between object and subject, and that nature is merely a reflection of their own subjective desires. In his *Physiology of Common Life*, for instance, George Henry Lewes read this passage as suggesting that “the infant world is wholly subjective” insofar as people only develop the ability to recognize independent objects over time (206). However, though infants are unable to admit the subjectivity of their beliefs—and in particular their naive faith in the existence of a benign order in nature—for Tennyson this also gives them unmediated access to the intuitive realm of metaphysical ideas which he can now only accept on trust, and is unable to fully articulate in words. Indeed, the cry of the child, he argues, is in some respects as close as it is possible to come to capturing his sense of the divine:

Behold, we know not anything;

I can but trust that good shall fall

At last—far off—at last, to all,

And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?

An infant crying in the night:

An infant crying for the light:

And with no language but a cry. (338)

When confronted with the sublime immensity of nature, Tennyson here imagines himself as akin to a newborn child, insofar as neither can know or say anything about the metaphysical order which underpins matter. Both he and the infant can merely articulate a “cry,” which reveals their inability to describe anything more about the underlying form of life. Through his extended metaphorical references to childhood, Tennyson thus figures the subjective human trust in the order of nature, yet also the impossibility of describing this transcendental structure through denotative language.

In addition to his use of the concept of individual ontogenetic development, Tennyson also repeatedly deploys the motif of phylogenetic change between species. In doing so, he attempts to demonstrate that while nature appears purposeless and random, this seeming lack of order in fact belies the logical development of different life forms from one another through evolution. Initially, however, Tennyson emphasises the arbitrary violence and destruction evident among organisms:

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;
That I, considering everywhere

Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear. (338)

In these stanzas, which in many ways reflect those ongoing scientific concerns about the “struggle for life” that would eventually provide the theoretical basis for Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Tennyson points out the immense waste that seems necessary to sustain the existence of species. In contrast to our idea of the divine, which assumes a metaphysical order and purpose, nature appears as merely a random and brutal series of events, in which some organisms happen to survive while others do not. This destruction in fact threatens not only the belief that each life is important to the divine, but also the belief that species themselves reflect immovable ideas in the mind of God. Thus the speaker observes:

‘So careful of the type?’ but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries ‘A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing all shall go.

‘Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death:
The spirit does but mean the breath:

I know no more.' And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,

Such splendid purpose in his eyes,

Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,

Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed

And love Creation's final law —

Tho' Nature red in tooth and class

With ravine, shriek'd against his creed —

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,

Who battled for the True, the Just,

Be blown about the desert dust,

Or seal'd within the iron hills?' (339)

Instead of each species being a unique and irreplaceable ideal form, which God created as part of a higher plan, Tennyson here notes that the geological evidence suggests that there has in fact been a constant series of life forms which have come into existence at some

point, only to then die off.¹³ For him, in this sense, neither the individual nor the species seems to serve any permanent end. Though “love” seems for true believers to be the “final law,” nature is in fact without any law whatsoever, apart from the ongoing struggle for life. Even humans, who imagine a world which underpinned by ideal conceptions including “the True” and “the Just,” are nothing but organised matter which is destined someday to return to the earth. In this conception, our objective sensations of disorder in nature thus undermine any subjective belief in a metaphysical structure.

However, while the evidence of the senses seems to suggest that life is inherently aimless and filled with needless death, as *In Memoriam* progresses Tennyson indicates that instead of mere destruction both individuals and species in fact develop through a form of evolutionary change. On the individual level, Tennyson invokes a loosely Christian theory of the transmigration of souls. Within this theory, the death of the body is not the end of the spirit, but rather a point of transition from one order of existence (the material) to another (the ideal). For this reason, he writes:

I wage not any feud with Death
For changes wrought on form and face,
No lower life that earth's embrace
May breed with him, can fright my faith.

¹³ Though Tennyson here laments the impermanence of the biological type and the fact that all species are destined to eventually pass away, Mathew Rowlinson points out that for him this ceaseless change was also what made the development of “higher” forms possible: “Tennyson’s poem is crucially concerned with fossil evidence for the extinction of species, which it terms ‘types,’ but it also adopts Chambers’ belief that extinction is a necessary part of the evolution of lower forms of life into higher ones” (40).

Eternal process moving on,
From state to state the spirit walks;
And these are but the shatter'd stalks,
Or ruin'd chrysalis of one.

This image of the spirit as an insect breaking free of its bodily shell, which invokes his earlier use of the same metaphor in "The Two Voices," thus suggests that though in life people are prisoners to their sensations, in death they are able to escape these bonds and enter into the realm of the ideal. In Tennyson's theology, existence is in effect simply an ever-ascending series of forms through which the individual will eventually pass in the fullness of time. Indeed, in the same way that souls move through different ontological planes of being, so too do species move through different biological forms, culminating in — and perhaps even going beyond — the human. For Tennyson, in this sense, there is an underlying order within life which involves the progression from lower to higher:

They say,
The solid earth whereon we tread

In tracts of fluent heat began,
And grew to seeming-random forms,
The seeming prey of cyclic storms,

Till at the last arose the man;

Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime,

The herald of a higher race,

And of himself in higher place,

If so he type the work of time

Within himself from more to more;

Or, crowne'd with attributes of woe

Like glories, move his course and show

That life is not an idle ore,

But iron dug from central gloom,

And heated hot with burning fears,

And dipped in baths of hissing tears,

And battered with the shocks of doom

To shape and use. Arise and fly

The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;

Move upward working out the beast,

And let the ape and tiger die. (379)

While recent developments in geology and evolutionary biology appear to suggest that life emerges from “seeming-random forms” and the purposeless interaction of matter, a closer examination of this record indicates an inherent plan—wherein the lower, material manifestations of life give way to higher, immaterial structures.¹⁴ Far from providing evidence of the arbitrary violence of nature, for Tennyson the suffering evident in nature is a necessary part of this evolutionary progress. Similar to forge metal, he suggests, the pinnacle of evolution—human life—requires the “hissing tears” and “shocks of doom” which occurred in the past to shape and purify its biological form. Through the struggle for existence, the grosser material parts of the human can be “worked out” so that those immaterial parts associated with the soul, such as reason, could come to the fore.

Nevertheless, though Tennyson theorises an underlying evolutionary order within nature, he is also careful to emphasise that this is a subjective ideal instead of an objective fact. This caution manifests itself throughout *In Memoriam* in the choice of verbs he uses to describe his relations to these metaphysical beliefs—which are uniformly tentative and conditional. In particular, Tennyson often suggests that while he “trusts” or “thinks” that there is an inherent structure within life, he does not “know” this to be the case. For instance, he writes:

¹⁴ Throughout studies of Tennyson’s poetry, critics have in fact repeatedly called attention to his ongoing use of geological metaphors to reflect a sense of the confusion—yet also purpose—within nature. In particular, Michelle Geric argues that the emergence Lyellian uniformitarianism precipitated both a recognition that all material forms were impermanent, yet also desire to uncover an intrinsic meaning behind the appearance of ceaseless change. “Lyell shattered the teleological foundations upon which [Tennyson] based his thinking, and caused an epistemological crisis. However, Tennyson also attempts to at least stabilise the crisis Lyell’s uniformitarianism creates an to reinstate teleological purpose” (110).

I trust I have not wasted breath:
I think we are not wholly brain,
Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,
Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death;

Not only cunning casts of clay:
Let science prove we are, and then
What matters Science unto men,
At least to me? I would not stay.

Let him, the wiser man who springs
Hereafter, up from childhood shape
His action like the greater ape,
But I was born to other things. (380)

For Tennyson, here, science seems to suggest that human life is merely material, and hence there is no immaterial soul which transcends death. Yet while he accepts that his own conviction that there is in fact a disembodied spirit within people is merely based upon faith, he nonetheless attempts to reserve a place for this ideal within his personal epistemology. In a continuation of his metaphor in which the “ape” represents the lower or merely sensuous aspect of human life, Tennyson contends that he has outgrown this psychological tendency, and with it that naive commitment to scientific materialism —

which rejects the possibility of an afterlife. Though passages such as these seem to indicate a hostility within Tennyson's philosophy toward scientific theory, I would argue that they instead involve a critique of that one-sided and sensationalist account of knowledge promoted in empiricist works by Locke, Hume, and more recently John Stuart Mill. John Tyndall, for instance, who became close friends with Tennyson after they met in 1858, recalled that while his "interest in science" was not "unmingled with fear of its 'materialistic' tendencies," he consistently sought to ensure his work was in keeping with recent advances in scientific knowledge: "To secure accuracy, he spared no pains. I found in his room charts of isothermals and isobars intended to ensure the exactitude of certain allusions of his to physical science" (475). Throughout *In Memoriam*, in fact, Tennyson often attempted to distinguish between his affection for science in general and criticism of what he regarded as its sometimes excessive materialism. For instance, he writes:

Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail
Against her beauty? May she mix
With men and prosper! Who shall fix
Her pillars? Let her work prevail.

But on her forehead sits a fire;
She sets her forward countenance
And leaps into the future chance,
Submitting all things to desire.

Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain—
She cannot fight the fear of death.
What is she, cut from love and faith,
But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of demons? Fiery-hot to burst
All barriers in her onward race
For power. Let her know her place;
She is the second, not the first. (377)

Without rejecting scientific knowledge as a whole, Tennyson here notes its epistemic limitations. In particular, empirical facts alone are childlike and immature, and thus figuratively—at least in his evolutionary theory of development—closer to material sensations than immaterial ideas. For this reason, scientific thinking is not only embodied in physiological form, and personified in feminised terms, but is also described in sensuous language as “fiery-hot” and prone to submit “all things to desire.” Whereas “love” represents the underlying and intangible “law” which regulates nature, he suggests, science—when ungoverned by ideas such as these—tends to merely capture the unruly appearance of embodied matter which manifests itself to the senses.

To uncover the underlying metaphysical “law” which regulates nature, therefore, requires practices of knowledge which exceed scientific observation. In contrast to natural

theology, which held that the existence of the divine could be deduced from the regularity of and harmony apparent within biological phenomena, Tennyson argues that understanding God involves “truths that never can be proved” (385). Precisely because nature appears so disorderly, evidence of a higher power can only come from subjective ideals instead of objective sensations. Thus he writes:

That which we invoke to bless;
Our dearest faith; our ghastliest doubt;
He, They, One, All; within, without;
The Power in Darkness whom we guess;

I found Him not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye;
Nor through the questions men may try,
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I hear a voice 'believe no more'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt

The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered 'I have felt.' (381-382)

When confronted with the possible non-existence of the divine, Tennyson writes that the evidence of the senses and indeed reason itself is insufficient to assuage this philosophical doubt. In contrast to natural theologians, who would find God in the apparently purposeful design of "eagle's wing" or "insect's eye," he relies instead upon an affective model of belief, in which faith is predicated on subjective intensity and the epiphanic power of revealed religion. Within this conception, the claim that "I have felt" is sufficient for personal belief. Whereas objective sensations appear to suggest that death is the end of life and that nature is without metaphysical purpose, therefore, subjective emotion provides the grounds for an evolutionary theory of nature in which lower forms give way to higher organisms in an ever-increasing and orderly fashion.¹⁵ For Tennyson:

A soul shall draw from out the vast
And strike his being into bounds,

¹⁵ J.A.V. Chappel argues that the capacity of evolutionary biology to provide not only anguish but also hope for the future meant that it had an important place within Tennyson's understanding of science: "Paleontology and geology might bring despair, [but] Chambers' developmental biology could evidently be retained within a providential frame of reference and contribute to the anthropocentric, human-centered vision of nineteenth-century culture, [though] the cost was the distancing of God from creation and the removal of the origin of the universe to the remotest past" (72).

And, moved thro' life of lower phase,
Result in man, be born and think,
And act and love, a closer link
Betwixt us and the crowning race

Of those that, eye to eye, shall look
On knowledge; under whose command
Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand
Is Nature like an open book;

No longer hark-akin to brute
For all we thought and loved and did,
And hoped, and suffer'd, is but seed
Of what in them is flower and fruit;

Whereof the man, that with me trod
This planet, was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine that lives in God,

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,

And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves. (389)

In the course of time, Tennyson suggests, individual souls pass from lower to higher forms of life.¹⁶ Within this theory, however, some spirits—in this case Hallam’s—move to the next before others, serving as forerunners of the “crowning race.” In doing so, they appear even more disembodied or immaterial than those of their given species, and hence they transcend earthly forms through death at an earlier point in life—insofar as they have lived “ere the times were ripe” for their higher mode of being. For Tennyson, in this sense, Hallam’s demise appears not as the tragic triumph of material decay, but a natural part of that evolutionary process through which the body gives way to the spirit. In death, he is no longer “half-akin to Brute,” and thus able to move beyond the sensational restraints upon knowledge. He is able, as Tennyson puts it, to read “Nature like an open book,” precisely because he “lives in God,” who both created and indeed also regulates life. In this theory, Tennyson concludes, God represents that underlying law “to which the whole creation moves”: in reuniting with the divine, therefore, Hallam himself attains this transcendental knowledge.

2.4 Conclusion: Poetics of Science

Throughout *In Memoriam*, then, Tennyson both affirms the need for faith in an underlying set of ideas which regulate the course of nature, yet also acknowledges that

these laws cannot be known through objective sensations. Instead, these ideas are a produce of innate intuition, which, like the cry of the infant, cannot be fully expressed through the medium of language. Literary critic J.M. Robertson perhaps best captured this theoretical position when he wrote of Tennyson's poetry that it involved a robust defense of

those first principles which underlie all creeds, which belong to our earliest childhood, and on which the wisest and best have rest through all ages; that all is right; that darkness shall be clear; that God and Time are the only interpreters; that Love is King; that the Immortal is in us; that, which is the keynote of the whole, 'All is well, tho' Faith and Form be sundered in the night of Fear. (298)

What is important about Robertson's readings, here, is not only his attention to the way in which Tennyson emphasises the underlying order within nature—which is manifest in the immortal God of Love—but that this metaphysical structure is related to the issue of "Form." Whereas both faith and form may be undone by doubt, this conception also implies the opposite: that faith in the divine idea of God can best be represented through a unity of form. This intellectual position is important, insofar as it suggests that while the idea of the divine cannot be captured in poetic language, there is a sense in which the transcendent structure of nature can instead appear in the formal qualities of the poem itself. In the case of *In Memoriam*, therefore, it is not only figurative indications of faith which Tennyson offers at the end of the poem, but also the regularity of his meter and

rhyme that attests to an underlying order beneath the disparate content of his cantos. In his 1850 article on *In Memoriam*, for instance, Kingsley noted that though throughout the book there is no “conscious or organic method,” the poems were nonetheless

united by the identity of their metre, so exquisitely chosen, that while the major rhyme in the second and third lines of each stanza gives the solidity and self-restraint required by such deep themes, the mournful minor rhyme of each first and fourth line always leads the ear to expect something beyond, and enables the poet’s thoughts to wander sadly on, from stanza to stanza and poem to poem, in an endless chain. (183)

In the same way that the ideas provide structure and regularity to the otherwise disorderly sensations in Whewell’s philosophy, then, the formal features of Tennyson’s writing organise the apparently disconnected parts of his poem into something like a coherent whole. Though the material content seems in many respects disconnected, the author notes, the constant yet unobtrusive form allows each section to seamlessly blend together. Without the almost—but not quite—metronomic form that Tennyson deploys, in other words, *In Memoriam* would appear merely what it started out as: namely, a diffuse series of meditations on death and the divine. Yet with this formal regularity, the poem becomes a unified structure which is more than the sum of its parts.

Whereas for Victorian observers science and poetry often appeared entirely opposed, in this sense, in examining the intellectual relationship between Whewell and

Tennyson it is possible to see how both were interested in the underlying problem of how to organise observed sensations into an ideal theoretical unity, and the problems in doing so through denotative language. Indeed, if Tennyson adopted the language of science in his poetry, others were just as inclined to draw upon the language of poetry in describing the phenomena of science. Edward Clodd, for instance, when describing the inherent structure of evolution used the vocabulary of meter and rhythm. "Changes are rung on evolution and dissolution," he declared, "on the birth and death of stellar systems — gas to solid, solid to gas, yet never quite the same — mighty rhythmic beats of which the earth's cycles and the cradles and graves of her children are minor beats" (23). For both scientists and poets alike, here, the constant and orderly motion of nature appeared most clearly in the form of a poetic metre, suggesting the dull and sometimes barely noticed, but always ineluctable, forward motion of life. However, though both Tennyson and Whewell were interested in the issue of how ideas provided the "form" which organised the "matter" of sensation, they also diverged over whether or not the underlying structure of nature could ever be known. For Tennyson, as we have seen, although we can accept the existence of a metaphysical order in nature based upon subjective faith, this order cannot be known through an objective set of criteria. Hallam Tennyson thus recalled of his father:

He consistently emphasized his own belief in what he called the Eternal Truths; in an Omnipotent, Omniscient and All-loving God, Who revealed Himself through the human attribute of the highest self sacrificing love; in the freedom of the human will; and in the immortality of the soul. But he asserted that "Nothing

worthy proving can be proven,” and that even as to the great laws which are the basis of Science, “We have but faith, we cannot know. (311)

Though people can believe or have faith in the inherent orderliness of nature, within this theory they cannot ultimately “know” that this is true, insofar as the concept of “knowledge” is reserved for describing those theories which can be subjected to objective scrutiny. This epistemic scepticism was at odds with the optimistic philosophy put forward by Whewell. In response to the question “how can it be that the world without us is in some respects identical to the world within us,” he noted that theists such as himself responded that “it is so because the Supreme Creative Mind has made it so—that the truths which exist or can be generated in man’s mind agree with the laws of the universe, because he who has made and sustains man and the universe has caused them to agree” (358). If we accept the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent God, in effect, then our ideas about the inherent order in nature can be assumed to be valid, precisely because this entity is the one that created both. Whereas Tennyson doubts that anything can be known of either God or the metaphysical structure of life, Whewell instead uses his assumptions about the divine to buttress his claims about the possibility of understanding nature.

In part, this disagreement about whether or not the underlying form of life was knowable emerged from the respective positions of Tennyson and Whewell on natural theology. In contrast to Tennyson, who as we have seen was sceptical of idea that biological design could support claims about God, Whewell was among a number of

scientifically minded Victorian thinkers to embrace precisely this argument. In his 1833 *Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference to Natural Theology*, for instance, which was a part of the influential Bridgewater Treatises dedicated to furthering the scientific study of religion, Whewell explicitly set out to demonstrate that nature indicated the existence of the divine. Thus he noted:

The examination of the material world brings before us a number of things which suggest to most minds the belief in a creating and presiding intelligence. And this impression, which arises with the most vague and superficial consideration of the objects by which we are surrounded, is, we conceive, confirmed and expanded by a more exact and profound study of external nature. (1)

Whereas Tennyson argued that there was essentially no connection between scientific and religious theories, Whewell here used each to support the other. Evidence of the design in nature, he noted, indicated the existence of the divine, yet at the same time the existence of the divine also indicated to him that there was an underlying order in nature which could be known through the ideas. This belief of Whewell's that both God and matter could be understood was responsible, at least in part, for Tennyson's principle critique of his one time teacher: that he tended to assume a position of omniscience within his work. Later in life, Hallam Tennyson recorded, his father had suggested that the satirical lines "What I know not is not knowledge / I am the Master of this college" would have "suited Whewell," who he claimed "set up to be omniscient" (400). While Tennyson declined to

comment further, Whewell's reputation for "omniscience," as Richard Yeo observes, was in fact well established at this point, insofar as his work frequently attempted to analyse almost every area of scientific knowledge — from mathematics to psychology — in a single treatise (58). In contrast to Tennyson, whose poetic practice emphasised the limitations of language and thought and the final unknowability of the divine, Whewell believed that both nature and God could be brought within the bounds of human understanding.

In this sense, though Tennyson often made use of both science in general, and Whewell's theories in particular, his own intellectual project was in many ways different from that of scientific thought. What he sought was self-evidently not to develop new theories, or even to recapitulate in verse form existing theories — notwithstanding his oft-noted interest in scientific accuracy — but to instead provide a conjectural set of hypotheses about the nature of that which underlies science and to thus evoke the possibility of further scientific thought. John Tyndall, for instance, argued that his work fulfilled precisely this intellectually generative function within his own work. In a journal entry from 1850, he noted having turned "from Tennyson, to whom I had appealed for inspiration, to Lefebre de Fourcy, a dry mathematician," and observed that "if poetry make me a dreamer, so much the worse for me, [but] if it make me a worker, so much the better" (470). For Tyndall, here, though poetry can be a subjective distraction from objective science, it can also function as a form of creative inspiration in the face of otherwise difficult and obscure intellectual labour. In pushing speculative thought beyond the epistemic limits allowable in science, in effect, Tennyson's ideas opened up new spaces into which science could then eventually grow. Whereas Whewell's theory of

knowledge was based upon his observations about the way in which science was practiced in the present, therefore, Tennyson's poetry involved a set of hypotheses about how it could occur in the future. Rather than opposing one another as the objective and subjective poles of thought, science and poetry were thus complementary intellectual practices. Tennyson's friend Frederick Pollock perhaps best summarised this relationship in his *Lectures and Essays* when he observed:

Science and Poetry are own sisters; insomuch that in those branches of scientific enquiry which are the most abstract, most formal, most remote from ordinary sensible imagination, a higher power of the imagination, akin to the creative insight of the poet is most needed and most fruitful of lasting work. This living and constructive energy projects itself out into the world at the same time that it assimilates the surrounding world to itself. (27)

In this theory, those abstract and difficult forms of scientific study, which attend to first principles or what Whewell would call ideas, require something like a poetic disposition that can go beyond the limits of mere objective sensation and subjectively intuit the underlying relations among natural phenomenon. Poetic science of the sort practiced by Tennyson, in short, is able to assimilate both mind and matter, senses and ideas, in a way that mere empiricism cannot, and in doing so provide a form knowledge which can gesture to—if not fully capture—the limits of human experience.

