

CHAPTER 3

*Objectivity**Alice Crary*

One of the core philosophical uses of the term “objectivity” today is to talk about a central and quite helpful metaphysical ideal. The term is employed to pick out aspects of what the world is like in itself or, to put it somewhat more expansively, aspects of the world that are there in the sense that any thinker—without regard to, say, her cultural or historical situation or idiosyncrasies of her temperament—who fails to register them can be said to be missing something. We might speak in this connection of a guiding *concept* of objectivity, and, once this concept has been isolated, it is possible to ask what can be said about the nature of the things that fall under it. We might speak in this further connection of different possible specifications of the concept of objectivity or, alternately, of different possible *conceptions* of objectivity. Throughout the history of analytic philosophy, thought about objectivity—where this is taken to include implicit invocations of the ideal as well as explicit treatments of it—has been dominated by a conception on which objectivity is taken to have as its hallmark the exclusion of everything subjective and on which it is thus construed as “the countering of subjectivity” (Daston and Galison 2007, 36). Starting from a description of the relevant conception of objectivity, this chapter presents and criticizes the kinds of considerations most commonly adduced in the conception’s favor. Along the way, the chapter uses passages from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein as its main reference points. A notable virtue of this method is that it sheds light on the transformative significance of Wittgenstein’s thought for how we construe the concept of objectivity.

To capture the content of a dominant conception of objectivity on which the exclusion of everything subjective is taken to be objectivity’s touchstone, it’s necessary to say something about the understanding of “subjectivity” that is at issue. Very generally, the kinds of qualities that here get debarred from objectivity on grounds of their subjective status are qualities that can’t adequately be characterized without reference to

responses that objects that possess them elicit from subjects. The class of qualities that count as subjective in this sense is internally diverse. It includes, among other things, qualities that an object can be said to possess merely insofar as it in fact elicits certain responses from a subject (for example, the amusing quality that a sudden inadvertent movement of mine can be said to have just because a young child watching me responds to it with amusement). The exclusion from objectivity of such “merely subjective” qualities is not itself of great philosophical moment (for the use of this phrase, see Conant 2006, 16; Crary 2002b; 2007, 17–18; and 2016, 33). But the set of qualities that are subjective in the above sense also includes qualities an object possesses insofar as it is the kind of thing that, in an appropriate setting, would elicit a certain response from a subject. Sensible (or secondary) qualities such as colors are frequently mentioned members of this additional subset of subjective qualities, and it is not hard to see that such qualities are indeed conceptually bound to human sensory capacities. For to be—say—green, just is to be the kind of thing that, in suitable circumstances, would appear green to a requisitely endowed human viewer. This set of more substantial subjective qualities includes, in addition to sensible things, an array of affective qualities such as “humorous” or “annoying.” We can take a first stab at specifying the conception of objectivity that prevails in analytic circles by saying that it is distinguished by the expulsion of all qualities that are subjective in the sense specified in this paragraph—and not only the “merely subjective”—from the realm of the objective.

Although many philosophers are content to simply take this conception of objectivity for granted, some of those who favor it draw explicit attention to this fact. For a couple of classic treatments of the pertinent rendering of the concept of objectivity, we can turn to the writings of Thomas Nagel and Bernard Williams. Both thinkers set out to evoke what Nagel calls the “opposition between subjective and objective points of view” (Nagel 1979, 196), and both construe what they take to be objectivity’s hostility to subjectivity as extending beyond the merely subjective. Nagel defends an account of the objective world on which none of its properties are “perceptual aspects” (Nagel 1986, 14), explaining that, as he sees it, this is because to have these aspects is just to look a certain way to “normal human observers in the perceptual circumstances that normally obtain in the actual world” (Nagel 1986, 75). Similarly, Williams tells us that he takes sensibles to be excluded from objectivity because they are at bottom “effects on our minds of the objectively existing differences of shape and motion” (Williams 1978, 237; see also 1985, 139). Additionally,

Nagel and Williams make it clear that they take the objective ban on subjective qualities to apply not only to sensibles but also to affective qualities like “humorous” (see, for instance, Nagel 1979, 206 and Williams 1978, 243). Both philosophers in this way offer explicit—and sympathetic—accounts of the prevailing conception of objectivity.