3. Inclusive Knowledge: George Eliot, G.H. Lewes, and the Problem of Detachment

3.1 Introduction: *Beyond Disinterest*

In an 1863 article about the novels of George Eliot, the well-known journalist and publisher Richard Simpson called attention to what he regarded as Eliot's opposition to metaphysical understandings of knowledge. Throughout her writing, he suggested, Eliot seemed to embrace a positivist approach to philosophy, which rejected abstract forms of thought on the grounds that they were insufficiently objective:

[In her work] belief does not correspond to objective truth, but only an impression on the imagination, which is useful to direct and give energy to the feelings, [yet] necessarily transient and unstable, here today and gone tomorrow. (231)

Following the arguments of Comte and Spencer, Simpson noted, Eliot appeared to dismiss the idea that humans could ever obtain objective knowledge about anything outside of their embodied perspective. For her, belief in the reality of metaphysical ideas was merely a form of subjective projection — which could be useful in regulating behavior but did not even begin to approach the position of verifiable truth. This sense that immaterial entities could not be treated with objective certainty was not only a product of Eliot's own interest in epistemology, but also her connection with the philosopher of science George Henry Lewes. In the opening sections of his influential *Problems of Life and Mind*, for instance,

which he began in 1836 and left for Eliot to finish after his untimely death in 1878, Lewes articulated a similar argument about the limitations of traditional metaphysics. For him, the inherent problem with these detached approaches to knowledge was that they dealt solely with speculative ideals instead of material realities:

There is truth in [the criticisms] applied to the common practice of metaphysicians, [for] they move entirely in a realm of abstraction regardless of concrete realities — and thus their solutions can only ever be purely subjective constructions without objective validity. (57)

In this conception, Lewes suggested that metaphysical forms of thought were unreliable precisely because they disregarded material objects, and instead attended almost entirely to abstract ideas. Whereas positivists such as himself dealt with objective facts, in short, metaphysicians concerned themselves merely with unreliable conjecture, which had little grounding in observable phenomena. In doing so, he suggested, they adopted a detached perspective which was incapable of capturing the actual structure of reality itself.

This opposition to metaphysics on the part of Lewes and Eliot was in many ways a result of their belief that objective knowledge was necessarily a product of the senses. In contrast to idealist philosophers such as Kant — who held that some facts could be reached through appeal to the use of abstract ideas in and of themselves — both Lewes and Eliot argued that all true beliefs were capable of being verified through appeal to a concrete set

of observable phenomena. Thus as Lewes himself noted, any idea that was not reducible to immediate perception ought to be rejected out of hand:

[For] our conceptions to be valid, when [regarded objectively], they must be capable of reduction to a sensible basis, [and] if we find among the constituents anything not thus reducible to sense or intuition, that thing must be set apart and regarded as transcendental. (71)

In Lewes' argument, factual propositions could only be treated as objectively valid if the evidence used to support them was directly observable through the senses. If not, then they were to be dismissed as inherently unreliable, and thus entirely outside the realm of verifiable knowledge. Without recourse to sensation, he held, philosophical debate was inherently ungrounded, and thus incapable of solution. This belief that all true knowledge began with observation was also important in Eliot's own writing.¹ In an 1855 article about the "Future of German Philosophy," for instance, she too rejected the idealist suggestion that transcendental conceptions could be verified without appeal to the senses:

These abstract terms on which speculation has built its huge fabrics are simply the [terms] by which we mark the boundaries of our knowledge. They have no value

¹ Karen Chase has rightly pointed out that Eliot's work "moved in the main current of nineteenth century empiricism" and had "little tolerance for intuitive doctrines that valued metaphysical sweep over sound evidence" (145). For a similar discussion of her writing in relation to empiricist approaches to the concept of knowledge see also Peter Garratt (102-126).

but in connection with the concrete, [for] the abstract is always derived from the concrete: what then can we hope to gain from a philosophy the essence of which is the derivation of the concrete from the abstract? (724)

In this conception, the problem with metaphysical approaches to knowledge was that they began with theoretical suppositions and then attempted to work their way down to factual observations, whereas true beliefs instead began with observations and worked their way up to wider theories. For Eliot, as for Lewes, abstract ideas thus demarcated the limits of knowledge, rather than its initial starting point. To prioritise detached speculation over immediate perception, therefore, was to invert the proper epistemic order, which in her view was founded upon intimate familiarity with particular objects.

While Eliot and Lewes both agreed that sensations were the basis of all knowledge, this belief also led to certain difficulties. In particular, idealists pointed out that different observers often interpreted the same phenomena in different ways, and thus if individual perceptions were to be the starting point for philosophy then there could be no singular or objective truth — only a variety of subjective theories.² For this reason, they suggested, epistemology could only save itself from a debilitating form of relativism through appeal to abstract reason. In response to this argument, however, Lewes argued that there was a

² Rick Rylance notes that Lewes's philosophy was in fact often rejected for precisely this reason. T.H. Green, in particular, who was among the leaders of the British idealist movement, criticised Lewes's epistemology for his assumption that "the objective is unknowable save through the subjective," insofar as it meant that to "posit a 'real' outside the forms of human perception is to posit a fiction, for there can be nothing 'outside of consciousness'" (315).

problem with their initial assumption — namely the claim that people did in fact perceive reality entirely differently from one another:

[Truth] is to each person what they feel it to be, and it is to each person what they think it to be. In other words, they have been sensibly impressed by certain reals, and have interpreted these impressions by means of different symbols. From these subjective differences in interpretation, it has been concluded that that there is an objective reality outside of all and different from each: but I hold, on the contrary, that objective reality is to each what it is felt to be. (175)

Though people could — and often did — interpret the same phenomenon in different ways, Lewes noted, this did not mean there was no truth common to all. Instead, our perception of reality remained the same from person to person, and what changed was merely our ideas about these perceptions. In this sense, objectivity involved not so much embracing an entirely detached viewpoint — which for Lewes was an impossible ideal — but instead attempting to reconcile various conceptions of nature through recognising the similarities between them. This belief that knowledge was best cultivated through bringing together different perspectives was in fact important not only for Lewes, but also for Eliot. In her 1851 “Progress of the Intellect,” for instance, she too called attention to the necessity of adopting an inclusive conception of epistemology:

[In addition] to the objective utility of critical research it has highly advantageous influences on the mind which pursues it, [for] it may be doubted whether a mind that has no susceptibility to the pleasures of changing its point of view, of learning a remote form of thought, and of perceiving identity in nature under a variety of manifestations, [can possess] the ready sympathy or tolerance which characterises a truly philosophical culture. (277)

In contrast to idealists—who argued that truth could only be attained through stepping outside of any particular perspective—Eliot held that objective knowledge instead arose from the connection between different points of view. Through relating our ideas to those of another person, she suggested, we could see the similarities between them, and in doing so begin to apprehend that underlying reality common to all people. Thus while observers could never perceive things in themselves, for her, they could at least come to some sort of agreement about how material phenomena appeared in different circumstances.

Though Eliot herself often insisted that the idea of objectivity involved integrating various different perspectives, studies of her writing have at times adopted the same set of idealist assumptions that she so emphatically rejected. In particular, critics have tended to see her novels as organised around a struggle between transcendental and relativistic forms of knowledge. Jeremy Tambling, for instance, in an argument typical of this view, claims that her work was often conflicted between opposing impulses toward immaterial abstraction and material embodiment:

There seems to be a contradiction involved here [for though] she asks for a single vision, which in its anatomising view ‘pierces the obscurity’ to detect process and growth, [her novel] also assumes that the mere objective view is insufficient, that there has to be a prior framing of the object through theory. (953)

In this conception, Tambling suggests that Eliot’s novels were predicated on an intrinsic conflict between objective and subjective forms of thought. Though her writing aspired to adopt a form of transcendental detachment, he suggests, she also admitted that this ideal was unattainable—insofar as all ideas were at least in part a reflection of the mind of the observer. Thus while she overtly rejected metaphysical speculation, Eliot was incapable of ever entirely escaping from those oppositional structures which underpinned idealist approaches to the production of knowledge.³ George Levine, in a similar argument, has also pointed out the apparently unresolved tension in her writing between situated and disembodied knowledge. In his reading, Eliot’s novels often appeared to adopt an abstract perspective on particular phenomena—only to then undermine this idea and demonstrate the inherent difficulties with such disinterest:

³ In her influential work on Victorian conceptions of detachment, Amanda Anderson has also suggested that Eliot was conflicted between a desire for abstraction and particularity. “To achieve reflective distance,” she suggests, “one must be capable of disengagement from both cultural norms and givens. But such achieved distance should promote not a sustained or absolute disengagement—for Eliot a destructive delusion—but rather a cultivated partiality, a reflective return to cultural origins that one can no longer inhabit in an unthinking manner” (121). For a similar reading of Eliot’s work as structured around the opposition between transcendental and relativistic concepts of knowledge see Kay Young (223-241).

[For the most part] the voice of the narrator has the quality of omniscience, [and] at times it seems to be the voice of the view from nowhere. [But it also] registers the diversity of thoughts, the limitations of feeling and perspective, in ways that make the novel's struggle to imagine a mind capable of transcending the limits of empiricism and the limits of perspective intensely dramatic and problematic. (182)

While Eliot attempted to depict a form of objective knowledge entirely removed from the strictures of situated perception, Levine suggests, she also recognised the impossibility of this desire and the contingency of all belief. In this sense, he claims, Eliot remained caught in a metaphysical paradigm—in which objective and subjective conceptions of truth could never be fully reconciled. Whatever her own ideas about epistemology, in short, Eliot was in the end unable to leave behind the limitations of idealist concepts to knowledge.

Though critics such as these have often noted the ostensible opposition in Eliot's work between objective and subjective forms of knowledge, I argue that this conflict was in fact merely apparent. For her, I suggest, the concept of objectivity itself involved not so much leaving behind any particular perspective and embracing the "view from nowhere," as instead bringing together various different points of view, and in doing so espousing what might be termed the "view from everywhere." In many of her best-known works of literary fiction—but especially in her 1871 novel *Middlemarch*—Eliot thus adopted a form of what the feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding calls "strong" objectivity:

Standpoint epistemologies call for a recognition of a historical or sociological or cultural relativism—but not for a judgmental or epistemic relativism. They call for an acknowledgment that all human beliefs—including our best scientific beliefs—are socially situated. [Thus] they demand a form of strong objectivity [which is] in contrast to the weak objectivity of objectivism. (142)

Whereas weak objectivity was predicated on the assumption that truth could only emerge through eschewing particularity and embracing detachment, Harding contends, strong objectivity involved attempting to understand the perspectives of many different people at the same time.⁴ In this sense, she argues, observers could learn how to correct their own biases and assumptions, yet without appealing to the impossible idea of a transcendental standpoint outside history. For many of Eliot's readers, this belief that objectivity was best achieved through an inclusive epistemology was in fact an obvious part of her fiction. In an 1885 review of her novels, the historian John Acton thus called attention to the way in which she often approached her subject matter from different points of view:

Eliot seems to be capable not only of reading the diverse hearts of men, but also of creeping into their skin, watching nature through their eyes, feeling their latent background of conviction, discerning theory and habit, influences of thought and

⁴ In a sense similar to Harding—and for many of the same reasons—Donna Haraway has also argued that that objectivity is best regarded as a situated and inclusive ideal. “Not so perversely,” she notes, “objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision which promises transcendence of all limits and responsibility. [For] feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge” (582-583).

knowledge, of life and of descent, and having obtained this knowledge, [depicting] scientifically their soul. (462)

In the course of her writing, he observed, Eliot often attempted to enter into the conscious thoughts of different people, not only to capture their ideas and beliefs but also to grasp the particular circumstances that produced them. For him, Eliot thus appeared to cultivate a wide—yet at the same time historically situated—approach to observable phenomena, which in his view led her to a better understanding of nature as a whole. Throughout her work, in this sense, obtaining objective knowledge involved rejecting abstract ideals, and instead attempting to perceive life itself from a variety of different perspectives.

This inclusive understanding of objectivity underpinned not only Eliot's approach to epistemology, but also in many ways her ideas about aesthetic form. Specifically, while her novels have often been associated with a kind of "omniscient realism" — in which the narrative persona positions itself outside of the story proper and provides unmediated access to the events described — I contend that Eliot instead embraced a form of "situated realism," which involved rejecting this detached ideal and locating truth in the connection between different perspectives. In doing so, I follow J. Hillis Miller's suggestion that the apparent omniscience of her novels often emerges from the way in which her narrator is able to inhabit various points of view at the same time:

[This perceptiveness] can only be obtained because he, she, or it is able to share the particular points of view of all the characters, thereby transcending the limited

vision of any singular person. [For] the narrator can move in imagination from one vantage point to another, or from close up to far away. (63)

In this reading, Eliot's speaker appears less as a detached or disinterested figure than as someone who sets out to develop a wider understanding of life itself through considering the ideas of different people. However, while Miller argues that this inclusive approach was predicated on form of subjective "perspectivism" — in which the underlying structure of reality remained necessarily inscrutable — I hold that her realism was entirely consistent with a strong conception of objectivity.⁵ Though Eliot often called attention to the limits of omniscience, I suggest that in doing so she set out to demonstrate not the impossibility of reliable knowledge, but simply the need for a situated epistemology. In the view of many initial readers such as Simpson this was in fact precisely the point of her writing:

She abjures the ideal, she hates the impossible, [and] strives to depict facts with all the roughness of reality. [In doing so,] she gives the largest possible variety to her books through the multiplicity of her characters, the richness of her backgrounds, and the brief glimpses which she gives us of all kinds of life. (246)

⁵ James Perkins Russell rightly notes that Miller's reading of Eliot turns on a false dichotomy — in which a failure to obtain absolute truth necessary entails a collapse into relativism: "If we cannot know everything, he seems to be saying, we should renounce all action and attempts a interpretation, since we will only ever misinterpret. [But] George Eliot does not ever assume that we could or should know everything, so for her the failure of such an ambition is less catastrophic than it seems to be to Miller" (152).

In Simpson's argument, Eliot seemed to suggest that the nature of reality itself could only be grasped through letting go of abstract ideals, and instead attending to the various ways in which people did in fact interact with their surroundings. Through looking at life from different points of view and in relation to different historical backgrounds, he noted, Eliot was able to develop a "realistic" aesthetic form, which was less susceptible to distortions and biases than similar works of fiction. In this sense, Eliot's work provided readers with a concrete instance of an inclusive and situated approach to epistemology – which they could then attempt to reproduce within their own everyday lives.

3.2 Situating Objectivity: Lewes and Eliot

Before considering Eliot's own conception of objectivity, however, it is important to understand how her philosophy of science developed in relation that of her partner George Henry Lewes. This is crucial not only because of the personal connection between the two authors, but also insofar as Lewes himself was among the best-known opponents of traditional metaphysical forms of thought. In Problems of Life and Mind, for instance, which was in many respects a culmination of his entire philosophy, Lewes called attention what he regarded as the inherent difficulties with speculative epistemologies:

Incapable of application to concrete phenomena and the practical needs, incapable of demonstration because incapable of verification, the splendid achievements in the metaphysical arena are merely sterile displays, [for] it is only those problems which are capable of solution that can profitably employ mankind. (24)

In his account, the problem with metaphysical ideas was that they were merely subjective conceptions, and thus incapable of producing reliable knowledge. Precisely because they could never be perceived in themselves, Lewes noted, it was impossible to decide whether they were true or not — insofar as there was no common basis on which to resolve disputes between proponents of different theories. For him, this led to a situation in which debates could go on indefinitely without any prospect of a solution — as was in fact often the case in the history of philosophy. Though they appeared profound, in this sense, metaphysical ideals were in the end nothing but empty conjecture. This belief that ideas alone could not produce reliable knowledge in fact led many prominent observers — including Lewes — to suggest that abstraction itself should be regarded as merely a thing of the past:

Men declare, truly enough, that metaphysics belongs to a condition of culture from which society has finally, though with immense difficulty, emerged, a condition in which men, instead of interrogating Nature, please their fancy with attempting to discern the character of Being in the abstract. (59)

Instead of attending to the observable structure of material reality, Lewes suggested, prior metaphysical philosophers often engaged in mere speculation — which contributed little to the progress of human knowledge. For this reason, he argued, idealist forms of thought had come to be seen as obsolete — particularly in contrast to the ongoing successes of the natural sciences. Thus in a period when useful knowledge was becoming an important —

and in fact necessary — part of everyday life, metaphysical thinking was at best unhelpful and at worst merely a self-indulgent retreat from material reality.

In pointing out the problems with speculative approaches to knowledge, however, Lewes was also careful to note that there remained a crucial role for metaphysics within epistemology — so long as the role was carefully defined. In particular, while the term was often associated with a rejection of materiality and an embrace of conjecture, Lewes held that metaphysics was in fact better regarded as simply the highest and most abstract form of ordinary reasoning. For this reason, he noted, what needed to change was not the entire structure of philosophy but simply the meaning given to certain words:

To the vulgar [metaphysics] stands for whatever is speculative, subtle, abstract, and remote from ordinary apprehension. [But] the term is so good that if possible it ought to be preserved, and it may be preserved if we separate it from its method, and understand it [as] that which comes after science, and embraces the widest abstractions of our research. (14)

Though traditional metaphysical philosophy was often rightly rejected as merely aimless conjecture, Lewes suggested, the term itself could be redefined to denote those abstract theories that emerged from strict observation. In this conception, metaphysics would thus stand less for a set of unfounded suppositions about reality than an attempt to derive from perception a broader set of ideas about nature as a whole. Part of his reason for adopting this provocative approach — which he admitted had the potential be controversial among

not only idealists but also materialists—was a desire not so much to reject metaphysical theories outright, as to include them in a wider positivist philosophy. Through reducing metaphysics to the methods of science in this way, Lewes contended, speculative forms of thought could be rendered useful within everyday life:

That method which has hitherto achieved such splendid success in science needs only to be properly interpreted and applied, and through it the inductions and the deductions from observation will furnish solutions to every metaphysical problem that can be rationally stated — whereas no problem, metaphysical or scientific, that is irrationally stated, can receive a rational solution. (4)

In this conception, metaphysical problems were entirely capable of being resolved—so long as they were regarded with the same rigor as the rest of the natural sciences. If not, he argued, theoretical debates would remain as intractable as ever—insofar as they could never be articulated in a coherent form. Instead of dismissing abstract ideals, in this sense, Lewes attempted to subsume them within a strictly materialist methodology, and in doing so to leave prior speculative theories of knowledge behind. For him, metaphysics could thus only be saved from itself through a return to material observation.

This belief that idealist epistemology needed to be reconfigured was apparent not only in the writing of Lewes, but also that of Eliot too. Though she had come into contact with various prominent philosophers before meeting Lewes in 1851—including Comte and Spencer—it was only after being introduced to her long-time partner that Eliot began

publishing upon the topic. In the “Progress of the Intellect,” for instance, which first came out soon after they met, Eliot concisely captured many of the same underlying problems that Lewes too had observed within metaphysical forms of thought:

Holding with Comte that theological and metaphysical speculation have reached their limit, and that the only hope of improving our sources of knowledge and happiness is to be found in science, [positivists] urge that those thinkers who are in the van of human progress should devote their energies to the actual rather than to the prospective. (275)

In this reading, Eliot emphasised that there were various obvious limits to metaphysical speculation — which could neither provide a sound basis for true beliefs nor improve the lives of ordinary people in the way that science could. For her — as for Lewes — obtaining useful knowledge thus involved turning away from abstract ideas and toward observable phenomena. Though she would thereafter articulate certain doubts about positivist ideas, at least in this instance Eliot was evidently in agreement with the claim that metaphysics needed be reconfigured.⁶ There was, as she put it, a “truth in this view.” This truth was in fact precisely what she attempted to demonstrate throughout her influential 1855 article

⁶ In a sense similar to Lewes — thought for often different reasons — Eliot was somewhat conflicted about Comte’s positivism. While she agreed that the practical use of an idea was an important consideration when evaluating its importance, Eliot also reserved a role for historical analysis in philosophy. In particular, she suggested, “it would be a very serious mistake to suppose that the study of the past and the labours of criticism have no important bearing on the present,” insofar as this form of research helped situate ongoing developments within the production of knowledge. For discussions of the relationship between Eliot and positivism see James Scott (59-76) and Susanne Vogeler (406-431).

upon the “Future of German Philosophy.” Whereas her prior work had merely sought to outline the positivist rejection of traditional metaphysical epistemology, Eliot here went even further in calling for a reform of philosophy itself:

That object towards which [we] direct our consideration is the rectification of the method of philosophy, which is the preliminary to all true progress. [For] it is to the reform in method that we owe all the splendid achievements of natural science, and only through the applying that reform in every department of philosophical inquiry that [any improvement] can be obtained. (723)

In this conception, Eliot suggested that true knowledge was—at least historically—almost always the result of concrete observation. Thus if metaphysical forms of thought were to remain relevant, then they too needed to be subsumed under a materialist philosophy and approached with the same rigor as the rest of the sciences. Without returning to concrete phenomena in this way, she argued, abstract ideas would remain unrelated to reality, and for this reason incapable of contributing anything useful to epistemology.

In many ways, this attempt on the part of Lewes and Eliot to redefine metaphysics in positivist terms was a product of their conviction that reliable knowledge invariably began with sensation. Whereas transcendental philosophers held that a variety of useful theories could be derived from abstract reason alone, both Lewes and Eliot suggested that true beliefs—including speculative beliefs—were necessarily a product of the senses. For Lewes, this meant even metaphysical forms of thought could be conditionally included in

the realm of verifiable knowledge—provided they were capable of being entirely reduced to a perceptible set of material phenomena:

Whatever conceptions can be reached through a logical continuation of [sensation] and can be shown to be conformable with it, are legitimate products, capable of being used as principles for further research. [But] whatever lies beyond the limits of [sensation] and claims another basis than that of induction and deduction from established data, is illegitimate [and] only an object of infertile debate. (16)

In contrast to idealist theories—which were predicated on escaping from the strictures of sensation so as to perceive things in themselves—Lewes argued that speculative concepts were merely an attempt to infer the underlying structure of reality from a particular set of observable entities. For this reason, he held, they were an entirely valid part of science—and could be used not only to help researchers better understand particular phenomena, but also to guide them in their studies of nature as a whole.⁷ Though they were often less reliable than immediate perceptions, Lewes pointed out that abstract ideas in fact fulfilled an important role within epistemology. In particular, he noted, metaphysical speculations were often important for providing philosophers with plausible hypotheses—which they could then attempt to either verify or falsify through careful observation:

⁷ Peter Garratt notes that Lewes often adopted what might be called a “speculative” concept of objectivity, in which ideas provided a way a grasping—albeit dimly—the outline of reality itself. For Lewes, he suggests, “knowledge can never transcend the limits of consciousness, but nevertheless it implies the occurrence of a real, independent, objective structure in the same way that a subject implies an object” (178).

[We can] move securely on the ground of speculation so long as we carefully pick our way, and consider every position as insecure until what was merely probable becomes proven. But in the [transcendental] region we have not even probability as a philosophical guide—it is instead a morass of uncertainty where all footing yields and all tests fail. (29)

In this argument, metaphysical forms of thought were best understood not as true beliefs, but instead merely as useful suppositions—which could be tentatively accepted so long as they were broadly consistent with recognised facts and could potentially be observed through appeal to sensation. Thus while they were never entirely certain, Lewes claimed, speculative theories could at least be regarded as more or less probable depending on the available evidence. In this sense, they were entirely distinct from idealist epistemologies—to which the standard of plausibility was not even remotely applicable.

This opposition between transcendental and metaphysical theories of knowledge not only informed Lewes's approach to the role of ideas within science, but also in many respects his conception of objectivity. In particular, Lewes often used the term "objective" to describe all ideas—whether immediate or abstract—that could be verified through the use of the senses, and to distinguish them from those subjective beliefs that were entirely detached from the inherent limitations of material reality. Though both forms of thought were in a sense valid, he suggested, only the first could be regarded as a reliable reflection of the underlying structure of nature:

Feeling is the common basis of sensible and rational inferences, [thus] we cannot admit that any unverified inferences are to be accepted as objective truths. For my conviction that there is an object before me [may be true] of my state of feeling, [but it may be] false of objective realities, and the truth or falsehood can only be demonstrated through a reduction to correspondent sensibles. (139)

In this reading, Lewes held that knowledge claims could be seen as objectively valid if — and only if — they could be reduced to a perceptible set of material phenomena. Without some sort of observable evidence to support them, he suggested, these claims were merely a subjective reflection of the ideas of a particular person — which had no epistemic weight outside the mind of the observer. In this respect, objective truth was a result not so much of attempting to transcend the limits of embodiment as instead attending to the structure of the senses.⁸ This belief that objectivity was inherently a product of immediate sensation in fact underpinned the way in which Lewes approached not only material facts but also abstract concepts — including those seen as inherently metaphysical. Provided these ideas were entirely derived from direct perception, he pointed out, they too could be regarded with a degree of objective certainty:

⁸ Jason Rudy notes that for Lewes objective knowledge was necessarily a result of embodied perception, and could only be achieved recognising the reality of subjective sensations: “For Lewes, any comprehension of objective nature comes necessarily through the human body. Subjective bodily passions lead to objective knowledge, and each individual’s subjective feelings of passionate sensation puts him in touch with, or at least opens the door to, objectivity” (96).

[Ideal theories] are constructions of the intellect, not facts of sensible concretes. Yet such constructions are in no way arbitrary — they are all reducible to sensation and intuition, they all conform to rigorous objective tests, and because they are so, and because found to reconcile prediction with observation, they are imprinted upon phenomena [as truth]. (72)

Though speculative concepts could not be perceived in and of themselves, Lewes argued, this did not mean they were inherently subjective. Instead, he noted, abstract ideas had a legitimate claim to objectivity — insofar as they made predictive assertions that could be verified through the senses. In this sense, what rendered metaphysical theories objectively valid was the fact that they were entirely predicated on an observable set of sensations — and for this reason were capable of being subjected to strict scientific analysis.

This sense that metaphysical forms of thought could be rendered objectively valid through reducing them to discernible sensations was in fact important not only for Lewes, but also in many ways for Eliot herself. Throughout the “Future of German Philosophy,” for instance, she too attempted to demonstrate the impossibility of obtaining verifiable knowledge that did not first begin with immediate perception. In particular, Eliot often pointed out what she regarded as the inherent uncertainty that developed when observers attempted to remove speculative hypotheses from their concrete underpinning:

Ideas begin purely in the observations of the senses, and are only valued under certain well-known and presupposed conditions. Thus to isolate abstracts ideas,

to use them apart from sensations, to raise their relative value to an absolute value, to deduce knowledge from them alone, and to make them a standing point higher than perception, is to turn nature on its head. (724)

In this conception, all ideas necessarily started out in the form of perceptible sensations, and only thereafter coalesced into a wider set of concepts. For this reason, Eliot suggested, attempts to detach abstract theories from the facts which produced them — and to regard them as things in themselves — invariably led to a sense of epistemic confusion.⁹ In the absence of concrete objects to ground them, in short, metaphysical concepts could not be verified — and often devolved into endless conjecture and controversy. Instead of seeing them as entities in their own right, Eliot thus claimed that speculative theories were better understood as speculative forms of objective truth — which derived their validity from the sensations on which they were predicated. In the “Progress of the Intellect,” for instance, she famously called attention to the provisional nature of abstract ideas:

True metaphysics is the belief in things probable, and is the assigning to inferences a hypothetical objectivity. Upon the acknowledgement of this hypothetical nature alone depends its difference from idealism, for metaphysics itself is not, properly

⁹ In her analysis of Eliot’s approach to philosophical detachment, Amanda Anderson has concisely captured precisely this point. “In general,” she observes, “Eliot manifests scepticism about any abstract theory that remains unchecked through direct knowledge. Direct knowledge is most needed in representations of social life, where abstractions, distortions, and idealisations plague both theory and art” (10).

speaking, knowledge, but the admission of certain inferences beyond knowledge which may be resolved into in the results of sensations. (284)

Though speculative concepts were never absolutely true — insofar as they were concerned with phenomena which had yet to be directly perceived through the senses — Eliot pointed out that they were in a sense relatively true. Precisely because they were derived from an observable set of phenomena, she noted, conjectural ideas could be assigned a conditional objectivity — and thus admitted to the realm of reliable knowledge. Far from being entirely opposed to embodied perception, in this sense, Eliot suggested that metaphysical forms of thought were in fact merely a continuation of sensation through different means.

Though both Eliot and Lewes set out to demonstrate that reliable knowledge was necessarily a product of the senses, in doing so their ideas were often criticised as leading to a form of relativism. In particular, proponents of transcendental epistemology argued that if all knowledge was derived from perception then observers could never step outside their particular point of view and perceive things in themselves. Instead of providing an objective perspective, they argued, materialist philosophy thus seemed to merely involve a return to the limits subjective belief. If these claims were meant to undercut their ideas, however, they ended up having the opposite result. This was notably evident in this case of Lewes — who in fact embraced the description of himself as a relativist but attempted to give this language a somewhat different set of philosophical connotations:

Idealists urge that a concrete response to a speculative theory can never satisfy the mind yearning for an insight into the nature of things behind phenomena. But to know things as they are to us is all that we need know, and even knowledge of the transcendental would only be knowledge of its relation to us — thus the knowledge would still be relative and phenomenal. (25)

In this conception, Lewes suggested that opponents were right to contend that absolute knowledge was impossible within his philosophy, but wrong in the conclusions that they derived from this fact. Though relative truths were often derided as simply a reflection of how objects appeared to an embodied observer — and not their underlying reality — Lewes argued that all knowledge was in a sense relational, insofar as there was no such thing as an idea that did not occur to a particular person. In contrast to the claim that philosophy based on sensation alone would inevitably end in scepticism, Lewes thus held that relative beliefs were entirely sufficient for the purpose of human understanding.¹⁰ For him, in fact, ideas derived from perception were in many ways stronger than idealist forms of thought, in part because they appealed to a standard of proof outside the mind of the subject:

¹⁰ Susanne Anger notes that critics have at times overestimated the strength of Lewes's relativism, and in doing so tended to regard him as embracing a form of radical scepticism. "[Though] it has been common to align George Eliot's view on knowledge with Lewes's professed relativism," she points out, "it is a mistake to regard him as holding a view that undercuts traditional understandings of objective knowledge. [For] while he claims we are limited to our human point of view, and that our perspective is limited in this sense, in his view this counts as truth for us" (85).

Whereas the principle of relativity furnishes a criterium which coincides with the realm of intelligence, the opposite principle is productive of uncertainty because it has no criterium. Idealist arguments remain fluctuating because their evidence is personal and cannot be transferred. Those who claim to despise the certainty of science because it can never transcend the relative sphere, and yearn for a form of knowledge which is not relative, thus cheat themselves with phrases. (175)

Though critics tended to suggest that relative perceptions were less reliable than absolute ideals—insofar as they varied from person to person—Lewes held that the opposite was in fact true. In his reading, it was transcendental beliefs that constantly changed—largely because they only ever occurred within the mind of the subject. This was entirely different than embodied sensations, he noted, which for all of their limitations at least provided a common point of reference to which observers could turn in cases when they happened to disagree with one another. In this sense, objectivity and relativism were not opposed, but in fact merely different aspects of the same materialist form of epistemology.

This belief that relative conceptions of knowledge were entirely consistent with the idea of objectivity was at least in part a product of Lewes's realist ontology—in which the sensations that observers perceived were both a reliable reflection of nature itself and also broadly similar from person to person. Though the way in which people interpreted their perceptions was often subject to change, he held, the phenomena that they perceived remained almost entirely the same in any given instance:

Nature is to each man as it affects him, and to each a man different nature. But all believe that they see the same thing. Nor is this unanimity delusive, for the same here means a similarity in their consciousness. For whether we affirm the objective reality of something distinct from the affections of consciousness, or affirm that this is simply a reflection from consciousness, in either of these cases we declare that objective truth is to every man the totality of his sensations. (185)

In contrast to idealist critics who claimed that sensations differed among observers — and were thus an unreliable basis for truth — Lewes argued that at least insofar as immediate perception was concerned people in fact did see precisely the same thing. This meant that any phenomenon which manifested itself to various viewers could be treated as objective, insofar as it was not merely a subjective reflection of the underlying ideas and beliefs of a particular person.¹¹ In this sense, he suggested, the idea of objectivity itself was ineluctably bound up in a collective standard of evidence. For Lewes, in fact, propositional knowledge claims could only be regarded as objective if they were capable of being articulated in a way that was meaningful to a variety of people — who could then subject them to rigorous criticism and attempt to integrate them within wider philosophical debates:

¹¹ Rick Rylance argues that for Lewes all ideas were in fact a product of the relationship between various different people. “Lewes is very firm about the historicity of the logic of signs,” he claims, for “the language we think in, and the conceptions we employ, the attitude of our minds, and the means of investigation, are social products, determined by the activities of the collective life” (293).

In respect of all convictions, we must distinguish the personal or subjective aspect from the impersonal or social aspect — the truth which is valid to the man himself and the truth which is valid for all. That feeling which determines the behavior of the man is true for him, but this may not be communicable to another person, and for this reason cannot be made guides from them. For communicable truths, what is needed is the possibility of displaying them in their objective relations. (429)

In this reading, Lewes pointed out that the underlying difference between subjective and objective belief was that the second of these was a reliable reflection of perceptible reality for a variety of observers — whereas the first only ever indicated the conscious ideas of a single person. For this reason, the test of whether an idea was objective or not was whether it would hold up under criticism from those who were not its initial proponents. Through submitting different theories to this form of concerted investigation, he held, philosophers could thus distinguish verifiable truth from mere personal supposition.

In a sense similar to Lewes himself, Eliot too emphasised that reliable knowledge was necessarily a product of collective observation and debate. Though different people adopted various perspectives on particular phenomena, she noted, there was nonetheless an underlying reality common to all — which could be discerned through integrating these disparate points of view. In her 1852 “Prospectus,” for instance, Eliot suggested that truth itself could only emerge through the relationship between a variety of ideas and beliefs:

[Because we are] convinced that the same fundamental truths are apprehended under a variety of forms, and that, therefore, opposing ideas may in the end prove complements, [we] aspire to institute such a radical and comprehensive treatment of those controverted problems which are practically momentous, as may aid in the conciliation of divergent views. (15)

In response to what she regarded as the increasingly insular structure of epistemology — in which proponents of particular theories only ever attempted to discuss ideas amongst themselves — Eliot set out to embrace an inclusive form of knowledge. Through opening up an intellectual forum that was open to all comers, she suggested, participants in the debates which occurred therein could begin to see the similarities and differences among their respective approaches — and in doing so start working toward a common conception of truth that was valid for all sorts of people. For her, this meant welcoming a wide variety of beliefs and perspectives, even if these perspectives were hostile to the positivist ideals she espoused. Though beliefs such as these may initially appear to be harmful, she noted, in the end this openness would only lead to a clearer form of knowledge and a broader consensus among those involved in the investigation:

In contradistinction to the practical infidelity and essentially destructive policy which would ignore wide-spread doubts in relation to established systems, and would stifle all theories dangerous to prescriptive claims, we will [display] that

fearlessness of criticism and investigation which are the consistent results of a belief in the eventual prevalence of truth. (16)

In attempting to integrate a wide variety of beliefs on different matters, Eliot was not in the least bit concerned that this process would lead to relativism. Within her intellectual schema — as in that of Lewes — epistemological conflicts were only a reflection of different ways people interpreted the same reality. Thus while bringing together these disparate perspectives might initially lead to a sense of disagreement and opposition, she suggested, in the fullness of time it would only ever produce a stronger form of objectivity.

3.3 Fictions of Transcendence: Middlemarch

This commitment to including a variety of different perspectives within the same theoretical structure was important not only within Eliot's non-fictional writing, but also in her 1871 novel *Middlemarch*. Throughout her work, I suggest, Eliot repeatedly called attention to what she regarded as the underlying limitations of metaphysical speculation, and the importance of instead adopting an inclusive approach to philosophy. In doing so, I contend, Eliot set out to not only demonstrate the difficulties with detached conjectures, but also to articulate a positive model of embodied epistemology. This attempt to replace abstract concepts with situated forms of thought was in fact evident from the first sections of her novel. In introducing Dorothea, for instance, Eliot both calls attention to her longing for an idealised view of life outside the strictures of material reality — yet at the same time undercuts this longing and emphasises the need to return to concrete phenomena:

Her mind was theoretical and yearned for a lofty conception of nature, for she was enamored of intensity and largeness. But at the same times she was also impetuous in embracing whatever seemed to have those aspects, and thus appeared bound to seek out suffering, to make retractions, and then to incur suffering after all in a location where she had not sought it in the first place. (16)

Though Dorothea attempts to cultivate an abstract form of metaphysical understanding, Eliot notes that in doing so she is often overly impulsive — and ignores the limitations of immediate circumstances. Thus while she sets out to develop a wider perspective — which she hopes will give her life a sense of both meaning and purpose — Eliot implies that this yearning is fated to inevitably end in regret, insofar as it is predicated upon the false belief that truth itself can be reached without regard for ordinary facts. Through insisting on an absolute ideal, she suggests, Dorothea fails to recognise the importance of those material conditions that underpin everyday life.¹² This failure is in fact evident not only in the way in which she approaches her intellectual pursuits, but also in her personal relationships — especially those with people of the opposite gender. In depicting her views on marriage, for instance, Eliot calls attention to what she sees as Dorothea’s unrealistic beliefs about

¹² James Gowan points out that in many respects the story of Dorothea is fundamentally a story about the way in which she transitions from a limited perspective to the wider view of the Eliot’s speaker: “Dorothea is given the task of working from a position of ignorance — in her initial misjudging of Casaubon — toward the knowledge enjoyed by the narrator, [for] the first obstacle to knowledge lies in the limited perspective of the self, a tendency further impeded by the tendency of desire to lead perception” (186).

her prospective partner — and in particular her apparent desire to find a husband who is himself engaged in the search for some sort of abstract knowledge:

With all her eagerness to know the various truths of life, Dorothea often retained childish ideas about marriage. She felt sure she would have accepted the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony, or John Milton when his blindness had come on, or any of the important men whose odd habits it would have been piety to endure. (17)

In this scene, Dorothea seems to suggest that she will be happiest spending her life as the helpmate to a speculative philosopher — a belief which Eliot gently reproaches as at best naïve and at worst misguided. While there is nothing wrong with her aspiration to be the wife of a metaphysician — and also implicitly to participate in his work at second hand — Eliot suggests that this desire may not end up being nearly as fulfilling as she hopes. In considering the possibility of marriage, she points out, Dorothea attends only to abstract ideals instead of those mundane realities which make up everyday life — and in doing so seems to set herself up for an eventual sense of disillusionment and despair.

Though Eliot implies that this search for an idealised form of truth is largely futile, Dorothea nonetheless soon comes across another person with the same intellectual desires as herself in the figure of Edward Casaubon. Following their initial meeting, Dorothea in fact comes to believe that the aging reverend embodies precisely those abstract properties that she hopes to find in a man. In particular, what at first attracts her to Casaubon is the

apparent metaphysical depth of his ongoing research. This research involves attempting to condense the wide variety of religious beliefs found among different people to a single structure — an attempt that Eliot implies is not only impossible but also necessarily endless precisely because of the enormous scale of its philosophical ambitions:

Having finally grasped the true position and taken a firm footing there, Casaubon believed that the vast field of religious constructions would become intelligible, nay, luminous with the reflected light of correspondences. But to gather in this harvest of truth was no light or speedy work. His notes already made a formidable number of volumes, but the eventual task would be to condense these voluminous and still accumulating results to fit on a little shelf. (18)

In a sense similar to her depiction of Dorothea's transcendental desires — and for many of the same reasons — Eliot here both notes the yearning of Casaubon for absolute knowledge untethered from any particular perspective, yet at the same time undermines this impulse through emphasising its inherent unattainability. Though he sets out to reduce different philosophical beliefs to the same abstract concept, Eliot implies that his search only ever leads to a proliferation of speculative conjectures — which seem to have little prospect of ever coalescing into a coherent theory.¹³ In fact, while Dorothea is at first enamored of his

¹³ Ian Duncan rightly observes that the limitations of Casaubon's approach reflected not so much a rejection of religious historicism as a whole — a field in which Eliot herself was personally invested — but instead an indictment of his transcendental approach to the production of knowledge. "Casaubon's adherence to an obsolete paradigm does not disqualify comparative mythology from scientific status," he argues, for "this was

different ideas and beliefs—much to the amusement of her family—the intensity of her enthusiasm itself also seems to render his arguments somewhat unserious. What someone of her slender knowledge and understanding regards as profound, Eliot seems to suggest, is not necessarily the best guide for truth as a whole:

Dorothea was altogether captivated with the wide embrace of this approach. Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies-school literature—a living Bossuet whose work would reconcile total knowledge with devoted piety. But while signs are small measurable things, interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of a sweet and ardent nature every sign is apt to conjure up vast hope and belief, even if they are in fact merely a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge. (19)

Though within the confines of Dorothea's limited perspective these abstract speculations appear significant, Eliot notes that in the wider scheme of things they do not necessarily have the same importance. Instead, she suggests, these theories are simply empty signs—which only appear meaningful because they have no perceptible substance and thus can be interpreted in whatever way best suits unwitting observers such as Dorothea. If they were ever subjected to rigorous testing or detailed analytical investigation, Eliot implies, these transcendental conceptions would immediately come undone—leaving everyone involved disillusioned and disappointed with their misplaced belief.

the field through which Eliot herself came into print in her translations of David Friederich Strauss [and Ludwig Feuerbach" (20).

This emphasis on the personal and intellectual difficulties of those who search for idealised forms of knowledge is apparent not only within Eliot's description of Dorothea and Casaubon, but also in the figure of Tertius Lydgate — the young doctor who moves to the small town to pursue his studies of pathology. Though her depiction of Lydgate is largely positive — and often calls attention to his self-conscious desire to avoid abstract ideals — Eliot also notes that his ongoing research at times aspires to an impossible form of totalising knowledge. In particular, his desire to uncover the fundamental "tissue" from which all organs are derived involves an attempt to transcend the limits of particularity — and in doing so to perceive the structure of things in themselves:

In his studies of disease, Lydgate felt the need for that fundamental knowledge of structure which just at the beginning of this period had been illuminated through the brief and also glorious career of Bichat. But he did not go beyond considering particular tissues as final facts of the living organism — thus it was open to another mind to say, have not these structures some common basis from which they have all started. (110)

In a sense similar to Casaubon — but within an entirely different field of study — Lydgate here aspires to bring together a wide variety of perceptible phenomena, and to unify them in the same transcendental schema. Though his desire to better understand living tissues is not necessarily a problem in and of itself — and is in fact precisely the variety of detailed scientific study that Eliot's own epistemology demanded — the difficulty seems to emerge

from his attempts to capture the metaphysical substance beneath material phenomena. In setting out to obtain this absolute form of truth, Eliot implies, Lydgate seems to disregard the importance of carefully attending to particular objects — and in doing so demonstrates a wider disdain for the constraints of everyday life. This disdain in fact becomes a defining characteristic for Lydgate, which Eliot implies will eventually cause his undoing — insofar as it leads him to ignore material reality in pursuit of an absolute ideal:

Lydgate's conceit was of the arrogant sort, never simpering, never impertinent, but enormous in its claims and benevolently contemptuous. But how could there be such commonness in a man so well-bred, so ambitious of social distinction, and generous and unusual in his view of duty? Just as easily as there may be stupidity in a man of genius if you take him unawares on the wrong subject. (111)

In this scene, Eliot suggests that Lydgate's idealised philosophical ambitions and personal conceit produces a certain blindness regarding mundane facts — which threatens to undo all of his good intentions. Though he aspires to understand the fundamental tissue, and thus to improve the lives of particular people, Eliot implies that this aspiration is fated to remain unfulfilled — insofar as it develops alongside a willful disinterest in those ordinary conditions which structure the pursuit of truth. For all of Lydgate's epistemic strictness, in this sense, he is in the end no different than either Dorothea or Casaubon — whose desire for a wider view of life falters beneath their disregard for material phenomena.