Sympathy for this conception will seem unremarkable as long as there appears to be no alternative, and it may well appear that no alternative is available. What can create this appearance is the in-itself unobjectionable idea that objectivity and subjectivity are conceptual opposites. It would, however, be wrong—a mere bit of terminological sleight of hand—to think that this idea obliges us to construe the objective arena as bereft of all traces of things subject-related. It is certainly possible to use “subjective” to mean “non-objective.” But in order to describe the content of the leading philosophical conception of objectivity that is here in question, it is—we saw a moment ago—necessary to take “subjective” to mean not “non-objective” but rather something like “conceivable only in terms of effects on subjects.” Granted an understanding of subjective qualities as qualities that are in this sense “subject-dependent” (Conant 2006, 17), and granted a received understanding of objective qualities as qualities that inhere in the world as it is in itself, there is no obstacle to taking seriously the possibility of a conception of objectivity on which some subjective qualities count as wholeheartedly objective.¹ This alternative conception would eliminate the interdiction on subjective qualities distinctive of its philosophically more influential counterpart, and it would thus hold forth the prospect of bringing some subjective elements within the objective domain—and of thereby expanding or “widening” this domain. We might for this reason helpfully refer to the envisioned nonstandard conception of objectivity as “the wider conception of objectivity,” and, by the same token, we might well refer to the philosophically more standard conception that it challenges as “the narrower conception of objectivity” (for the use of this monicker elsewhere, see Crary 2007, 18–19 and 2016, 34–5).

The contest between narrower and wider conceptions of objectivity is a philosophically momentous one. Although the narrower conception is often taken to be recommended by reflection on the development of the natural sciences, its influence extends beyond philosophy of science to a comprehensive array of philosophical subdisciplines. Consider, in very

¹ For a particularly clear and insightful attempt to show that this possibility, of a conception of objectivity on which some subjective qualities count as wholeheartedly objective, is in principle available, see Wiggins 1987/2002, chapter 5, esp. 201–2.

schematic terms, how a “narrower” approach to construing the concept of objectivity shapes the conceptual space in which—for instance—research in ethics is conducted. Insofar as the narrower conception excludes all subject-dependent qualities from objectivity, it seems to compel us to regard all values as non-objective, so it is fair to speak of the conception’s “imprint on ethics” in reference to the clear tendency of moral philosophers to take as a starting point for their investigations an assumption to the effect that ethical values are not among the objective furniture of the universe. Ethics, moreover, is but one case among others. Broadening our conception of objectivity would have transformative implications for inquiry in many areas of philosophy. So, there are good reasons to carefully examine considerations that are traditionally adduced in the narrower conception’s favor.

The centerpiece of established arguments for the narrower conception of objectivity is a proposal for distilling reality from appearance. At the most basic level, the idea is that we arrive at an increasingly accurate image of how the world really is by eliminating appearances it presents to us merely in virtue of the fact that we survey it from particular standpoints. This idea has a quite straightforward bearing on the literal—spatial—notion of a point of view or perspective. The literal notion of a perspective is that of a “line of sight on an object . . . when viewed from a particular angle” (Conant 2005, 14), and it belongs to this notion that it is the sort of thing that we must in a way transcend to arrive at an accurate account of the spatial properties of an object. “Transcending” a perspective in the sense that is relevant here involves, in the words of James Conant, placing it in “a *matrix* of alternative perspectives [in a manner that allows] us to *correct* for distortions and achieve a *true estimation* of the spatial properties and relationships of an object (or set of objects)” (Conant 2005, 15, emphasis in the original; for a similar observation, see McDowell 1983, 5–6). Within the proposal for separating reality from appearance that is under consideration, our perceptual and affective resources are effectively treated as resembling literal perspectives in being sources of appearance that must be transcended if we’re to see things aright. To be sure, many of the distinctive features of spatial perspectives drop out. There is, for instance, no longer any question of a form of transcendence in which we arrive at a more accurate vision of things by situating a single line of sight in a larger network by appeal to recognized laws. We are dealing with what is aptly seen as a “metaphorical extension” of the literal notion of perspective (for the use of this expression, see Conant 2005, 17 and McDowell 1983, 6), and this extension or leap is asked to bear substantial philosophical weight. For