Though all of her main characters appear susceptible to the distorting influence of idealisation, in important respects Eliot's narrator refuses this tendency — and in doing so provides readers with a positive model of epistemology. In particular, while critics have often regarded the speaker as a transcendental entity that provides unmediated access to the events that occur in the novel, I suggest that her fictional persona in fact disavows this omniscient ideal — and instead merely attempts to serve as a point of connection between different situated perspectives. This connective capacity first becomes evident when the narrator reflects upon the function of a microscope — and especially the way in which this device allows observers to see things from various points of view:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making a set of interpretations which turn out to be coarse, for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature demonstrating a voracity into which smaller creatures willfully play, a stronger lens will reveal to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits his receipt of custom. (44)

In this conception, Eliot's speaker suggests that to perceive the true structure of nature observers have to be willing to change their view of phenomena. Though without the use of a microscope — or only using a weak lens — life appears to behave in a particular way, when perceived from a different standpoint or with a stronger lens it seems to react in an entirely distinct manner. For this reason, her persona implies, the initial assumptions that people bring to perception can only be corrected through adopting another perspective —

as they themselves do win this scene.¹⁴ Through seeing things from various points of view, in fact, her narrator claims that people can obtain objective knowledge without attempting to step outside of their own embodied condition. In reflecting upon their own narrative approach, for instance, the speaker rejects the overt omniscience of past literary figures, and instead attempts to merely trace the connections between a few select people:

We belated historians must not linger after forgone models, and if we did so it is probable that our stories would be thin and eager. For we at least have so much to do in capturing certain human lots, and seeing how they are woven and unwoven, that all the truth we can command must be concentrated on this distinctive fabric, and not dispersed over that tempting set of relevancies called nature. (105)

In contrast to prior narrators — who often tried to escape from any particular point of view so as to capture the totality of knowledge — Eliot's persona emphasises the importance of epistemic limitations. Instead of attempting to apprehend nature as a whole, they suggest, factual truth is best uncovered through providing a detailed account of particular people in particular circumstances — and the underlying relations between them. In this respect, what allowed observers to understand the inherent structure of material reality was not

¹⁴ In an important analysis of Eliot's relationship with the science of microscopy, Mark Wormald points out that this scientific instrument functioned as a way of emphasising the limitations of abstract approaches to observation. "Broad observations constitute a critically 'weak lens,'" he contends, for "though they remain instruments of provocative metaphor, her narrator insists that the interpretations they inspire 'turn out to be rather coarse' compared to the subsequent, often startling revision offered by a stronger lens" (511).

the absence of embodied perspectives, but in fact a surfeit of situated standpoints — which together helped them develop a wider conception of life itself.

Whereas Eliot's narrator in many ways provides a positive model of epistemology based on connecting certain perspectives, her main characters often fill a negative function in revealing the difficulties that result from instead pursuing an abstract ideal. This role is especially evident in the case of Dorothea — who somewhat predictably comes to realise that Casaubon may not be all that she had hoped for in a husband. In the period following their wedding, for instance, she finds herself in Rome confronting a sense of despair that she cannot account for in rational terms, but which seems to be a result of her recognition that aspiring to marry a man of immense learning but little fellow feeling was naive:

Dorothea was crying, and if she had been asked to articulate the cause could only have done so in somewhat broad terms. For that actual future which was replacing the imaginary derived its material from the endless minutiae through which her view of Mr. Casaubon and her wifely relation, being married to him, was slowly changing from what it had been in her maidenhood. (143)

In this scene, Dorothea comes to recognise the foolhardiness of her initial desire to bind herself to a metaphysical ideal rather than a living breathing person. Though Casaubon himself remains the same stolid and dry figure that he always was — with the same failures and personal shortcomings — what changes is her perspective on him, and especially her realisation that life with him is not all she had hoped. When confronted with the everyday

reality of living with an aging reverend scholar, in short, her idealised conception begin to come undone. This admission that her childish ideals have started to collapse is in fact embodied in the figure of Rome itself. In particular, Rome appears not as she had at first imagined—as a point of abstract unity wherein the different strands of intellectual life come together at a single node—but instead merely as place of desolation and confusion, which in many respects reflects her own sense of philosophical turmoil:

This vast wreck of ambitious ideals, both sensuous and spiritual, brought together confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness, at first struck her as with an electric shock, and then urged itself upon her with that ache belonging to a glut of ideas that check the movement of emotion. Forms both pale and bright took over her young sense, and entrenched themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations that remained after. (144)

In contrast to Dorothea's initial belief that Rome is a place that unites all contrasts—and thus provides an absolute perspective on the progress of history—following her marriage she can only see the city as a reflection of her own shattered ideals. Instead of providing a way into a broader conception of nature, her relationship with Casaubon merely opens upon a vantage point that is all the more fragmented for her initial beliefs that it would be otherwise. In this sense, the progress of Dorothea's personal narrative provides for the reader a tacit lesson in the dangers associated with attempting to achieve an abstract point of view entirely disconnected from the material constraints of everyday life.

In many respects, Dorothea's disillusionment is bound up in her increasing sense that Casaubon's ideas may not be as promising as she had at first believed. This suspicion becomes increasingly apparent as she spends time working with her husband a reader and secretary—and in doing so becomes familiar with the mundane business of helping him conduct research. Though she initially enjoys the opportunity to see into his thoughts, Dorothea in fact soon comes to realise that many of his theories are merely disconnected suppositions that have little relation to perceptible sensations:

Dorothea was gradually ceasing to believe with her former delightful confidence that she should see any wide opening where she followed him. Poor Mr. Casaubon was lost among small closets and winding stairs, and in his agitated dimness about the ill-considered parallels of opponents easily lost sight of any purpose that had prompted him to pursue these labours in the first place. (146)

In this scene, Dorothea comes to see what Eliot herself had intimated from the beginning of the novel—namely that Casaubon's research was ill-fated from the start. Though he sees himself as a dedicated intellectual engaged in a rigorous pursuit of objective truth, Eliot instead seems to suggest that he is merely a tired old man preoccupied with a set of subjective resemblances that only occur in his own mind. Part of the problem with his work is in fact not only that her husband sets out to obtain an absolute ideal entirely removed from material phenomena, but also that in doing so he fails to consider different points of view on the topic. Soon after Dorothea meets Casaubon's nephew Will Ladislaw,

for instance, the younger man tells her that his research is in fact obsolete because he does not engage with the most up-to-date theories within his field:

Casaubon's labours are thrown away, as so much English research is, for want of knowing what is being done around the rest of the globe. If Mr. Casaubon would read German he would save himself a deal of trouble, for they have taken the lead in historical studies, and laugh at results which are got through groping about in woods with a pocket compass while they have made good roads. (154)

Though Casaubon spends most of his time engaging in conflicts with a variety of critics, Will points out that in doing so he fails to see beyond a limited coterie of English authors, meaning that his research remains hopelessly insular. Through restricting his research to such a confined perspective, he suggests, Casaubon can only see a particular side of the debate—meaning that his research only ever reflects a partial standpoint. In this sense, what eventually leads to his intellectual failure is not simply his transcendental ambitions, but also the isolating circumscription of his philosophical method.

In a sense similar to Casaubon—and for many of the same reasons—Lydgate's own progression through the novel also demonstrates the difficulties that beset those who attempt to obtain an absolute perspective on particular phenomena. This difficulty in fact begins with the way in which Lydgate structures his research, which Eliot seems to imply aspires to an impossible ideal. Though he sets out to uncover the fundamental tissue from

which all organs are derived, the narrator suggests that this is precisely the wrong way of treating the issue insofar as it aspires to an abstract unity that can never be obtained:

Lydgate longed to demonstrate these intimate relations of living structure, and to define the thoughts of men after the true order. This work had not yet been done, but only prepared. What was the fundamental tissue? In that way Lydgate put the question — not in the way the awaiting answer demanded, but such missing of the right word befalls many seekers. (110)

In spite of Lydgate's good intentions and rigorous scientific method, Eliot suggests here that his research falls into the trap of adopting a metaphysical set of assumptions. Through assuming that there is such a thing as a singular "tissue" which underpins all life forms, she suggests, he attempts to pursue an abstract substance rather than a material reality, and in doing so ignores opposing ways of approaching the topic. Instead of accepting the possibility that there could be a variety of different structures — as turned out to be the case with the development of cell theory — Lydgate believes implicitly that there must be a unity beneath the appearance of plurality.¹⁵ This implicit impulse towards abstraction is in fact evident not only in the inherent content of his research, but also in many respects

¹⁵ Ian Duncan notes that critics have called attention to two possible sources for the failure of Lydgate's intellectual aspirations: "First, that Lydgate misses the advent of Schleiden and Schwann's cell theory in the 1830s (because he is too early for it or because his commitment to Bichat's tissue theory closes his mind to a different paradigm) and second, that the concept of a unitary foundation is itself mistaken" (22). In my reading, I suggest that these opposition interpretations are not in fact incompatible — insofar as Lydgate's failure to perceive the possibility of a cellular theory of biology occurs precisely because he is committed to the idea of a singular metaphysical structure.

in its underlying form. In particular, Eliot calls attention to the fact that Lydgate naively believes he can conduct his studies from an entirely detached perspective:

Fever had obscure conditions, and gave him a delightful labour of the imagination that was not mere arbitrariness but the use of careful self-discipline—combining and constructing with the clearest view of probabilities and the fullest obedience to knowledge, and then in alliance with impartial nature, standing aloof to invent tests through which to try its own work. (122)

In this instance, Lydgate aspires to a disinterested perspective on material phenomena, which he hopes will allow him to perceive things in themselves. While Eliot emphasises that all knowledge is a product of an epistemic collective, Lydgate seems to believe that he can achieve his ideals simply through the “independent value” of his work—a form of detachment which is antithetical to the integrated form of inclusive social relations that the novel celebrates. For this reason, while Lydgate tries in good faith to better understand certain natural phenomena, Eliot implies that both the object of his research and the way in which he conducts it involve a failed desire to step outside of material constraints.

In contrast to the implicit desire of her characters to escape from the limitations of their embodied standpoint and perceive things in themselves, Eliot’s narrator emphasises the necessity of these situated constraints. Through doing so, I argue, her speaker serves not only as a point of connection between different perspectives within the novel, but also as a form of epistemic guide—who calls attention to the failings of particular people and

thus encourages readers to avoid these shortcomings.¹⁶ In reflecting upon the collapse of Dorothea's idealised ambitions in Rome, for instance, the narrator points out the wider difficulties implicit within her search for a totalising perspective on phenomena:

That sense of failure which lies in the fact of recurrence has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotions of humankind. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all human life, it would be similar to hearing the grass grow or a squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the opposite side of silence. In any case, the brightest of us walk about well-wadded with stupidity. (144)

In this conception, Eliot's speaker suggests that absolute knowledge is not only impossible but also in an important sense undesirable. Though observers often aspired to see nature as a unified whole, she claims, if they ever actually attained this transcendental point of view it would be too vast for them to fully understand. For this reason, the boundaries of human perception were not simply limits, but also a form of protection against the wider immensity of nature. This sense that the perceptible coherence of reality was necessarily a product of situated forms of thought in fact recurs at various points within the novel. In meditating upon the selfish desires of Rosamond, for instance, Eliot's narrator describes

¹⁶ Monika Fludernik notes that the seeming objectivity of Eliot's narrator is at least in part a product of the way in which he or she invites the reader to participate in their ironic reflections on her characters. "Though Eliot's novelist oeuvre is often credited with the authoritative tone and rational tidiness of the omniscience narrator tradition so prominent in the realist prose of the nineteenth-century English novel, this cliché only partially succeeds in characterising her narrative discourse. True, we feel we are in competent hands when we immerse ourselves in her fictional works, yet the impression of authority arises less from a consistent perspective that is being propounded than from our connivance at Eliot's ironies" (21).

the figure of a pier glass which has been scratched in different ways, and points out what she regards as the underlying meaning behind this phenomenon:

Though minutely scratched in all directions, if you place against it a lighted candle as a center of illumination, the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine set of concentric circles. But it is demonstrable that the scratches are in fact going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of this concentric arrangement. These things are a parable. (195)

In this scene, Eliot's narrator seems to suggest that the apparent structure which people perceive around them is only a reflection of their own subjective beliefs and biases — and that nature itself is in fact far less consistent than it would seem. This does not necessarily mean there is no underlying form to reality — as after all the true form of the scratches can still be seen — but simply that what observers first regard as coherence often turns out to be only a product of their mind. In this sense, Eliot's speaker not only calls attention to the situatedness of all knowledge, but also the inherent imperfection of subjective belief — and thus need to correct these initial suppositions through careful analysis and testing.

In many respects, Eliot suggests that the best way of correcting personal biases is through looking at life from an entirely different point of view. Part of the problem with many of her characters though is that they appear largely incapable of entering into the

thoughts and beliefs of another person.¹⁷ This is especially evident in the case of Casaubon, who never even seems to consider the fact that his wife may have ideas of her own. When the pair return home from Lowick, for instance, the narrator calls attention to his evident blindness toward the pain of Dorothea —and in particular the way in which this seems to reflect a wider intellectual failure to step outside of his own perspective:

Providence in its kindness had supplied him with the wife he needed. But whether this entity had taken the same care of Dorothea in bringing her to Casaubon was an idea that could hardly occur to him. Society never made the preposterous claim that a man should think of his own capacity for making a charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself happy. (206)

In a sense similar to the way in which he conducts his research — and for many of the same reasons — Casaubon here appears either unwilling or unable to see things from a different standpoint than his own. Instead of opening himself up and attempting to understand the views of another person, Eliot suggests, Casaubon remains caught up within the limits of what she calls the “small hungry shivering self.” Though initially this form of subjective isolation provides a sense of protection — insofar as it prevents him from having to deal

¹⁷ Bernard Paris argues that Eliot’s characters essentially fall into two categories — those who are capable of stepping outside their own point of view to see things from the perspective of another person and those who are not. “That important distinction among George Eliot’s characters,” he argues, “is between those who approach their lives subjectively and those who approach it objectively. In her view, we are all born selfish, [but] maturation is the process of recognising the reality of outer phenomena (including different people) and thus yielding up the importance of the self” (81).

with any harsh truths about either himself or his ongoing philosophical research — in the end it leads to an even worse collapse of his idealised self-conception. This collapse in fact becomes particularly evident soon after he is diagnosed with heart disease — a fact which causes him to reflect upon the both failure of his intellectual ambitions and the developing suspicion that his wife does not hold him in the high esteem that he would desire:

There are some kinds of authorship in which the result is an uneasy susceptibility accumulated in the consciousness of the author. Their characteristic product was a morbid recognition in Casaubon that Dorothea did not give him the place he had merited — a perpetual conjecture that her views about him were not to his benefit — an absence of desire in his efforts at achievement, and a denial of the confession that he had achieved nothing. (306)

When faced with the inevitability of own his impending demise — as he is in this scene — Casaubon comes to dimly recognise that he may have failed in both his intellectual and personal aspirations. Though he is unable to fully understand the source of this collapse — or even to entirely admit that it has occurred — Eliot intimates that it develops from his failure to set aside his own desires and escape from the “troublesome self.” In this respect, the fate that soon befalls him — in which he dies despised and forgotten — reflects a wider lesson about the problems associated with this insular form of subjective idealism.

This sense that an unwillingness to see things from another point of view leads to both intellectual and personal defeat is in fact apparent not only in Casaubon’s narrative,

but also in that of Lydgate too. In particular, his consistent failure to fully understand the intentions of his wife Rosamond causes not only the collapse of his marriage but also in many ways his philosophical research project. This failure is in fact evident from the scene where they first meet — which leaves both characters with a false sense of their relationship and the person with whom they are fated to eventually spend their lives:

Poor Rosamond! or should we say Poor Lydgate! Each lived in a realm of which the opposite knew nothing, for it had not occurred to Lydgate that he had been a subject of eager meditation for Rosamond, who had neither any reason for seeing her marriage from a distant perspective, nor any pathological studies to divert her mind from that ruminating habit, that repetition of looks, words, and phrases that makes a large part in the lives of girls. (123)

Though Lydgate initially attempts to hold himself aloof from personal attachments and dedicate himself to science, Eliot notes that in failing properly grasp Rosamond's thought and feelings he has already begun to undermine these plans. In contrast to his own belief that their relationship is only a harmless flirtation, she soon develops certain assumptions about the intimacy of their connection — assumptions which eventually cause Lydgate to propose out of a sense of decency when he finds out that he has led her on. This sense of misapprehension in fact continues even when they are married — particularly when they encounter financial difficulties. In response to these various difficulties — many of which

are the result of Rosamond's spending — the couple have a falling out that emphasises the severity of the underlying personal differences between them:

Perhaps it was not possible for Lydgate, under the double stress of his outward difficulties and his own proud rejection of humiliation circumstances, to imagine fully what this trial was to a creature who had known nothing but indulgence, yet it seemed to him that she no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species. There was still science, but he must give a tug — all the stronger because the rest of his satisfactions were going. (436)

In this scene, Lydgate comes to realise the full depth of the opposition between them, and also the fact that their marriage has for all intents and purposes collapsed. Though he embraces science as a form of consolation, even this is soon tainted when in his poverty he turns to the unscrupulous Bulstrode — whose eventual humiliation reflects on Lydgate and causes him to close his medical offices in Middlemarch.¹⁸ In this sense, what begins as an innocuous failure to fully grasp the thoughts and feelings of a young girl soon ruins not only his personal life but also his intellectual desires — a fact that subtly demonstrates the inherent problems with this form of self-involved subjective isolationism.

¹⁸ John Gowan astutely observes that the failures of Lydgate's intellectual ambitions are intimately bound up in the failure of his personal ambitions: "[In both cases] Lydgate's story demonstrates that a man does not simply create himself and cannot simply impose his will on particular society, shaping it to conform to his vision of how things should be. Similarly, individual acts of comprehension are not purely individualistic, [for] the individual must use categories, concepts, and words given to him or her by society" (188).

Though both Casaubon and Lydgate capitulate under the weight of their failure to see things from another point of view, Dorothea alone of Eliot's main characters is able to change her ways and achieve a measure of happiness. In particular, the collapse of her marriage seems to provide her with a better sense of insight into the thoughts and feelings of various people—an insight that helps to widen both her own perspective and also the views of those with whom she engages.¹⁹ Following the disgrace of Lydgate, for instance, Dorothea emphasises that she believes he is entirely blameless in the situation—and in doing so allows him to see his condition in an entirely different way:

Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and noticed Dorothea's face looking up at him with trustful seriousness. In situations such as this, the appearance of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, and ardent in its charity, changes the light for us—and we begin to see things again in the larger masses, and to believe that we too can be seen in the wholeness of our character. (558)

Through attempting to enter into Lydgate's own perspective—instead of simply believing that he is culpable as everyone else does—Dorothea forms a sense of personal connection, which in turn allows her friend to see himself from her point of view. Though the facts of

¹⁹ In his influential analysis George Eliot's work in relation to Victorian theories of mind, Michael Davis notes that it is only after Dorothea learns to enter into the mind of another person that she is able to help improve the lives of those with whom she engages. "Her acts of personal idealism on Dorothea's part underlines the vital importance of a degree of epistemological idealism, [for] it is only through her imaginative engagement with the subjectivities of different people, an engagement similar to that of the scientist in attempting to understand nature, that she is able to act for their benefit" (186).

the matter have not changed — and his position still remains tenuous — he is at least able to see that his predicament is not an insurmountable difficulty, but merely an everyday problem from which he will recover. In this sense, Eliot suggests, Dorothea's relationship with Lydgate helps him to perceive things as they are — instead of merely as they appear to be from within his despondent subjective position. This talent for helping people step outside of their own limited perspective is in fact apparent not only in the case Lydgate, but also in many respects Rosamond herself — who believes that her husband is guilty. In an attempt to alleviate this suspicion, Dorothea visits Rosamond at home and reassures her that the gossip which she has heard is unfounded — a gesture of intimate connection which causes her to entirely reconsider her view of life:

This was a wider crisis in her life than even she could imagine. Rosamond was under the first significant disturbance that had shattered her beliefs in which she had been easily confident in herself and critical of everyone else, and this strange manifestation of feeling in another woman made her being totter with a sense that she had been walking in an unknown realm which had just broken in on her. (583)

In response to Dorothea's selfless desire to recognise her suffering and alleviate her fears, Rosamond is able for the first time to see beyond her personal needs. Though this capacity proves short lived and she soon returns to her selfish ways, Eliot suggests that for a brief moment her connection with Dorothea allows her to escape her subjective perspective and perceive reality from an objective viewpoint. For this reason, while neither Rosamond nor

Lydgate—or in fact any of the main characters—ever attain their initial idealised desires, through attempting to observe their surroundings from the perspective of another person they at least come to attain a slightly better understanding of nature and society.

Though Dorothea in many ways fulfills a function similar to the Eliot's persona—insofar as she helps to connect an assortment of different perspectives—in the end she too is restricted to her particular place within the novel. In this sense, the burden of depicting things in their widest possible relations eventually devolves upon the narrator, who is in a sense outside the story itself. Through doing so, however, the speaker emphasises that the variety of viewpoints they describe cannot be reduced to a single viewpoint. Instead, they suggest, all realistic narratives remain in a sense unfinished:

Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can leave young lives after being long in company with them and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years? For the fragment of a life, however typical, is never an even sample, as promises may not be kept, an ardent outset may be followed with declension, and a past error may urge a final retrieval. (607)

In this reading, Eliot's narrator notes that there can never be a transcendental perspective on phenomena—whether in nature or in a novel—insofar as all theories are necessarily based on particular objects. Though these objects may embody a common set of attributes, the speaker contends, they never do so perfectly. For this reason, observers can only ever adopt a limited and situated standpoint—which is nonetheless capable of being broaden

through attending to different sets of ideas and beliefs about things. In fact, while Eliot's fictional persona is in many respects the least embodied figure within the entire narrative, even they are unable to tell the full story of Dorothea and her influence on people. This is particularly evident in the final lines of the novel — which attempt to describe her different characters from the widest possible point of view:

Dorothea's full nature spent itself in channels which had no significant name on earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive, for the growing good of the globe is partly dependent upon unhistorical acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as the might have been is owing to the number who have lived faithfully a hidden life. (613)

Though she is able provided a form of limited insight into Dorothea and her connections with those immediately around her, Eliot's speaker admits that they could never trace her impact on society as a whole — insofar as doing so would demand precisely that absolute perspective which they oppose. Through adopting this bounded view, her narrator thus functions not so much as a transcendental entity but instead as an embodied historian — who tries to gain an objective view of past events through seeing things from a different perspective.²⁰ In doing so, they provide an implicit model epistemic rigour — which Eliot seems to suggest her readers should attempt to emulate in their everyday lives.

²⁰ Nancy Henry points out that the apparent objectivity of Eliot's persona is at least in part attributable to his or her historical distance from the events described — which allows them to see things from their widest possible perspective: "George Eliot developed a theory of history and a mode of narration in her fiction that

3.4 Conclusion: Everyday Objectivity

In both her fiction and non-fiction, in this sense, Eliot followed Lewes in pointing out the underlying difficulties with transcendental conceptions of knowledge. For her, objective truth was best attained not through adopting a disembodied point of view, but instead through integrating many different perspectives—and in doing so attempting to perceive life from the widest possible standpoint. Throughout initial reviews of her work, critics in fact often called attention to this feature of her writing. In an 1876 article on her novels to date, for instance, an unnamed author pointed out what they regarded as Eliot's longstanding opposition to detached aesthetic forms:

In undertaking to represent characters and secure attention for this representation, Eliot is consistent with her earliest principle — indifference to the critic saying from his bird's-eye station: 'Not a remarkable specimen; the anatomy and habits of the species have been determined long ago.' In contrast, Eliot insists upon having the specimen remarked, not because it is rare but because it is real. (360)

Though critics often demanded that authors adopt an entirely disinterested perspective on their subjective matter, Eliot's anonymous critic argued that the strength of her fiction was precisely that she did not embrace this abstract point of view. Instead, they suggested,

emerges from the narrator's omniscience awareness of the characters' past, presents, and futures. Through setting her novels in England's past, she could narrate in the present tense, but with a knowledge of the prospective future of the nation" (25).

her writing set out to cultivate an intimate familiarity with particular people and things— which were important not because they were unusual but because her detailed depictions brought them to life. Through seeing things from up close rather than from far away— with attachment rather than detachment— Eliot was thus able to provide a clearer picture of the various different phenomena that she described. This sense that truth could only come about through attending to the everyday in fact informed not only critical responses to Eliot’s fiction, but also in many respects her own understanding of epistemology. In an 1856 article on the “Natural History of German Life,” for instance, Eliot famously called for a form of research that rejected intellectual abstraction and instead set out to capture to different perspectives of ordinary people:

If any man of sufficient moral and intellectual breadth, whose observations would not be vitiated by a forgone conclusion, or by a professional point of view, devoted himself to studying the natural history of our social classes—the degree to which they are influenced by local conditions, their ideas and habits, or the points of view from which they regard their religious teachers, [his theories] would be a valuable aid to the social and political reformer. (112)

In this conception, Eliot suggested that reliable knowledge could only be attained through rejecting detached points of view — which were often merely a product of the subjective biases of the observer — and instead attempting to enter into the ideas and beliefs of many different people. Through setting out to adopt this embodied view from below — rather

than a disembodied view from above—Eliot argued that observers could develop a better understanding of nature itself. In this respect, her writing rejected the weak epistemology of abstract disinterest in favor of strong conception of objectivity—based upon obtaining philosophical breadth through attending to a variety of situated standpoints.

Though both her fictional and non-fictional work was in many ways committed to a strong form of objectivity, there were also limits to Eliot's inclusive epistemology. These limitations were particularly apparent in her approach to gender. In contrast to feminist philosophers such as Harding—who argued that reliable knowledge necessarily involved attending to the voices of marginalised groups such as women—Eliot herself often tended to suggest that gender had no place in science. Throughout her influential 1854 article on "Women in France," for instance, Eliot claimed that natural philosophy should ideally be blind to this set of material considerations—which she believed were unimportant for the way in which researchers conducted their everyday investigations:

Science has no sex: the mere knowing and reasoning faculties, if they act correctly, must go through the same process, and arrive at the same result. But in art and in literature, which imply an action of the entire being, in which every fiber of nature is engaged, in which ever peculiar modification of the individual makes itself felt, woman has something specific to contribute. (8)

Whereas in literary fiction authors often sought to imprint a piece of themselves upon their productions, Eliot held that the whole point of science was to remove such personal

beliefs and biases so as to allow nature to speak for itself. For this reason, she suggested, the gender of the observer was irrelevant within debates about epistemology—insofar as all people perceived the same underlying set of concrete phenomena. In attempting to remove gender from science though, Eliot did not mean to suggest that women should not concern themselves with natural philosophy—only that their reasons for doing so had little to do with standards of proof. Instead, she suggested, introducing women to science was important because it helped to improve the minds of participants—and in doing so contributed to the wider development of a functioning intellectual culture:

Women become superior [through] being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men, and this must ever be the condition at once of a true womanly culture and of true social well-being, [for women] are not the less graceful, delicate, or feminine, because they can follow a train of reasoning, or interest [themselves] in a question of science. (36)

While science was a gender-neutral pursuit, Eliot noted, women historically did not have the same access to this form of knowledge—often to the detriment of not only themselves but also society as a whole. If denied the opportunity to participate in natural philosophy, she held, women failed to develop the capacity of for rigorous analysis—thus diminishing the standard of social discourse and depriving society of numerous potential theories and inventions that they may have developed. In this respect, the trouble with ignoring female

voices was not that doing so removed an entirely distinctive standpoint from science— but instead that it detracted from the total number of ideas within ongoing debates.

Throughout Eliot's work, in this sense, knowledge came about through bringing together a variety of different beliefs so as to perceive connections between them. Whether male or female, she argued, every person had the capacity for grasping part of the truth— meaning that a broader understanding of nature itself was only to be obtained through integrating these disparate points of view. In many respects, Eliot's novels were in fact an attempt to model precisely this situated conception of epistemology— and in doing so to help her readers cultivate an inclusive and embodied approach to knowledge within their own everyday lives. In an unsigned 1872 review, for instance, another anonymous author noted that her work was— if anything— too committed to teaching her audience a lesson in the importance of seeing life from different perspectives:

If we are to call [her work] a novel at all, we may say that as a didactic novel it has scarcely been equaled. Never before have so keen and varied an observation, so deep an insight into character and motives, [come] together to represent through the agency of fiction an author's moral and social views. But the reservation that we have implied is a broad one. No talent, not genius itself, can quite overcome the inherent defect of a conspicuous, constantly prominent lesson. (314)

Though Eliot's ability to provide insight into a variety of different human perspectives was to be applauded, the author held, in doing so her writing tended to be too transparent

in the point she was making. For them, the end of the novel was not to simply put forward the ideas of the writer — which was the purpose of argumentative prose — but instead to depict nature and society as they appeared to them. In articulating this criticism though, the unnamed reviewer also seemed to miss Eliot's point — namely that even disinterested descriptions of human behaviour fulfilled an important epistemological role, insofar as they put readers in contact with various ways of seeing their surroundings. Provided they were founded upon detailed attention to particular phenomena — and were not merely detached abstractions — these descriptions were in fact an important means of widening the minds of perspicacious observers.²¹ In the "Natural History of German Life," Eliot thus noted that what distinguished aesthetics from philosophy — and provided its distinctive character — was the capacity of this medium to help audiences step outside of themselves and observe reality from an entirely different standpoint:

[That] benefit we owe the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. [For] appeals founded on generalisations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity, but a picture of life such as an artist can give surprises even the trivial and selfish into an attention to what is apart from themselves. [In this sense] art is the nearest thing to life, and is

²¹ Richard Menke rightly notes that for both Lewes and Eliot fiction provided an important means through which readers could learn to see into the beliefs of another person. "Literature and art," he notes, "offer a source of 'objective' understanding of thoughts and emotions outside our own mind, [while] a properly scientific psychology would offer another, as observation and analysis give us admittance into the thoughts and feelings of different people" (623). In the final chapter, we will see how Thomas Hardy adopts this idea and attempts to bring it to its eventual conclusion.

a mode of amplifying sensation and developing our contact with our fellow man beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (110)

In this conception, Eliot suggested that the function of aesthetic forms such as the novel was to allow audience members enter into the thoughts and feelings of another human being—and in doing so to see nature from a broader vantage point. Through attending to a variety of perspectives in this way, she suggested, they could obtain a form of truth which was valid for a wider variety of people—and which for this reason approached ever-closer to the ideal of being true for all. Though novels depicted fictional people and events, in this sense, that capacity to move beyond the limitations of the self which they promoted in readers was a very real—and in fact lasting—result of their influence.

4. Immanent Will: Thomas Hardy, George Romanes, and the Science of the Ejective

4.1 Introduction: Beyond Objectivity

In a 1912 review of Thomas Hardy's novels, the poet Frederic Manning reflected on what he regarded as Hardy's attempts to capture the underlying structure of conscious thought from an objective perspective. Through attending closely to the outward features of particular characters within his writing, he noted, Hardy was able to capture something of the underlying thoughts and beliefs which produced these observable properties:

[Hardy] has a delicacy and mobility of mind through which he is able to capture and reflect the most various and fluid moods, to hit upon the contrasting aspects of life and present them with a perfect impartiality. Such a mind is delicate in the way that it captures the feelings of pain or of pleasure, moods of joy or of sorrow, which have no definite and objective reality for us, though we may connect them in our minds with realities about us. (416)

Though conscious ideas could not be observed in themselves, Manning noted, Hardy's writing tried to give them perceptible form through connecting them with certain material sensations. In doing so, he suggested, Hardy was able to provide a means of entering into the mind of another person — yet without ever letting go of an impartial perspective. This

attempt to understand subjective thought from an objective point of view involved a form of what the philosopher George Romanes — following his close friend William Clifford — referred to as “ejective” reasoning. Through attending to the visible behavior of organisms and imagining how we would feel under similar circumstances, Romanes argued, subjects could begin to understand the ideas and beliefs of another being:

For it is evident that the mental activities of another organism can never be to us objects of direct knowledge, [as] we can only infer their occurrence from objective sources supplied through observation. Therefore, all our knowledge about mental structures outside of our own really consists of an inferential interpretation — this interpretation being founded on subjective knowledge regarding the condition of our own mental structures. (16)

To apprehend the mind of someone outside ourselves, Romanes suggested, involved first considering their objective features and appearance, and then throwing out — or ejecting — our subjective feelings into their position. Through inferring a set of conscious thoughts from those perceptible behaviours which accompanied them, observers could thus begin to understand — albeit tentatively — the mind of another person. In this sense, he argued, conscious thought was best understood through neither objectivity nor subjectivity alone, but instead through the underlying relationship between the two of them.

This similarity between Romanes’ ejective method of knowledge production and Hardy’s objective conception of narration and was in fact far from coincidental. Though

they never met in person, Hardy was an admirer of Romanes' theories and in fact owned many of his books—including his influential *Mind and Motion*. In response to this work—which he read in article form in 1888—Hardy reflected in his notes on the importance of Romanes' attempts to bring together objective and subjective approaches to philosophy—and in doing so to better understand the nature of conscious thought:

Because the understanding refuses the title of objectivity claimed for the ideas, man may apprehend them only if he admits that he has to deal not with objective things but with partial conceptions of them. (139)

Though objective concepts of knowledge were useful for capturing material phenomena, Hardy noted, Romanes demonstrated that they were incapable—at least in themselves—of reflecting subjective ideas.¹ Instead, he argued, doing so necessarily involved that form of inference which the author referred to as “ejective” reasoning—which provided a mode of access to those conscious thoughts beneath the appearance of material phenomena. This analogical approach to philosophy was in fact necessary in everyday life, Romanes held, insofar in its absence there was little or no reason to suggest that another being was even conscious at all. In his conception, the only available evidence of subjective mind was that

¹ Susanne Anger points out that part of what interested Hardy about Romanes' work was the possibility it seemed to offer of perceive life from both an objective and subjective perspective: “Romanes attempts to demonstrate in his writing that his monistic theory of mind allow simultaneously for an objectivist view of mind and also an ejective view, [which leads] Hardy to conduct his own attempts in representing these dual aspects of mind, material and mental, from the subjective and scientific points of view” (500).

which was furnished through outward behavior — meaning that ejective forms of thought were the necessary basis upon which all theories of mind were predicated:

[Insofar as] the subjective mind can never become assimilated with the objective to learn through direct feeling the mental processes which there accompany the objective structures, it is clearly impossible to satisfy anyone who might choose to doubt the validity of the inference, that in any case besides that of his own, mental processes do in fact accompany objective structures. (23)

In Romanes' view, ejective reasoning was necessary precisely because the mind of another person could ever be observed through the senses — and thus could not be regarded with objective certainty. Though direct perception could lead observers to an understanding of the attitude and demeanor of an organism, he pointed out, it could not provide access to the ideas and beliefs which produced this conduct. For this reason, capturing conscious thought necessarily involved moving beyond objective approaches to epistemology and instead attempting to imagine oneself in the place of another living being.

Though Romanes suggested that ejective reasoning was most readily applied to another person — insofar as it was often easiest to understand the thoughts and feelings of something similar to the self — he also held that this same form of thought could be applied to animals and even inorganic entities such as nature itself. In his reading, the concept of will or purpose could in fact be attribute to almost any form of organised matter — so long as it displayed sufficient intricacy and a form of intentionality which was similar to that

of conscious human beings. Throughout his 1894 Mind and Motion, for instance, Romanes attempted to demonstrate that concrete objects were entirely capable of thought, and that seeing them in these terms helped unify material and immaterial forms of knowledge:

Through treating the perceptible form of causation as everywhere but the objective or phenomenal aspect of an ejective or ontological reality, we can furnish a logical basis for a theory of things which is at the same time natural and metaphysical. On the objective aspect, the ideas furnished through reason are of necessity material, while on the ejective aspect they are metaphysical or mental. (115)

In this conception, Romanes suggested that nature itself had what might be referred to as a two-fold reality—both unconscious and conscious. Though in the first of these instances, he argued, material phenomena were merely inert objects without meaning or purpose, in the second instance they contained with a form of subjective intention. In his view, both of these ways of conceptualising nature were entirely valid—they were simply different approaches to the same thing. This belief that ejective consciousness could be observed in the structure of reality was in fact important not only for Romanes but also in many ways for Hardy too. In response to reading the ideas of Clifford, for instance, he reflected in his personal notebook on the possibility that even material objects themselves could contain the initial vestiges of conscious thought—or what he called immanent will:²

² Though a variety of different critics have called attention to Hardy's belief that there was an underlying will or purpose within nature, perhaps the best description comes from J. Hillis Miller: "While the Immanent Will

That reality which underlies what we call matter shall be called mind-stuff. Thus a molecule of inorganic matter does not possess mind, but possesses a small piece of mind-stuff. When the molecules are so combined the corresponding elements of mind-stuff form what we call consciousness. (108)

Though inanimate matter was not conscious in the sense of humans, Hardy suggested, nature nonetheless seemed to have a form of what might be called proto-consciousness—or what Clifford himself often referred to as “mind-stuff.” In this conception, all material phenomena seemed to contain the potential for consciousness if raised to a sufficient level of intricacy—thus matter itself could be said to manifest intentional behavior in a more or less developed form. Through ejective reasoning, in this sense, it was to possible deduce an underlying will or purpose within nature—albeit a purpose which appeared often vague and inscrutable when seen from the limited perspective of the human mind.

While Hardy often called attention to the importance of recognising the subjective aspects of material phenomena—whether human or non-human—studies of his writing have at times tended to emphasise the seeming objectivity of his novels. In adopting this approach, critics have often argued that Hardy’s novels regarded consciousness itself as a material object—which was thus to be treated with a sense of philosophical detachment and disinterested analysis. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, in perhaps the best-known version

is not conscious, it is still will, a blind force sweeping through nature, urging things to happen as they do happen, weaving a set of circumstances, shaping things in patterns determined by its energy” (15).

of this argument, argues that Hardy regarded all of his characters with an emotionless impartiality which often bordered upon callous indifference:

Their minds are habitually turned outward, [for] almost every sentence that Hardy ever wrote, whether in his fiction, in his poetry, or in his more private writings, is objective, [and] names something outside the mind of which the mind is aware. In his view, a man should even look at his own interior life as something detached and outward, not as known from the inside with special intimacy. (1)

In this conception, Miller suggests that Hardy's work habitually adopted a detached and omniscient perspective on people and events — which ignored depictions of interiority in favor of capturing outward appearance. For him, this refusal of to enter into the subjective perspective of his characters — and to render their thoughts immediately visible — belied a shallowness of mind within both the author and the people he depicted. George Levine, developing this argument, similarly calls attention to the fact that Hardy seemed most at home describing material things and not immaterial thoughts. In his description, Hardy's fiction was structured around an unwillingness to depict the underlying workings of the conscious mind as it reflected upon nature:

His novels persistently dramatise the disparity between event and reflection. They are 'objective' [at] the same time that they dramatise the difference between the way that characters imagine one another and the way they really are. [For] Hardy's

work does not pause to analyse consciousness or motives, but narrates enormous leaps of consciousness. (93)

While Levine recognises Hardy's interest in the problem of describing consciousness, he comes to the conclusion—similar to Miller—that he attempts to do so from an entirely objective perspective.³ Because almost all ideas and beliefs are the product of unconscious impulses and intrinsic desires, he suggests, Hardy regards the thoughts of his characters are in a sense unknowable—both to themselves and also to the reader—and thus merely attends to the perceptible behaviour that accompanies cognition. In this respect, Hardy's novels treat subjective intention as inherently impenetrable—and for this reason embrace a detached and objective perspective on the particular phenomena they describe.

Though there are good reasons to believe that Hardy often approached his subject matter in a disinterested and objective manner, I argue that he did so not simply to neglect or dismiss the importance of subjective ideas—but instead as a way of capturing conscious thought from the outside. Through reading his novels in relation to Romanes' conception of "ejective" reasoning—and in particular his 1896 novel *Jude the Obscure*—I suggest that Hardy's fiction can be understood as encouraging readers to deduce the thoughts of his characters from their outward appearance. In doing so, I argue that Hardy deviated from what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison regard as the underlying epistemic paradigm at

³ Besides Miller and Levine, a variety of observers have pointed out the way in which Hardy's writing often seemed to eschew subjective interiority in favour of objective description. Phillip Mallet thus notes what he regards as the "tendency of his novels to register subjectivity not through introspection or free indirect discourse, [but] somatically, in terms of immediate sensations or changed perceptions of nature" (25). For a similar reading of Hardy's work see also Dale Kramer (113).

this particular historical moment – which held that verifiable knowledge of the thoughts of another person necessarily involved rejecting any form of subjective intuition:

Here and elsewhere, [critics] lambasted the traditional philosophical methods of self-observation as irredeemably subjective, [and argued that] only observations offered any hope of an objective science of thought. Even if the contents of thought could not be directly measured, psychologists could avail themselves of objective determinations of mental processes. (264)

Throughout psychological science of this period, Daston and Galison suggest, observers came to reject what they regarded as the unreliable nature of introspective self-reflection, and instead embraced the idea that consciousness was best understood through analysing and measuring the responses of the brain to outward influences. In doing so, they claim, scientists treated the mind not as a subjective entity but as an objective phenomenon – which could thus be studied in the same way as any biological structure. Though Hardy himself was evidently indebted to this conception⁴ – and adopted a similarly materialist understanding of mind – I argue that his novels also retained a limited form of subjectivity through his use of ejective reasoning. Specifically, Hardy adopted a variety of what I term

⁴ Jenny Bourne Taylor rightly points out that Hardy was both well-read in the theories of mind that were current throughout this period, yet also somewhat evasive about his precise position on them. “We may trace evidence of this reading, as well as of wider debates on selfhood circulating within intellectual culture, but it rarely takes the form of straightforward influence in his fiction. Hardy makes use of specific and at times conflicting psychological models and languages, which arise at different moments as a multilayered and multifaceted set of reference points” (340).

“ejective” aesthetics, which called attention to the different ways in which literary objects such as novels allowed readers to enter into both the underlying thoughts and feelings of different organisms. In his 1888 article on the “Profitable Reading of Fiction,” for instance, Hardy suggested that the process of reading itself involved not only attempting to deduce the motivations of characters from what they said and did, but also inferring the ideas and beliefs of the author from the nature of their fictional writing:

In this process, [the] appreciative, perspicacious reader [will] see what his author is aiming at, and through affording full scope to his own insight, catch the vision which the writer has in his eye, and is attempting to project upon the paper, even while it half eludes him — [that is] a composition based upon faithful imagination, less the transcript than the similitude of material fact. (116-117)

Instead of merely depicting the objective facts of nature — a form of writing that he derided as mere copyism — Hardy suggests that true writers structured their works in such a way that the reader could glimpse into the ideas of another person. Through attending closely to both the form and also the content of a novel, he argued, readers could thus perceive something of the underlying thoughts behind the words that they read — the immaterial mind beneath the material matter. So long as the author was careful to merely describe the way in which things appeared to them rather than things in themselves, in this sense, literary fiction could provide an important means of transcending the limits of the self.