the guiding thought of this strategy for distinguishing reality and appearance is that it is only insofar as we abstract from or transcend our perceptual and affective constitutions that we are justified in crediting ourselves with an accurate image of how things really are. Reasoning along these lines, Nagel, for example, claims that approaching an unobstructed view of the world requires an exercise of “abstraction” away from “the forms of perception and action characteristic of humans” (Nagel 1979, 206); similarly, Williams suggests that, in our effort to bring the real world clearly into focus, we need “to step back from [those] peculiarities of our constitution” relating to color perception, tastes, and interests (Williams 1978, 242–3).

It is a short step from issuing these sorts of calls for abstraction from our subjective endowments to endorsing the narrower conception of objectivity. Insofar as, in trying to get the world in view, we endeavor to step back as far as possible from our subjective makeups, we put ourselves in a position of trying to evacuate from our account of reality all subject-dependent qualities. An initially attractive image of how to distinguish reality and appearance in this way seems to speak for eliminating everything subjective from the fabric of the world or—what amounts to the same—for embracing the narrower conception of objectivity.

The key move in this argument for the narrower conception is the introduction of a requirement to abstract as far as possible from our subjective endowments. But a loose analogy, of the sort described above, between these endowments and literal perspectives provides at best very weak support for such an “abstraction requirement” (for employment of this term elsewhere, see Crary 2007, 21 and 2016, 44). If we are to evaluate the credentials of a “narrower” approach to the concept of objectivity, we need to ask whether we are justified in imposing the requirement.

It might at first blush seem possible to show that we are justified in doing so by identifying discursive resources that are free of any tinge of subjectivity and that thus satisfy the requirement. It might seem as though such resources would supply us with a standpoint that is free of and hence external to everything subjective and that thus positions us to determine not only that our subjective endowments are irredeemably distorting but that we are right to regard our interest in objectivity as compelling us to abstract from them. But this approach to defending the idea of an abstraction requirement, however apparently promising, fails to deliver. The idea that, as Williams dismissively puts it, “not all concepts [are] ours” (1978, 244) may seem like a bit of philosophical fantasy, and there is good reason to think that we are in fact trafficking in mere fantasy here.

A core stretch of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* provides support for this conclusion. The passages in question, which are sometimes said to contain Wittgenstein's "rule-following considerations," explore the idea of an ideally abstract conceptual practice where it may seem most plausible, namely, in reference to practices of extending simple mathematical series. Wittgenstein works toward deflating an image of basic mathematical operations as wholly abstract by first encouraging us to do our utmost to breathe life into such an image. He invites us to envision producing the terms of a simple mathematical series in a style that qualifies as suitably abstract in that it is not essentially informed by any of our subjective responses. We are asked to conceive the steps of the series as already—that is, independently of any contribution from our sensibilities—stretched out in front of us, so that we encounter the series' projection in the guise of, to use Wittgenstein's iconic imagery, a rail "laid to infinity" (PI §218). By thus urging us to actively grapple with the idea of abstraction in mathematics that his imagery is designed to capture, Wittgenstein's ambition is to lead us to the recognition that there is nothing we ourselves would accept as realizing this idea and that, by our own lights, the idea is hopelessly confused.