This belief that novels themselves fulfilled an ejective function is in fact consistent with wider theoretical discussions about realism. In particular, critics have often argued that part of the importance of realist fiction is that it helps readers better understand their fellow human beings—and in doing so allows them to develop a form of both sympathetic engagement and ethical attachment. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, in perhaps the best-known version of this claim, argues that literary fictions—but especially realist novels—cultivate in their audiences an emotional identification with the characters described, and through doing so train them see things from the perspective of another person:

Literary works usually invite their readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their [points of view]. In their very mode of address to their imagined reader, they convey the sense that there are relations of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the characters and also the reader. Historical and biographical works do provide us empirical information that is essential to good choice, [and] may in fact also arouse the relevant forms of imaginative activity. But insofar as they promote identification and sympathy in the reader, they resemble literature. (5)

In this conception, Nussbaum suggests that the distinctive characteristic of imaginative fiction—in contrast to philosophy or history—is its capacity to move beyond depictions of outward events and to enter the mind of another person. Through reading, she argues, audiences can learn to apprehend not only objective things but also subjective thought—

an ability that promotes social cohesion. However, while Hardy shared Nussbaum's belief that realist fiction provided readers with different a form of intuitive knowledge, there were also certain distinctions between their approaches to this topic. This was particularly evident in the case of science. Whereas Nussbaum often claimed literary sympathy was opposed to the detached rationality that underpinned natural philosophy, Hardy argued that the capacity of novels to elicit an ejective response was in fact entirely consistent with scientific ideals. In his influential 1891 article about the "Science of Fiction," for instance, Hardy observed that both literature and science set out to grasp the underlying structure of nature and society through appeal to a limited set of observable phenomena:

What cannot be discerned by eye and ear, what may be apprehended only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all its manifestations, this is the capacity which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his abilities and means of observation, but without that sympathy. To see in half views the whole tune, is the intuitive talent that supplies the would-be story writer with the scientific basis for his pursuit. (137)

Instead of regarding literature as a retreat from rational thought, Hardy here attended to the way in which novels often provided a form of scientific knowledge concerning the minds of different organisms. In doing so, he attempted to undermine the rigid opposition between science and aesthetics—or what Nussbaum herself called "fact" and "fancy"—

which consigned fiction to the realm of affect and emotion. Through reading, in this sense, observers could develop a better understanding of both the thoughts of the people with whom they interacted on an everyday basis and also the will of nature itself.

4.2 Reading Mind: Romanes and Hardy

Though Hardy's understanding of the capacity of literature to provide knowledge beyond the objective was in part a product of his own particular aesthetic theories, it also emerged from his engagement with the history and philosophy of science. In particular, Hardy was indebted to those "ejective" theories first put forward in the work of Clifford and then developed in the writing of Romanes. While the idea of using outward behaviour as a means of understanding the ideas and beliefs of another person was widespread in Victorian philosophy, Clifford was among the first to introduce this concept into scientific epistemology—especially in relation to language of "objectivity." For him, thinking about the mind of someone outside of ourselves necessarily involved a form of reasoning that was categorically distinct from the rest of philosophy:

There are some inferences which are profoundly different than anything found within the natural sciences. When I come to the conclusion that you are conscious, and that there are objects in your consciousness similar to those in mine, I am not inferring any actual or possible feeling of my own, but your feeling, which is not, and cannot through any possibility become objects in my consciousness. (275)

In this conception, he suggested, there were certain limitations in scientific approaches to knowledge. Though they were useful for analysing and studying the objective properties of different material phenomena, Clifford argued, science was incapable providing insight into the conscious thoughts of another person. For this reason, attempts to understand the underlying ideas and beliefs of a living being necessarily involved a different method of reasoning—which was based on inference instead of immediate observation. In his view, this distinctive conception of knowledge was best termed “ejective” thinking—a reference to the fact that it was predicated upon ejecting or throwing out our own thoughts into the subjective position of a mind that was not our own:

Inferred occurrences of feelings, of objective groupings similar to those among my own feelings, and of a subjective order in many ways analogous to my own—[are] always thrown out of my consciousness, and regarded as outside of it, as not being a part of me. [Thus] I propose to call these inferred occurrences ejects, or things thrown out of consciousness, to distinguish them from objects, or things apparent within the structure of my own consciousness. (275)

In contrast to objective phenomena, Clifford argued, which could be perceived through direct observations of nature itself, and subjective phenomena, which could be grasped through introspective reflection on the self, ejective entities—such as the mind of another person—could not be immediately apprehended, but instead had to be inferred from the

evidence of the senses.⁵ Thus while Kantian epistemology had attempted to differentiate our conception of material objects from that of immaterial subjects, Clifford introduced a third form of knowledge — that of “ejects” or inferred subjectivities — which only emerged through reasoning based on both outward observation and analogy to ourselves.

Though ejective reasoning at first glance appeared somewhat less important than either objective or subjective forms of thought, Clifford argued that this ideal was in fact crucial not only within everyday life but also throughout philosophy itself. Even objective concepts of knowledge relied upon ejective belief, he suggested, insofar as they tacitly assumed that different people perceived the same objects as the observer — and did so in a broadly similar manner. For this reason, what he referred to as “ejective” reasoning was every bit as important as either objective or subjective approaches to philosophy:

Belief in the occurrence of another man’s consciousness, in the occurrence of ejects, dominates every thought in our lives. In the first place, it profoundly modifies [our perception of] the object. This room, the table, the chairs, the bodies, are all objects of my consciousness, for as simple objects they are part of me. But I somehow infer the occurrence of similar objects in your consciousness, and these are not objects to me, nor can they ever be made so — they are ejects. This being so, I bind up with

⁵ Donald Forsdyke points out that while Clifford believed that ejective forms of thought were in a sense subjective — insofar as they only occurred within the mind — they were also at the same time objective, in that they had an underlying material reality in the brain itself. “Clifford thought that despite being perceived only ejectively, the mind (your subjectivity) would obey the rules that applied to objective nature” (4).

each objects as it occurs in my mind the thought of similar objects existing in other men's minds. (276)

Far from being secondary to objective knowledge, Clifford argued, ejective reasoning was in fact a necessary precondition of our underlying belief that objects had any underlying reality whatsoever. Without the ability to infer that the same phenomena which appeared to our own mind also appeared in the minds of different people, he held, the emphasis in objective forms of thought on restraining personal biases would be unnecessary. For him, it was only through recognising that objects had a social aspect to them that the problem of subjective belief became important. This sense that ejective reasoning was foundational to philosophy in fact structured not only the way Clifford conceptualised epistemology— but also his understanding of the development of language:⁶

Belief in eject and the recognition of a kindred consciousness in our fellow beings is clearly a condition of gregarious action among animals so highly developed as to be called conscious at all. Language, even in its first beginnings, is impossible without that belief, and any sound which—becoming a sign to my neighbor— becomes thereby a sign unto to myself, must in the nature of the case be a mark of the social object. (277)

⁶ Timothy Madigan notes that Clifford often deployed the word “eject” as a broader idea to describe all shared objects that occurred in the minds of many different people. “Clifford uses the term ‘social object’ to refer to the intricate symbols of an infinite number of ejects related to the objects they resemble. [For] the belief occurrence of consciousness in different people remains a constant” (60).

What allowed language to have significance, Clifford held, was a tacit understanding on the part of users that particular words corresponded to the same objects in the minds of different people who used them. In this argument, language was merely the outward or objective signifier of the inward or subjective idea signified. Thus to grasp the underlying meaning of any utterance—whether written or verbal—necessarily involved an ejective assumption that the same marks led to similar sensations in another person. In this sense, reading the meaning of a book from perceptible marks upon a page was no different than reading the thoughts of another person from their behaviour, insofar as both involved inferring a set of subjective ideas from the material indicators associated with them.

This belief that ejective reasoning was necessarily prior to language was in fact particularly important for Clifford in his attempts to demonstrate that conscious thought was itself an implicit property of almost all forms of organised matter. In his argument, mind and matter necessarily corresponded with one another in a sense similar to written and spoken words. Though the precise nature of the relationship between these different entities remained unknown, he argued, the fact that they were in some way related was as indisputable as the claim that language itself could appear in distinctive forms:

Ejective facts—the changes in your consciousness—run parallel with changes in your brain, which are objective facts. This parallelism is a parallelism of intricacy, an analogy of structure, [for] a spoken sentence and the same sentence written are two different things, but each of them consists of parts—the spoken sentence of

the perceptible sounds of the language, the written sentence of the alphabet. Yet the relation between the spoken sentence and its parts is nearly the same as the relation between the written sentence and its parts, [and] of such a nature is the correspondence or parallelism between mind and body. (280-281)

Though ejective ideas and objective changes in the brain were obviously different things, Clifford suggested here that they were related to one another as written language is to spoken words. In this conception, he suggested, changes in the second were necessarily related to changes within the first in a way that implied the two could never be entirely differentiated and regarded in isolation. However, because mind itself was in some sense material in nature, the problem necessarily developed at what point conscious thought had developed throughout the evolution of organisms. In many respects, Clifford himself adopted a monist response to this underlying ontological difficulty. Within this schema, all material phenomena possessed trace amounts of what he referred to as “mind-stuff” — a form of vestigial cognition which when developed to a sufficient level of sophistication and intricacy came to resemble what we call consciousness:

Conscious thought is a collection of ejective facts—of basic feelings, or rather the remoter aspects which cannot even be felt, but of which the simplest feeling is built up. Such fundamental ejective facts go along with the behavior of every organism, however simple. But it is only when the material organism has reached a certain

level of nervous structure (not now specified) that the collection of ejective facts reaches that mode of complication which we call consciousness. (284)

Though ejective reasoning was most often applied to higher organism such as humans and animals—which bore enough resemblance to ourselves to make entering into their thoughts relatively easy and straightforward—Clifford emphasised that eject or “mind” itself was in some sense a property of all phenomena. In this respect, there was no reason why the beginnings of thought could not be identified in single-celled organisms or even material objects. While these phenomena were not “conscious” in the sense of possessing the capacity for self-reflection, he argued, they did have a semblance of such properties, and were thus ontologically no different than the people who set out to study them.

Though Clifford was in many ways the first to use the term “ejective” in debates regarding the development of consciousness, the conceptual language which he deployed soon became widespread among philosophers of mind. George Romanes, in particular, used the idea of “ejective” reasoning as a helpful shorthand for describing how observers came to understand the mind of another organism through an analogy to the self. In his 1883 *Mental Evolution in Animals*, for instance, he signaled his personal and intellectual debt to the philosophical ideas which Clifford had developed:

Through inference we project the known patterns of our own mental disposition on what is to us the blank screen of another mind, and our only knowledge of the processes there taking place is really due to this form of projection of our own

subjectivity. This matter has been well and clearly presented by Professor Clifford, who has coined the particularly appropriate term *eject* (in contradistinction to subject and object) whereby to designate the distinctive character of a mind (or mental process) outside of our own. (16)

In this conception, Romanes suggested that the only possible knowledge which observers could have about the ideas of different organism — whether human or non-human — came about through projecting their own subjective ideas those of another.⁷ Through doing so, he argued, philosophers could grasp — albeit only dimly — those underlying thoughts and feelings that occurred within the mind of someone else. In addition to adopting Clifford's theoretical conception of *ejective* reasoning, Romanes was also indebted to his claim that *mind-stuff* — and thus the eventual capacity for conscious thought — was inherent within nature itself. For him, as for Clifford, cognition itself was merely a property of matter in motion after it reached a certain level of intricacy, though without this intricacy conscious thought remained only an incipient potentiality rather than an accomplished fact:

We are going upon the hypothesis that all mind is matter in motion, and that all matter in motion is mind — or, as Clifford phrased it, that all the outside world is composed of *mind-stuff*. [But] while all matter in motion is mind, merely as matter

⁷ Nicholas Thompson provides a neat summary of the way in which Romanes regarded *ejective* reasoning as an attempt to bring together both objective and subjective forms of thought: "Romanes' method involves putting together our knowledge about the relationship between two sources of information concerning our own minds with our knowledge of information about others' minds to make an inference regarding the subjective beliefs which accompany objective behavior" (60).

in motion (irrespective of the kinds or degrees of both) it may not be mind in the elaborated form of consciousness: it may only be the basic stuff of mind. (97)

While under the monist ontology which both Clifford and Romanes adopted mind and matter were merely two sides of the same phenomena, this did not necessarily imply that all material objects were capable of volition. In their reading it was only at a certain level of development that mind-stuff turned into something approaching consciousness. This meant that while observers were able to abstractly recognise that inert matter possessed the potential for cognition, they could not engage in those ejective forms of identification which made knowledge about the mind of another being possible.

Though there were a number of similarities between the ways in which Romanes and Clifford approached both ejective reasoning and theories of mind, there were also important distinctions between their philosophies. In particular, the two differed over the problem of precisely which phenomena were capable of conscious thought. While they agreed that a certain level of sophistication was necessary for cognition, Clifford insisted that this intricacy was to be understood through analogy with the human brain — which was the sole standard of thought. For him, this meant that the closer a particular structure was to that of the mind the higher the probability that it was capable of conscious thought, and if there was not resemblance at all then the object was almost certainly incapable of higher reasoning. In contrast, Romanes argued that while an analogy with the human mind made the occurrence of thought in another being probable, this did not preclude the possibility that consciousness could develop within entirely different phenomena:

[Clifford] said that unless we can show in the disposition of heavenly bodies some morphological resemblance to the structure of the human brain, we are precluded from rationally entertaining any probability that self-conscious volition belongs to the universe. Obviously, this way of presenting the case is so grossly illogical that even popular opinion cannot be held to justify the presentation. For aught that we know to the contrary, not only the highly developed structure of the human brain, but even that of nervous matter in general, may be only one of a thousand possible ways in which the material and dynamic conditions for the apparition of self-consciousness. (98)

Though the intricate patterns of celestial motion bore little resemblance to the structure of the human brain, Romanes observed, it was nothing short of illogical to assume on this basis that such phenomena were incapable of thought. In the best-case scenario, he held, we could claim that there was no reason to positively assert that planets were conscious, but anything beyond this involved a fallacious belief that an absence of evidence implied the evidence of absence. Besides his attempt to demonstrate the difficulties with Clifford's philosophical reasoning in this way, Romanes also set out to provide direct indications that nature did in fact possess a form of consciousness resembling that of the human. In particular, he argued, the underlying sophistication evident within material phenomena seemed to be a positive reason for believing that objects could think:

If we focus our attention on the matter of intricacy, and refuse to be led astray by obviously false analogies of a particular kind, I think there can be no question that the macrocosm does furnish ample opportunity, as it were, for the presence of subjectivity, even if it be assumed that subjectivity can only be yielded by an order of sophistication analogous to the nervous system. For considering the material and dynamic system of nature as a whole, it is obvious that the intricacy presented is greater than that of any of its parts. (100)

In setting aside the issue of analogy to the human mind, Romanes observed, the totality of nature was necessarily more intricate than any phenomenon contained within it. Thus if complication was the principle criterion for assuming the occurrence of cognition, there seemed to be ample evidence that nature itself was conscious—though the form of this consciousness may be entirely different to that of human beings. Through ignoring those underlying biases associated with their own limited point of view, in short, philosophers could come to recognise the inherent potential for cognition within material objects.

Though Romanes emphasised the implicit difficulties in attempting to understand the abstract mind of nature—insofar it was different than human thought in structure and substance—he also suggested that the same form of ejective reasoning could be used to understand both material phenomena. Through attending to the perceptible manner in which matter behaved—and considering this alongside of their own ideas and beliefs—Romanes argued that people could begin to discern an underlying sense of conscious will and intentionality within the structure of nature itself:

Matter in motion is only the objective relation, to us and for us, of that which in its subjective aspect—or in its inherent reality—is mind. Just as the operations of my friend’s mind can only be revealed through the mechanical operations of his body, so it may very well be that operations of the abstract mind can only be revealed to me through the mechanical operations of nature. [For] the only difference between these two cases is that while I am able, in the case of my friend’s mind, to elicit responses of mechanical movement having a definite and intended relation to the operations of my own mind, such is not the case with nature. (111)

In the same way that people could infer the thoughts of another person through reference to their observed behaviour, Romanes argued, so too could they attempt to infer the mind of nature from its underlying structure.⁸ Though doing so would necessitate a much better scientific understanding of objects than was possible at that particular moment in time, Romanes emphasised that there was no reason to think this could not occur at some point in the distant future. For him, the problem was material rather than philosophical. In fact, while critics objected that observers could never hope to converse or interact with nature in the same way that they did with people, Romanes pointed out that there were many

⁸ Though critics have often argued that Romanes’ attempt to apply ejective reasoning to nature involved a misleading form of anthropomorphisation—insofar as it involved projecting human ideas onto an entirely different set of non-human beings—Robert Richards notes that Romanes himself was in fact well aware of this objection and pointed out the difficulties it encountered. In particular, he observes, “this objection to comparative psychology would tell against the possibility of human psychology too” (379). For a criticism of this aspect of Romanes’ philosophies see Nicholas Thompson (59-70).

things which were incapable of responding to their interlocutors, but nonetheless seemed to possess an intuitive sense of both intentionality and mind. Perhaps the best instance of this phenomenon, he suggested, came in the form of aesthetic objects — which seemed to be a reflection of certain ideas within the mind of the author who produced them:

Every structure of causation is the merely phenomenal aspect of the ontological reality — the outward manifestation of an inward meaning. Thus, for instance, I am listening to a sonata of Beethoven's played by Madam Schumann. Helmholtz tells me all that he knows about the physics and physiology of the process, both beyond and within my brain. But I feel that even if Helmholtz were able to tell me much more than he can, so long as he is dealing with objective reasons he is at work only upon the outer structure of the matter. That method of communication has little more to do with the reality communicated than have the paper and ink of this article to do with the ideas which they serve to convey. In each case a vehicle of symbols is necessary in order that one mind should communicate with another, but in both cases this is a vehicle of symbols and nothing more. (113-114)

Though considered from an objective perspective aesthetics was merely an assortment of audible sounds or marks on a page, Romanes argued, from an ejective perspective these objects could be understood as the material medium through which the ideas of the author were relayed to the recipient. In this sense, both music and literature seemed to be imbued with a form of second-hand consciousness which could be interpreted through attending

to its perceptible structure—in much the same way that we would attempt to discern the thoughts and feelings of a person whom we encountered face-to-face. Thus while aesthetic objects could not respond to their audience—at least in any obvious sense—this did not mean that they had no sense of interiority. Instead, he suggested, the fact that we did in fact attribute mind to such non-responsive material objects implied that responsiveness in and of itself was not necessarily an inherent precondition of subjective thought.

In many respects, Hardy's own conception of science and aesthetics was indebted to so-called "ejective" theories of consciousness. Not only did he read widely in Victorian psychology and evolutionary biology, but his notebook also demonstrates an ongoing and detailed familiarity with many of the arguments which Clifford put forward. Besides the various references to "mind-stuff" which appear throughout his notebook, Hardy was also particularly interested in his claim that objective forms of thought were incapable of capturing certain aspects of nature. In an 1888 entry concerning the relationship between science and metaphysics, for instance, he called attention to what he regarded as the limits of objective forms of thought and the need for a different approach to philosophy:

Science reaches its true form only when the order of thought is connected with the order of nature, [for] the aim of science is to break through the husk of matter and thus to apprehend things in their forms, in which they are at one with the mind that knows them. If the shows of things are least themselves we must go beyond the shows in order to know them, [and] just in proportion as the reality is removed

from the appearance does the knower become conscious of an activity of his own thought in determining things. (172-173)

In a sense similar to Clifford, Hardy emphasised that the goal of science was not simply to capture the appearance of material objects, but also to go beyond this and apprehend the structure of reality itself. For him, this necessarily involved recognising the role of our own thoughts in the production of knowledge. Though objective approaches to science could help observers understand perceptible matter, he noted, a different form of objective reasoning was needed to reconcile the mind of nature with mind of the human. In fact, while he recognised that objective forms of thought were ascendant in Victorian science, Hardy also looked forward to a time when subjectivity could be reintroduced into the study of the universe. Thus in a passage reflecting on the work of Comte, he criticised the way in which objective methodologies had come to replace subjective knowledge:

Subjectivity has had less and less share in framing our theories recently. But in continuing this course, the current ascendancy of objectivity, through repressing the imagination under appeal to reality, has tended to idiocy. Yet subjectivity in a regenerated form, used on the future from material of the past, will finally rule — subjectivity not absolute, at first, but relative. (75)

Whereas contemporary understandings of science tended to downplay the importance of subjective ideas and beliefs — instead emphasising the need to capture reality in itself —

Hardy argued that this conception was predicated upon a false assumption: namely, that the human imagination could be entirely removed from observation. Though personal biases should of course be critically considered, he held, subjective thought was necessary for producing different theories. This meant that while sociologists such as Comte had depict the history of science as a linear movement away from “subjective” projection and toward “objective” detachment, Hardy instead embraced a return to subjectivity — albeit in a different form. In emphasizing the role of mind in the production of truth, he argued, observers could thus learn to see ejective ideas as a supplement to objective perception.

Part of this attempt to reintroduce prior forms of subjectivity into science involved recognising the way in which nature itself demonstrated a capacity for conscious thought which approached that of the human. In a sense similar to Clifford himself, Hardy argued that even the lowest of material phenomena contained a form of “mind-stuff” — which if sufficiently developed could evolve into intentional volition. Recognising this immanent will within nature, he argued, was in fact a necessary precondition of adopting a strictly materialist conception of the biological sciences:

That whole mechanism of the materiality may well be seen as having an interior and mental aspect corresponding to its outward and self-complete frame. [For] unless you assume that the basic atom or molecule to have some inner properties analogous to those that we call mental — properties such as the Professor Clifford used to speak of as of mind-stuff — there is no accounting for how the mental first developed out of the material. (148)

Instead of thinking of nature and the human as necessarily opposing phenomenon — the first solely comprised of inanimate matter and the second distinguished by its possession of conscious mind — Hardy argued that evolutionary theory demanded a recognition that nature itself had a capacity for cognition. Without admitting the possibility that some form of mind-stuff could occur in even the simplest of molecules, he argued, the development of conscious thought within organisms made little sense. In contrast to Clifford, however, Hardy held that objects did not even need to resemble the human brain to be capable of conscious thought. Instead, he followed Romanes in suggesting that all forms of life were theoretically capable of cognition — and in doing so attempted to reaffirm the underlying connection between intentional thought and matter in motion:

Professor Clifford said that unless we can show in the disposition of the heavenly bodies some morphological resemblance to the structure of a human brain, we are precluded from rationally entertaining any probability that self-conscious volition belongs to nature. But this is illogical [for] the theory of monism supposes matter in motion to be substantially identical with mind. (174)

Whereas Clifford had suggested that conscious thought could only occur in biological organisms which appeared similar to humans, Hardy adopted Romanes' view in claiming that all material phenomena were able — at least in principle — to develop the capacity for conscious thought. In his argument, claims that objects were incapable of cognition simply

because they did not resemble the brain was itself nonsensical. Though consciousness was easiest to discern in organisms that closely resembled ourselves, Hardy noted, similarity was an often unreliable criteria of judgment. To understand the mind of nature, in short, necessarily involved setting aside prejudice and attempting to apprehend the will of those phenomena sophisticated enough to display a capacity for intention and cognition.