The setting for this exercise within the *Investigations* is a cluster of scenarios in which a child is taught to produce different series. In an initial scenario, the child is taught to come out with the series of natural numbers by first copying its terms (PI §143), and in a subsequent scenario the child is given various "examples and tests" until she can write the series of even natural numbers up to 1,000 (PI §185). After being presented with these episodes of instruction, we are pushed to try to construe the child's accomplishment in a style consistent with an understanding of mathematical thought as satisfying an abstraction requirement. This would mean thinking of her as having, as John McDowell puts it, "a psychological mechanism which, apart from mistakes, churns out the appropriate behavior" (McDowell 2000, 41). Thus conceived, the child's successful performance doesn't essentially reflect her sense of correctness. Generating the series is, for her, like fastening herself to a conveyer belt and letting it pull her ever further along.

An important aim of Wittgenstein's remarks in these portions of his work is to get us to see that, however strongly inclined we are to present ourselves as endorsing this picture of mathematical understanding, we have no clear idea what it would be for it to be satisfied and should hence forfeit it as bankrupt. The trouble is that, in trying to depict mathematical understanding in the wholly abstract manner in question, we deprive ourselves of resources we would need to determine that a pupil has actually

understood the rule for—to stick with the last case touched on above—the series of even natural numbers. That is, no expression the student gives of her own sense of how to proceed in accordance with the rule “add 2”—for instance, no account she gives of how she now sees past earlier errors, and no explanation she offers of how to go on from examples she has been given—can be accepted as demonstrating that she has indeed understood; since, under this rubric, her own subjective take on the matter is at best externally related to understanding. So, in attempting to ascertain whether our tutee has understood, we are restricted to appealing to her brute behavior. This is problematic because grasp of the rule for this and other series of numbers manifests itself in an indefinite amount of behavior and because at any moment we have, in McDowell’s parlance, “at most a finite fragment of the potentially infinite range of behavior which we want to say the rule dictates” (2000, 42). At no point do we have more than partial and inadequate grounds for excluding the possibility that the recipient of our instruction has failed to understand the command to count by 2s and will subsequently produce the series incorrectly. We cannot rule out the possibility that—to mention the example Wittgenstein adduces in the *Investigations*—having written out the series of even natural numbers rightly up to 1,000, she will go on to write 1,004, 1,008, 1,012 … (PI §185). The abstract constraints that we impose while seeking to determine whether a novice has grasped the rule for a mathematical series rob us of the resources we would need to make an authoritative determination. That, in compressed form, is Wittgenstein’s argument against taking even mathematical discourse to qualify as ideally abstract.

This argument is unlikely to sway thinkers who appeal to an abstraction requirement in their efforts to motivate the narrower conception of objectivity. Champions of the narrower conception generally agree with Williams in holding that our concepts are irrevocably ours, and that the quest for modes of discourse bereft of all subjective traces is therefore, in Nagel’s terms, “an unreachable ideal” (Nagel 1979, 208). What may nonetheless seem to speak for allowing a call for abstraction to play a regulative role in our world-directed thought is the conviction that—even if our discursive categories bear the indelible mark of our subjectivity—there are methods for investigating the world that are themselves wholly abstract and that accordingly justify us in believing that movement toward greater objectivity is, as such, movement toward a view of the world “that is as far as possible not the view from anywhere within it” (Nagel 1979, 206). The idea of such ideally abstract or transparent methods is typically associated with scientific inquiry (see, for instance, Williams 1978, 244

and 1985, 136–40), and, with an eye to evaluating this association, it would seem reasonable to at least ask whether research on the history of science supports the idea that transparency is a regulative ideal for scientific thought. Setting this line of inquiry aside for a moment, we may well be struck by the bald implausibility of the idea of scientific methods that don't essentially reflect views about what the world is like that are championed by scientists at a particular time and place.² What may seem to make this idea palatable is a view—central to classic empiricism and still very much alive in philosophy of perception today—to the effect that in perceptual experience we make mental contact with the world in a manner that is non-conceptual and ideally abstract. This view, which is sometimes referred to as the mark of *nonconceptualism* about perception, might seem to speak for taking abstraction to be a governing ideal for world-guided thought, and it might thus seem to speak for respecting the constraints of the narrower conception of objectivity.