This belief that all objects — no matter how seemingly inanimate — were potentially capable of conscious thought was especially crucial not only in Hardy's theory of science, but also in his approach to aesthetics. In particular, while works of fiction could be seen from an objective perspective as merely a sophisticated assortment of images and sounds, Hardy suggested that they could also be seen from an ejective perspective as repositories of feelings and emotions. For this reason, he argued, the particular interpretation which an observer adopted in any case depended entirely on their own point of view:

Though all conscious volition is matter in motion, it does not follow that all matter in motion is elaborated consciousness. [For] the scientific definition which is given by Helmholtz of the effect of [aesthetics] on the human brain is no doubt perfectly sound within its category, but the ejective definition given of these same effects by the [author] is also sound within its category. (174)

In this conception, Hardy attempted to demonstrate that aesthetic objects could be treated in two entirely different ways. Though scientific philosophers such as Helmholtz argued that these objects were merely material phenomena — which had certain properties and

caused particular reactions in beings that encountered them — ejective thinkers such as Romanes and himself also treated them as an articulation of the inherent ideas and beliefs that occurred in the conscious mind of the author. This belief that aesthetic productions were in a sense both objective and subjective in fact underpinned the way in which Hardy approached his own writing — and especially his conception of the role of the author. In a note upon the theories of his literary mentor Leslie Stephen, for instance, he observed that the purpose of the author was to articulate their own particular understanding of truth — yet in a way that pulled the reader into his or her personal vision:

[They] reveal to us certain aspects of the society in which we live and the men who live in it, truths capable of being proved through direct intuition and certain facts as they appear to him. If we are so constituted as to be unable to see what he sees, he can go no further, but on the other hand so far as we are in sympathy with him, the proof — if it be a proof — has all the cogency of direct vision. (136)

Though Hardy often claimed that there was no unified philosophical program within his writing, he repeatedly emphasised that the purpose of the writer was to capture and then communicate in words a set of personal “seemings.” For this reason, the process of writing involved transmitting ideas from the mind of the author to the mind of the reader through the medium of the novel itself. There was no guarantee that the audience would be able to infer these ideas from the evidence of their work, but the same was true of attempts to read the ideas of any organism from their outward their behaviour. In both cases, ejective

reasoning was needed to move beyond the objective evidence of the senses — and through doing to deduce something of the underlying mind which occurred beneath.

4.3 Ejective Poetics: Jude the Obscure

This concern with the role of ejective reasoning in the process of interpretation — whether of biological organisms or literary objects — was notably evident not only within Hardy's non-fiction, but also his 1896 novel *Jude the Obscure*. From the opening pages of his narrative, Hardy foregrounds the difficulty his characters face in attempting to read the thoughts of another person from the evidence of the senses, yet also the importance of attempting to do so. In this sense, I argue, Hardy's characters model for readers both the necessity of ejective reasoning in everyday life, and also the tragic results often associated with failing to adopt this form of thought.⁹ When we first meet Jude, for instance, Hardy calls attention to his ejective openness and the ease with which different characters can deduce his inward thoughts from his outward appearance. In particular, after he meets Vilbert for the first time, Jude's subjective pleasure in helping to procure medicines for the unscrupulous doctor manifests itself plainly in his outward features:

Through the intervening fortnight he ran about and seemed to smile outwardly at his inward thoughts, as if they were people meeting and nodding to him —

⁹ Elisha Cohn points out that Hardy's novel can in many respects be read as an attempt to demonstrate the fallibility of objective approaches to knowledge — and the necessity of a different epistemology: "Though his fiction concerns itself with the 'sensitive surface of life,' it cannot be simply aligned with empiricism — with an objective recording of phenomena. This is not least because the habits of liberal cognition which underwrite the idea of objectivity seems so unavailable to his characters" (151)

smiled with that singularly beautiful irradiation which is seen to spread on young faces at the inception of some glorious idea, as if a supernatural lamp were held inside their transparent natures, giving rise to the flattering fancy that heaven lies about them then. (28)

Because of his youth and sincerity, Hardy suggests, Jude can be easily “read” by those around him—insofar as he has not yet developed the capacity for duplicity. For Hardy, everything that Jude thinks immediately writes itself upon his features—and thus neither Vilbert nor the reader requires privileged access to his interior thoughts and feelings to understand him. For this reason, while we know little of his character or personal history, he already appears as the naïve and generous—yet also in many respects tragic—figure that he will eventually prove himself to be. If this initial description of Jude foregrounds the ways in which ejective reasoning will become important in the structure of the novel, Hardy’s depiction of his reading habits also calls attention to the capacity of literature to provide a connection with the mind of another person. This ability becomes particularly apparent when Jude first purchases for himself an old edition of poetry—which produces a delighted sense of being able to step outside the limits his of own perspective:

While he was busied with these ancient pages, which had already been thumbed by hands possibly in the grave, digging out the thoughts if these minds, so remote and also yet so close, [his] mind became so impregnated with the poem that, in a moment of the same impulsive emotion which before had caused him to kneel on

his ladder, he stopped the horse, alighted, and glancing around to see that nobody was in sight, knelt down on the roadside bank with open book. (33)

In this reading, Jude seems to model for readers precisely the way in which Hardy himself believe literary fiction should influence the reader. Through engaging with the words on the page and regarding them with a sense of imaginative projection, he suggests, Jude is able to reanimate — though only for a moment — the ideas of those long-dead writers who produced this work. In doing so, Jude thus demonstrates how ejective reasoning could be applied not only to human beings but also to material objects such as the novel.

Though Jude is in many ways an astute analyst of literary fiction, at times he also proves himself to be at best an ambivalent reader of others — a characteristic which not only contributes to his tragic ending but in doing so also seems to suggest the importance of developing a sophisticated capacity for ejective reasoning. In the fateful scene in which Jude first meets Arabella Donn, for instance, Hardy calls attention to the way in which his protagonist fails to accurately interpret the character of his interlocutor:

For somehow or other the eyes of the brown girl rested in his own when he had said the words, and there was a momentary flash of intelligence, an announcement of affinity in posse, between herself and him, which, so far as Jude Fawley was concerned, had no sort of premeditation to it. She saw that he had singled her out from the three, as a woman is singled out in such cases, for no reasoned purpose of further acquaintance, but in commonplace obedience to conjunctive orders from

headquarters, unconsciously received by unfortunate men when the last intention of their lives is to be occupied with the feminine. (39)

In this section, Jude's capacity for ejective reasoning appears to fail him in spectacular fashion, as he entirely misinterprets Arabella's thoughts and intentions. Whereas Jude sees an underlying intellectual similarity between himself and Arabella, Hardy suggests that there is only unconscious desire — of which Jude is unaware but which Arabella plays upon to captivating effect. For this reason, Jude is not only unable to correctly "read" the mind of another person, but also unable to recognise his own motivations. In an important sense, he becomes a stranger to himself.¹⁰ For Hardy, this inability to understand both his own motivations and those of the people around him occurs not merely because of a lack of proper ejective reasoning, but also a willful failure to engage in this process:

Though faintly conscious that to common-sense there was something lacking, and still more redundant, in the nature of this girl who had drawn him to her, [Jude] saw this only with his intellectual eye, just for a short fleeting while, as by the light of a falling lamp one might momentarily see an inscription on a wall before being enshrouded in darkness. (42)

¹⁰ George Levine notes that the inability of characters such as Jude to understand their own motivations in fact reflection a wider philosophical position that Hardy adopts in his novels — in which all human behaviour is necessarily motivated through unconscious and instinctive impulses: "Hardy's narrations do not so much analyse consciousness as present it in action, in contest with itself, hiding from the consequences of its own perceptions. [For] consciousness itself, driven by forces it does not understand, both makes reality and also separates humans from it" (87).

In this passage, Hardy implies that while Jude does possess an underlying capacity for ejective reasoning, he chooses — whether consciously or not — to ignore this. What leads him astray, in this sense, is not Jude's inability to interpret the mind of another person, but his unwillingness to do so. Indeed, as the novel develops, Hardy repeatedly returns to the problematic way in which many of his characters fail to cultivate this rational capacity — or instead disregard it at important moments — much to their own detriment and that of those around them. Through calling attention to the importance of ejective reasoning in this manner, Hardy thus emphasises the necessity of not only consciously attending to the objective appearance of organisms, but also attempting to interpret their ejective ideas and motivations on the basis of this information.

In the meantime, however, Jude is soon disabused of his misapprehensions about the character of Arabella. Specifically, after they marry Arabella reveals not only that she is not in fact pregnant — the ostensible cause of their betrothal — but also that many of her outward features which attracted Jude in the first place are counterfeit. For instance, on the evening of their marriage, Jude finds out that Arabella's masses of long dark hair are merely the result of an elaborate weave. Though he is unconcerned about the deception itself — which Arabella describes as a form of embellishment common to those who reside in the nearby towns and cities — he nonetheless laments the discovery that his bride is capable of any duplicity whatsoever, however harmless:

Jude thought with a feeling of sickness that though it might be true to some extent, for all that he knew, many unsophisticated girls would and did go to towns and remain there for years without losing their simplicity of life and embellishments. Others, alas, had an instinct towards artificiality in their very blood, and became adepts in counterfeiting at the first glimpse of it. However, perhaps there was no great sin in a woman adding to her hair, and he resolved to think no more of it.

(59)

Beyond his disappointment that Arabella's hair is not as voluminous as he had imagined, Jude is hurt to find out that anyone—particularly his wife—is different than they first appear. With exception of his meeting with the quack doctor Vilbert as a youth, Jude has up until now not had to confront people whose outward appearance did not correspond precisely to their inward character, hence his confusion and disappointment. In the language of Romanes, he has only just begun to realise the potential difficulties involved in ejective inference. In fact, while he initially brushes off this feeling of betrayal, Arabella continues to display worrying—if small—signs of deception. This is particularly evident when Jude finds out that her dimples are not “natural,” but instead something Arabella produces through sucking on her cheeks:

When she came into the room he was between sleeping and waking, and was barely conscious of her undressing before the little looking glass as he lay. One action of hers, however, brought him to full cognition. Her face being reflected

towards him as she sat, he could see that she was amusing herself by artificially producing in each cheek the dimple before alluded to, a curious accomplishment of which she was mistress, effecting it by a momentary suction. It seemed to him for the first time that the dimples were far oftener absent from her face during his intercourse with her nowadays than they had been in the earlier weeks of their acquaintance. (60)

In a moment indicative of his slow transition toward conscious evaluation of Arabella's character, Jude here notes that her dimples — which initially seemed to signify a form of childish innocence — in fact reveal an unusual capacity for duplicity, and that this capacity has been used to manipulate his own behaviour. What first appears to suggest a simplicity and openness of character, he observes, instead comes to indicate the difference between appearance and essence. Through his relationship with Arabella, in this sense, Jude comes to realise the difficulty involved in ejective induction — particularly when dealing with organism such as his wife who are capable of intentional deception.

Whereas Jude in many respects struggles to interpret the mind of his wife from her appearance, this problem does not go both ways. In fact, Arabella seems at times not to even recognise that her husband has any subjective thoughts at all. Though she initially develops an intense infatuation with Jude, for instance, she depicts this not as an attraction

to his underlying character or personality, but as an impersonal desire for the particular type of man that he represents.¹¹ Thus she tells her friends:

'I've got him to care for me: yes! But I want him to more than care for me; I want him to have me—to marry me! I must have him. I can't do without him. He's the sort of man I long for. I shall go mad if I can't give myself to him altogether! I felt I should when I first saw him!' (50)

In this scene, Arabella regards Jude not as a thinking and feeling subject, but merely as an inert object which she hopes to possess—a means of fulfilling certain desires rather than an end in himself. For this reason, she cares little whether he marries her willingly or not—all that matters to her is the eventual outcome rather than the underlying intentions and beliefs which produced this. Thus whereas Jude projects a form of ejective interiority onto his wife—which he mistakenly believes demonstrates their inherent similarity—Arabella is either unwilling or unable to even admit that her husband might possess a mind at all. This underlying incapacity manifests itself in the way in which she carelessly disposes of Jude's photograph. While browsing broker's shop in Alfredston one day, Jude finds out—

¹¹ In a fascinating reading of the relationship between evolution and the idea of sympathy in Hardy's fiction, Caroline Sumpter observes that Arabella's inability to enter into the thoughts and feelings of her husband seems to reveal a lower or bestial selfishness in her character—which is at odds with the higher humanistic impulse that motivate Jude: "[Whereas] Jude feels an inconvenient sympathy for Arabella that is directly at variance with his own pleasure, Arabella is untroubled by such instincts and instead follows her 'ape and tiger' promptings—and thus in her dealings with Jude has 'no more sympathy than a tigress'" (18).

in a moment indicative of their increasing estrangement — that his wife has also sold a picture of him which he gave her as a present while they were together:

The utter death of every tender sentiment in his wife, as brought home to him by this mute and undesigned evidence of her sale of his portrait, was the conclusive little stroke require to demolish all sentiment in him. He paid the shilling, took the photograph away with him, and burnt it, frame and all, when he reached his lodging. (72)

For Arabella, here, Jude's picture is merely a material object — no different than the rest of her furniture — which can be sold off when it is no longer useful. In contrast, Jude sees this image as in some sense imbued with his own personality, hence when Arabella gets rid of it she is not only throwing out a household decoration but also in a sense disposing of Jude himself. For this reason, Arabella either fails to see the portrait as containing some aspect of Jude's subjectivity — insofar as for her it is merely an inanimate object without any inherent meaning — or she simply cares so little about him that she is prepared to disregard it without a second thought. In both cases, she appears to lack the capacity — or at least the willingness — to recognise the importance of those underlying ideas and intentions which occur beneath the observable features of her husband. Thus in the same way that Arabella's false hair demonstrates the difference between objective appearance and subjective character, her treatment of his picture reveals to Jude that the capacity for

ejective reasoning is neither necessary nor innate, but varies from person to person —and even then needs to be carefully cultivated and consciously deployed.

This underlying difference in their approaches to ejective reasoning is apparent not only in their respective treatment of photographic images, but also the pig that they slaughter soon after Arabella reveals to Jude the truth about her pregnancy. Specifically, whereas Jude treats the creature as a conscious subject which is capable of both thinking and feeling pain, his wife instead sees it merely as a material object which can be disposed with entirely as she sees fit. For this reason, while Jude elects to “make short work of it” and kill the pig as quickly as possible so as to prevent unnecessary suffering, Arabella protests that the creature must be bled slowly to increase its economic value:¹²

‘You must not,’ she cried. ‘The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slowly. We shall lose a shilling a score if the meat is red and bloody! Just touch the vein, that’s all. I was brought up to it, and I know. Every good butcher keeps unbleeding long. He ought to be eight or ten minutes dying.’ (64)

In the same way that Arabella is unable to see Jude’s underlying thoughts and emotions as having intrinsic value, so too does she fail to recognise the suffering of the pig. For her, the animal is merely a material commodity and should be treated as such. Though there

¹² This sympathetic identification with the pig has in fact often been an objective of analysis within critical discussions of the novel. In particular critics have noted that this scene reflected Hardy’s own wider interest in the developing animal rights movement. For useful readings of Hardy’s relationship with the movement see Susanne Keen (190-208) and John Marks (52-59).

is an underlying logic to her argument — and in particular her pointed observation that “poor folks must live” — the way Hardy depicts the scene seems to endorse Jude’s position on the matter. In fact, while most of these events are described from a detached third person perspective, at times the authors language appears to reflect the thoughts of Jude himself. This is notably evident when he finally plunges his knife into the pig:

The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal’s cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends. (64)

Though this scene is ostensibly a disinterested depiction of what the pig thinks in its last moments, because of how closely it follows Arabella’s revelation about her pregnancy it is difficult not to get the sense that what we are seeing is — at least in part — a projection of Jude’s own feelings of betrayal. In particular, the suggestion that the creature’s final look involves a form of “eloquently keen reproach” is clearly an ejective interpretation, either on the part of the narrator or — more plausibly given the previous events — Jude himself. In response to his own sense of betrayal at the hands of Arabella, it would seem, Jude imagines that under similar circumstances the pig must also feel a similar set of emotions. Thus in contrast to Arabella, who appears incapable of seeing any form of conscious subjectivity in another organism, Jude not only attributes a set of abstract

ideas and emotions to the pig, but also comes to see himself in its position. In attending to their shared suffering, in effect, he demonstrates how ejective reasoning can be used to understand not only people, but also life forms far removed from the human.

While Jude's relationship with Arabella leads him to develop what he regards as a better understanding of human nature, his struggles with ejective reasoning nonetheless continue after they have separated — particularly in his relationship with his cousin Sue Brideshead. In many respects, Jude has at least as much difficulty in attempting to discern Sue's subjective ideas from her objective actions as he did with Arabella, though for very different reasons. Whereas Arabella often intentionally misleads her husband, Jude seems instead to misinterpret his cousin because of his own idealised projections. When he first leaves for Christminster, for instance, Jude asks his aunt for a photograph which he sees of Sue — whom he has never met — because the image produced "a quickening ingredient in his latent intent of following his friend the schoolmaster thither" (78). For reasons that he cannot fully articulate, Jude attributes a human personality to the image itself — which he regards as an embodiment of the ideal of Christminster itself:

Jude, a ridiculously affectionate fellow, put the photograph on the mantelpiece, kissed it — he did not know why — and felt more at home. She seemed to look down and preside over his tea. It was cheering — the thing uniting him to the emotions of the living city. (85)

In contrast to Arabella — who refuses to attribute any form of subjective interiority to his photograph — Jude not only “ejects” a set of human properties onto an image of someone he does not know, but imagines them as the perfect reflection of his own abstract hopes and desire for intellectual improvement. If Arabella regards Jude merely as a material object, in this sense, Jude treats Sue as a disembodied concept. She is for him a projection rather than a person. This idealised relationship is especially apparent when the two first come into contact with one another. Soon after learning of his cousin’s whereabouts, Jude secretly observes her at work in an ecclesiastical warehouse in Christminster:

He kept watch over her, and liked to feel she was there. The consciousness of her living presence stimulated him. But she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams. [Then] all of a sudden, his cousin stood close to his elbow, pausing a moment on the bend of her foot.... She looked right into his face with liquid, untranslatable eyes, that combined, or seemed to him to combine, keenness with tenderness, and mystery with both, their expression, as well as that of her lips, taking its life from some words just spoken to a companion. (89)

Despite having observed his cousin in person, Hardy suggests, Jude continues to treat her as an imaginary abstraction — onto whose form he projects certain ideas and fantasies. He is content, in Romanes’ terms, for her to remain a subjective reflection of himself rather than an ejective entity in her own right. For this reason, when they finally meet face-to-

face, Jude is unable to discern anything of her underlying personality — which for him appears unknowable or at least untranslatable. Even what little Jude thinks he can deduce about Sue from their brief meeting — such as her “keenness” and “tenderness” — is merely what “seems to him” to be the case, not a reflection of her actual characteristics. In this sense, both Jude himself and also implicitly the reader is left in a position of radical ejective nescience concerning Sue, trying — and often failing — to infer her thoughts and feelings from the limited evidence available from her observable features.

Though Jude’s consistent misunderstanding of Sue stems in part from his idealised conception of his cousin, there are also additional reasons for this failure of ejective reasoning. In particular, Hardy repeatedly calls attention to the seeming unpredictability and inconsistency of her behaviour, and the way in which this prevents those around Sue from understanding her mind. Despite her evident attraction to Jude and his feelings for her, for instance, Sue elects to marry his old schoolmaster Phillotson — a man for whom she has no strong feelings. Yet soon after they are wedded, Sue goes so far as to leap out of a window to escape her husband — apparently out of fear of having to touch him — and returns to Jude. This erratic series of events leaves Jude at a loss as to how he should regard the behaviour of his cousin:

How could Sue have had the temerity to ask him to do it — a cruelty possibly to herself as well as to him. Women were different from men in such matters. Was it that they were, instead of more sensitive, as reputed, more callous, and less romantic; or were they more heroic? Or was Sue simply so perverse that she

willfully gave herself and him pain for the odd and mournful luxury of practicing long-suffering in her own person, and of being touched with tender pity for him at having made him practice it? (174-175)

What prevents Jude from properly understanding Sue's motivations in this scene—as evident in the proliferation of questions—is not so much that he idealises her, but that he is unable to account for her behaviour within any framework which makes sense to him. Her actions, he suggests, are “ridiculously inconsistent,” leading to him to conclude that Sue must be merely a “flirt” who enjoys playing with his emotions. In contrast to Arabella, however, who intentionally manipulates Jude for her own purposes, Sue appears at times not to comprehend her own motivations. Phillotson himself observes this lack of self-understanding, particularly in her interactions with Jude. “Her exact feeling for him,” he observes, “is a riddle to me—and to him too, I think—and possibly to herself” (229). For Phillotson, Sue's emotions are unaccountable precisely because even she cannot fully comprehend the logic behind them. Indeed, Sue herself at times seems to recognise that her impulses and desires are not within her own control, and for this reason cannot be easily understood within conventional models of human behaviour:

The social moulds that civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman

tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies.

(205)

Whereas Jude initially attempts to understand his cousin through reference to certain received character types—in this case labelling her a “flirt”—Sue rejects the basic premise behind his assumption. Her actions, she argues, come not from a logical set of identifiable intentions, but from often arbitrary and idiosyncratic impulses. In this sense, she does not act upon her own desires, but rather her desires act upon her—a fact which appears to prevent Jude from entering into her mind. Without some form of stable subjectivity to interpret, it would seem, ejective reasoning becomes all but impossible.

Nonetheless, while Sue’s lack of self-knowledge is a significant impediment to her relationship with Jude, they do eventually come to a form of mutual understanding. This happens not only because the two become increasingly familiar with one another, but also because they learn to set aside their preconceived notions regarding the particular “types” of human behaviour. Thus instead of treating Sue as either a dutiful wife or a devious flirt, Jude recognises in her a singular desire to escape her current life. Even when Sue is still married to Phillotson and protesting her happiness, for instance, Jude is able to ejectively grasp her personal turmoil:

There was something in her face which belied her latest assuring words, so strictly proper and so lifelessly spoken that they might have been taken from a list of speeches in “The Wife’s Guide to Conduct.” Jude knew every vibration in Sue’s

voice, could read every symptom of her mental condition; and he was convinced that she was unhappy, although she had not been a month married. (189)

In this scene, Jude is able to see through the conventional attitude that Sue adopts toward marriage, and deduce something of her underlying yearnings and desires. Though he remains bewildered as to the logic behind her actions, he is at least able to grasp the fact that she is suffering. Part of the reason for this ability to read her emotional state is that Jude himself is also racked by an intense desire to escape the traditional bonds of marriage which senselessly tie him to Arabella. When Sue reveals how she jumped out of a window to avoid Phillotson, for instance, Jude begins to see a little of himself in her position, and in doing so briefly glimpses her tortured feelings at that particular moment. "It was true that [Jude] did not understand her feeling very well," Hardy observes, "but he did a little; and began to love her none the less" (243). Through attending not to her overt reasons but her underlying emotions, Jude begins to recognise the affective similarities between Sue's reaction to an empty marriage and his own response to Arabella. In time, this sympathetic relationship helps them develop the capacity to read the thoughts of one another with relative ease. While walking in the market with Sue one day, Jude thus reflects on their emotional and intellectual connection:

In his light grey holiday-suit, Jude was really proud of her companionship, not more for her external attractiveness than for her sympathetic words and ways. That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was

as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole. (292)

What allows Jude to finally understand his wife, Hardy suggests here, is a willingness to sympathetically engage with him — which in turn seems to elicit a corresponding form of emotional responsiveness within Jude himself. Through recognising and acting upon the affective connection between them, in effect, both characters develop an instinctive sense of ejective understanding, which allows them to easily interpret the thoughts and feelings of one another. In this sense, their shared emotional reactions to traumatic events become the basis on which to build a language of their own, through which they can speak to each other without ever actually having to say anything in words.

Perhaps the clearest instance of the way in which Sue and Jude bond through their similar responses to pain occurs when Jude comes upon a small rabbit which has been caught in a hunting trap outside of his bedroom window. Upon hearing the desperate cries of the animal, Jude begins to ejectively imagine its torment — leading him to leave his lodgings and end its misery:

He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a 'bad catch' by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-sprunged instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the fields from the mortification of

the limb. If it were a 'good catch,' namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken, and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape. (213)

In a sense similar to his previous relationship with the pig, Jude seems to identify here with the rabbit at least in part because of their shared sense of helpless suffering. Both he and the creature which he hears outside are caught in man-made traps—marriage and the steel snare respectively—which torture them in life and can only be escaped through their own death. Though Hardy notes that even in his youth Jude had sought to protect living beings from harm, the fact that their fates seem so similar adds a further poignancy to the scene, and underscores the way in which ejective reasoning is often mediated through a form of situational connection. In fact, not only does Jude's identification with the rabbit allow him to better appreciate its underlying thoughts and feelings, but it also brings him closer to Sue. This is particularly apparent when Sue herself also comes outside to end the rabbit's torment, and especially when she reveals her motivations to Jude:¹³

'I haven't been able to sleep at all, and then I heard the rabbit, and couldn't help thinking of what it suffered, till I felt I must come down and kill it! But I am so glad you got there first... They ought not be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!' (214)

¹³ Elisha Cohn observes that the way in which people react to the suffering of animals in fact often functions in Hardy's work as a means of defining personality and identifying similarity. "Both affinities and encounters with animals," she argues, "mark the status of character and consciousness in Hardy's narrative" (163).

In setting out to prevent the rabbit from suffering further here, Sue not only demonstrates her own capacity for ejective engagement with non-human life forms, but in doing so also reveals her emotional similarity to Jude. For both of them — and in contrast to Arabella — animals are not merely material objects, but instead thinking and feeling subjects, which have an interior life similar to that of human beings. In this sense, the rabbit itself functions as a kind of ejective touchpoint in their relationship, insofar as it elicits the same responses in both characters and thus allows them to better understand one another. Whereas their differing ideas and beliefs initially separates them, in effect, their similar reactions to pain in non-human life forms helps them solidify their relationship. Ejective identification with nature, in this schema, thus provides an important form of emotional connection.

However, while Jude and Sue's capacity to empathise with natural phenomenon brings them together, nature itself seems entirely unconcerned with the feelings of either character — a fact that soon drives them apart. Beginning with Jude's reflections as a child on the cruelty of "nature's logic" — which demands that he scare away local birds and deprive them of food in order to protect the farmer's field — Hardy in fact repeatedly calls attention to the indifference of nature toward human concerns. This is detachment is particularly evident in his depiction of Arabella's illegitimate child, whom Jude and Sue simply refer to as "Little Father Time" because of his prematurely aged personality and features. When they first meet the child, for instance, they immediately notice his apathy toward the particularities of human life:

He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through the crevices. A ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to life the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of time, and appeared not to care about what it saw. He then seemed to be doubly awake, like an enslaved and dwarfed Divinity, sitting passive and regarding his companions as if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures. (276)

In describing Father Time, here, Hardy suggests that his personality is not that of a young child, but rather some natural phenomenon which has occurred since the beginning of recorded history. Instead of seeing life from a particular perspective, therefore, he adopts the impartial viewpoint of nature itself—and in doing so seems uninterested in specific people and events, insofar as they are simply too small and fleeting to be important within the larger scheme of things. This apparent lack of interest in everyday life in fact becomes even more evident when Father Time is brought back to the Fawley home, where he enters an almost trance-like state of detachment from the details of material reality:

The child fell into a steady mechanical creep which had an impersonal quality—like the movement of the wave, or of the breeze, or of the cloud. He followed his directions literally, without an inquiring gaze at anything. It could have been seen that the boy's ideas of life were different from those of the local boys. Children begin with detail, and learn up to the general; they begin with the contiguous, and

gradually comprehend the universal. The boy seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particulars. To him the houses, the willows, and obscure fields beyond, were apparently regarded not as brick residences, pollards, meadows; but as human dwellings in the abstract, vegetation, and the wide dark world. (277-278)

In a sense similar to nature itself, Father Time here appears almost entirely indifferent to the occurrence of particular phenomena. What matters for him is not the specific object, but instead the abstract category of which it is a member. In contrast to ejective reasoning, which emphasises the need for detailed attention to individual organisms, Father Time thus embraces a logic of objective disinterest, which is predicated upon regarding all life forms—whether human or non-human—with a sense of impersonal detachment.

Though his apparent inability to engage in ejective thinking initially seems to be merely a character quirk, the indifference of Father Time—and implicitly nature itself—toward human life also has tragic and far-reaching consequences for Sue and Jude. In particular, this detached attitude toward human life leads Father Time to devalue the importance of individual personhood. In response to the harsh reflections of his mother upon the Darwinian “law of nature,” which produces of more offspring than can survive and then sets them against one another in a struggle for survival—he thus comes to the conclusion that surplus members of the population—including himself—should be killed off so that the rest of them can live better lives. Hence he tells Sue:

'What makes it worse with me is that you are not my real mother, and you needn't have had me unless you liked. I oughtn't to have come to 'ee — that's the real truth! I troubled 'em in Australia, and I trouble folk here. I wish I hadn't been born.... I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about.' (333)

In this scene, Father Time depicts human beings as material objects rather than conscious subjects, and for this reason sees them as beholden to the same brutal logic of evolutionary necessity that underpins the rest of the universe.¹⁴ Having embraced this merciless ideal, Father Time then adopts the role of nature itself, killing what he regards as unnecessary organisms such as himself and his younger siblings. Despite the horrific nature of what he does, however, Hardy is careful to underscore the objective rationality of his behavior. In the note he leaves before hanging the children, Father Time thus tries to articulate the impersonal reasons for the murder — which he claims was simply “Done because we are too menny” (336). Though critics have suggested various possible interpretations for this scene, what is important in the context of debates about objectivity is the way that he eschews any form of subjective interiority or ejective consideration of his victims. Not only

¹⁴ In her detailed analysis of Hardy's work in relation to cosmological metaphors, Pamela Gossin observes that Little Father Time himself is often identified with the celestial structure of nature as a whole — in a way that is similar to the reflections of both Romanes and Hardy on the impersonal will of the universe: “When Sue gives up her intellectual ideals to become a mother to Little Father Time she believes she has found something more profound than intellectual stars to care about, [for as she puts it] there is more for us to think about in that one little hungry heart than all the stars in the sky” (222).

does his behavior reflect the abstract rationality of nature rather than an act of personal animosity, but even the formal structure of the note itself seems to suggest an absence of intention—insofar as it fails to identify a grammatical subject.¹⁵ For this reason, the deed appears to have been “done” not by a particular individual, but the impersonal will of the universe as a whole. Though Sue is devastated by the death of her children, she too in fact adopts this interpretation of the tragedy:

In the days when her intellect scintillated like a star, [she imagined] that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of terrestrial conditions there had never been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. But affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous; and those ideas were exchanged for a sense of Jude and herself as fleeing from a persecutor. (342)

For Sue, here, nature appears to be both a blind and impartial force, yet also a conscious entity which seems to will the horrific events which befall her. Though she recognises that in objective terms life as a whole is indifferent to her suffering, the pain she feels leads her to ejectively project a form of intentionality onto the patterns of brute matter. In a sense

¹⁵ Emily Steinlight has rightly called attention to the fact that the unusual grammar of this note encapsulates the wider sense of impersonal motivation which permeates the novel: “Father Time’s strange agency attests that there are forces at work in fiction that override individual intention or, at times, are enacted through what are felt to be conscious choices, [for] the violent deed is simply marked as ‘done,’ with no subject attached to the bare participle” (207).

similar to Romanes, Sue thus imagines the universe as capable of thought, but at the same time incapable of caring for the fate of individuals. In this sense, while Sue treats nature as a conscious eject, nature itself can only ever regard her as a material object, without any inherent meaning or value within the larger span of natural history.

4.4 Conclusion: Ejective Forms of Life

Throughout his writing, in this sense, Hardy repeatedly called attention to what he regarded as the failure of objective approaches to knowledge. Though detached forms of thought were useful in everyday life, he suggested, they were incapable of providing insight into the underlying ideas and beliefs that motivated particular organisms. For him, this limitation meant that objective methodologies risked adopting a one-sided view of life that was not only incomplete, but also—as in the case of Arabella and Father Time—could lead to devastating ethical failures. To correct this bias, Hardy followed Romanes in emphasising the importance of ejective reasoning. In particular, he noted that society could only improve if participants learned how to recognise the pain and suffering of their fellow man. In a letter to his wife Florence, for instance, he argued:

Altruism, or the Golden Rule, or whatever ‘Love your Neighbour as Yourself’ may be called, will ultimately be brought about, I think, by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind may be, and possibly will be, viewed as members of one corporeal frame. (294)

Through learning to deduce the thoughts and feelings of someone else, Hardy suggested, observers could cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for one another, and hence begin to overcome the differences between them. In this sense, while being able to understand the mind of another organism did not necessarily lead to better behaviour, it did at least allow people to widen their philosophical perspective, which he hoped would eventually encourage them to adopt a more inclusive ethical view. For Hardy, in fact, part of the function of literature itself was to help readers come to precisely this broader ethical understanding. In a 1901 interview with his friend William Archer, he thus asked:

What are my books but a plea against “man’s inhumanity to man” — to woman— and to the lower animals? Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remedial evils, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good. (70)

In contrast to critics who argued that his work was inherently pessimistic, Hardy himself claimed that he was a “meliorist,” and regarded his writing as an attempt to help people reduce the violence inherent in nature. Through reading his novels, he hoped, people would develop the capacity to enter into the thoughts of another person, and thereby come to treat them with a measure of kindness. Thus while nature as a whole was largely indifferent to the plight of particular individuals, Hardy observed, fictional depictions of

these individuals would allow his audience to overcome their own disinterest, and in doing so learn how to make the universe a slightly more bearable place.

In many respects, Hardy argued, literature was in fact better able to teach readers how to enter into the mind of another person than any philosophical treatise. Though authors such as Clifford and Romanes could attempt to rationally convince people that ejective reasoning was important, he noted, they could not make them emotionally feel its underlying necessity. Thus it was only through embodying this ideal in narrative form, for him, that audiences could readily grasp the truth of the matter. In his 1888 essay on the “Profitable Reading of Fiction,” for instance, Hardy argue that:

Representation is less susceptible to error than disquisition; depending as it does upon intuitive conviction, and not upon logical reasoning, it is not likely to lend itself to sophistry. If endowed with ordinary intelligence, the reader can discern, in delineative art claiming to be natural, any stroke at variance with nature, which, in the form of moral essay, *pensée*, or epigram, may be so wrapped up as to escape him. (114)

Whereas the meaning and truth of a piece of discursive writing was often difficult to discern—and sometimes required careful thought to decipher—Hardy held that literary fiction could be understood and validated almost immediately. Precisely because most readers were intimately familiar with how ordinary people behaved, they were able to easily perceive the plausibility of a fictional depictions, or else reject it as inconsistent with

their own experiences. Instead of attempting to convince his readership of need for ejective reasoning with “excursions into various philosophies,” therefore, Hardy sought to articulate this same sentiment by means of what he called “narrative proper.” To do so, however, his writing had to adopt a “realist” approach toward his subject matter, which at least in part involved reflecting the outward details of human behavior. Even beyond his own views, Hardy claimed, authors had an obligation to depict the truth of nature so that audiences could decide for themselves how to respond:

There is a higher characteristic of philosophy than pessimism, or than meliorism, or even than the optimism of critics— which is truth. Existence is either ordered in a certain way, or it is not so ordered, and conjectures which harmonize best with experience are removed above all comparison with other conjectures which do not so harmonize. So that to say one view is worse than other views without proving it erroneous implies the possibility of a false view being better or more expedient than a true view. (49)

If readers were to accept his depiction of the nature, Hardy argued, the image he created would have to ring “true” for them. Thus while the content of his novels often tended to emphasise the importance of ejective reasoning, he also recognised that the form of his writing needed—at least on some level—to capture a verisimilar reflection of objective reality. Whereas avowedly romantic or “imaginative” literature could indulge in flights

of fancy, in this sense, books such as his — which sought to educate the reader — had to be capable of capturing the circumstances of life as they appeared to the average person.

This did not mean, however, that novels were merely a photographic capture of outward details. Far from it in fact. For Hardy, the best works aspired to depict not merely the objective appearance of reality, but also the subjective thoughts of characters. In his view, this was the true form of realism, which most of his fellow writers had overlooked:

The modern English realist has confused the issues of his business; he thinks if he is objectively 'actual,' laboriously detailed in outside observation, a photographer of the slum, he has exhausted the possibilities of his method. But the truer realism is subjective. It deals with emotions, with sensation half-realised & misinterpreted; it shows the mind of man moving to spiritual crisis, not the external aspects of only his struggle toward existence. (121)

Instead of simply presenting the ugly and material "facts" of everyday life, Hardy noted, realist authors ought to go beyond these confines and represent the way in which people actually experience this reality. Doing so, in his view, involved not so much dispensing with descriptions of objective fact — which for him were necessary to establish narrative plausibility — but through supplementing this perspective with ejective depictions of the mental "crises" that his characters faced. Though subjective interpretations of the mind of another person were difficult, insofar as they necessarily involved a form of projection, Hardy noted that novel writing itself in fact always involved some degree of subjective

interpretation. While the author could attempt to restrain their beliefs as much as possible, in keeping with the dictates of strict objective realism, in truth the content of literary fiction was never anything but a reflection of the authors own views. Thus as Hardy put it:

However they may differ, characters express mainly the author, his largeness of heart or otherwise, his culture, his insight, and very little of any other living being, except in such an inferior kind of procedure as might occasionally be applied to dialogue, and would take the narrative out of the category of fiction; i.e. verbatim reporting without selective judgement. (“Profitable Reading” 124)

Though writers might draw inspiration or material from objective experiences, he pointed out, in the end what the reader encountered was nothing more or less than a subjective “impression” of the way the author understood different people. In this sense, literature provided both an imaginary window into the mind of various fictional characters, and also a very real glimpse at the thoughts of the author. For Hardy, therefore, the capacity of audiences of engage in ejective reasoning was not only something that writers could strive to encourage through the form and content of their work, but also an inherent characteristic—whether intentional or not—of all literary fiction.

5. Conclusion: Languages of Objectivity

In the 1856 second edition of his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, the journalist and essayist Thomas de Quincey reflected on the startling way in which the language of objectivity had spread within everyday discourse since the first edition of his influential autobiography was published in 1821. Though the term itself had been occasionally used among idealist philosophers and abstract metaphysicians in the past, de Quincey noted that in the intervening period it had become so widespread as to need no introduction or definition when deployed within either science or aesthetics:

This word, so unintelligible in 1821, so intensely abstract, and, consequently when, surrounded by familiar and vernacular words, so apparently pedantic, yet, on the other hand, so indispensable to accurate thinking, and to wide thinking, has since 1821 become too common to need an apology. (290)

Whereas when his book first came out the idea of objectivity was so unusual and technical as to demand some sort of clarification, de Quincey observed that the word had become so familiar that readers could instantly understand what was meant when he referred to the objective conditions that accompanied his subjective ideas and beliefs. In many respects, this dissertation has been an attempt to consider precisely this monumental discursive evolution in the concept of objectivity. Through reading a variety of scientific treatises in relation to a set of Victorian novels and poems, I have sought to chart the ways in which

philosophy and aesthetics came together to disseminate the language of objectivity within ordinary life. In both of these cases, I suggest, objective forms of thought were often less self-evident and more contested than many critics have so far recognised. Specifically, I have argued that the idea of objectivity was never entirely detached from subjectivity—which was not only an unavoidable part of embodied perception but also in many ways provided a rationale for its epistemic necessity. In his 1852 “Introduction” to a spurious set of letters purporting to be from Percy Shelley, for instance, Robert Browning argued that—at least as far as poetry was concerned—both subjective and objective approaches to knowledge had an important place within aesthetics:

[Though] the objective poet, in his appeal to the aggregate human mind, chooses to deal with the doings of men, the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute divine mind, prefers to dwell on those scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly his inner light. (40).

In this conception, Browning suggested that both objective and subjective approaches to poetry were valid forms of self-articulation. While particular authors and readers might prefer one of these ideals over the other, he argued, this was merely a matter of individual inclination rather than any form of necessary or intrinsic value. For him, in this respect, both perspectives were crucial in order to capture the wider variety of human perception, and to avoid falling into a partial or limited point of view of different phenomena.

In many ways, Victorian scientists and authors not only embraced the language of objectivity in their work, but in doing so also sought to encourage readers to adopt the epistemic ideals associated with this discourse. This meant inspiring their audiences to reflect on their own beliefs and biases and to restrain them whenever possible. Though philosophical treatises were useful for reaching educated and intellectual interlocutors, I argue that the burden of cultivating this form of epistemic restraint — whether individual or collective — largely fell on writers. Part of the reason for this was not only that fiction itself was better able to reach a wider audience of everyday people, but also that aesthetic objects could model the successes and failures of different approaches to knowledge in an intelligible narrative form. In his 1888 article on the “Profitable Reading of Fiction,” Hardy thus pointed out that the important function of literature was its ability to move people not only to rational assent but also emotional investment and belief:

Deductions from what [fictional] works exemplify by action that bears evidence of being a counterpart of life, [have] a distinct educational value, [for] they have the force of an appeal to the emotional reason rather than to the logical reason — and by their emotions men are acted upon, and act upon others. (115).

While philosophical discourses and articles could suggest the abstract value of particular approaches to knowledge, Hardy argues, novels and poems were able to demonstrate the emotional importance of these approaches in everyday life. Through modelling both the uses and also difficulties of different epistemologies, he suggested, authors could begin to

cultivate in their readers an affective attachment to the idea of objectivity which was much more persuasive than any argument. In this sense, I suggest, what led to the widespread embrace of objective ideals throughout Victorian society was not merely the influence of the natural sciences, but also the complementary – if at times divergent – work of those various poets and novelists considered over the course of this dissertation. In fact, while the most obvious characteristics associated with objective thinking – from the studious emphasis on self-restraint to the rigid attention to the outward form of sensation – soon began to wane with the emergence of Modernist introspection, the language itself lived on in many different ways. In his 1919 article on “Hamlet and His Problems,” for instance, T.S. Eliot famously argued that all aesthetic production necessarily involved an attempt to find an “objective correlative” for subjective ideas – so as to render them intelligible to a wider audience who did not share the author’s particular point of view:

For the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative, or in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensation, are given, the emotion is evoked. (125)

In contrast to what he regarded as the excessive self-reflection which often characterised the work of many of his peers, Eliot argued that meaningful aesthetic form could only be achieved through providing a shared objective referent – which caused the same feeling in readers that it did in the writer. Through adopting this approach, he thus attempted to

retain an older conceptual language but at the same time also to make it new. In this sense, while objective forms of thought had begun decline from their prior levels of dominance, by the end of the Victorian period—and through the influence of a wide variety of not only scientists and philosophers but also poets and novelists—the language of objective had well and truly become an ineluctable part of the fabric of everyday life.

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