Although nonconceptualist approaches to perceptual experience enjoy widespread approval, they have outspoken detractors. There are some high-profile thinkers who maintain, in opposition to nonconceptualists, that perceptual thought is conceptual all the way down (for example, Davidson 1974, McDowell 1994/6 and 2009a and Sellars 1956). The critical efforts of these *conceptualists* are by and large driven by the belief that nonconceptualists are obliged to place conflicting requirements on what perceptual experience is like. Conceptualists tend to go about showing this in something like the following manner. They start by observing that perceptual thought has the sort of normative character that permits questions about what justifies it. They also generally suggest—very plausibly but, as will emerge, not uncontroversially—that when it comes to non-inferential perceptual thought, perceptual experience is the natural candidate for this justificatory office. So, it appears to them that a reasonable starting point for a critical examination of nonconceptualist projects is a view of such experience as rationally significant. This intuitive view of perceptual experience is, according to conceptualists, a source of trouble for nonconceptualists. The difficulty has to do with the fact that nonconceptualists are committed to construing experiential inputs to perceptual thought as merely causally produced, nonconceptual contents that in themselves lack normative structure. But it is unclear how perceptual

² For criticism of Williams' endorsement of this idea (that is, the idea of scientific methods that don't essentially reflect views about what the world is like that are championed by scientists at a particular time and place), see McDowell 1983, 13 and 1986, 380. For influential general criticism of the idea, see Putnam 1981; 1990 and 2002.

experience can play the rational role in perceptual thought it appears to play and be free of the sort of normative organization that would enable it to serve in this role. That is the basic line of thought underlying conceptualists' efforts to show that nonconceptualists impose incompatible conditions on what perceptual experience is like, and—with a view to the fact that this argument targets an outlook on which experiential contributions to perceptual thought are merely causally "given"—conceptualists sometimes gloss the argument as an exposé of "the myth of the Given" (McDowell 1994/6, Sellars 1956).

Wittgenstein's later philosophy is an acknowledged source of inspiration for these critical endeavors. There are prominent portions of Wittgenstein's writings that explicitly explore an approach to our perceptual lives that qualifies as conceptualist (for example, PI §§398–401 and *PPF* xi). However, the parts of Wittgenstein's work that speak most directly against nonconceptualism are arguably found in sections of the *Investigations* addressing the topic of sensations or inner experience. A sequence of remarks in what get referred to as the book's "privacy sections" (§§243–70) are aptly taken to provide a model for the line of argument against nonconceptualism just sketched.

Especially helpful is a remark, central to the sequence, that presents a vignette in which a man is trying to make mental contact with his sensation in a manner respectful of a construal of it as a merely given, nonconceptual presence in his "inner" life (PI §258). Because the man is committed to understanding his sensation as in itself nonconceptual, he cannot think of himself as relying essentially on a definition to pick it out. For any definition of his sensation to which he appealed—say, a definition of it as a twinge or a pinch or as a smell that he associates with a baby book his mother kept for him—would be conceptually organized and would as such undermine his attempt to realize his image of transparent access. It follows that, in his attempt to isolate his sensation, he is restricted to a sort of bare mental exercise that might be characterized as a form of inward-directed ostension. Having decided to use "S" to refer to his sensation, he accordingly sets out to employ this form of inner ostension to note for himself "the connection between the sign and the sensation." Wittgenstein's aim in recounting this brief narrative is to get us to ask ourselves whether we have an intelligible idea of what it would be for the man to succeed in thereby isolating a definite sensation, that is, of what it would be for him to succeed in thereby putting himself in a position in which it was in principle possible for him to identify it on other occasions. Here we need to keep in mind that there can be no question of the man's

justifying a claim to have isolated S by appealing to the sorts of features that might get mentioned in a definition. He is limited, in his attempt to isolate it, to an entirely unmediated mode of awareness, to the kind of thing we might try to capture by speaking of a pure flash of intuition. The trouble is that, as we are envisioning it, such a flash is nonconceptual and hence as such without normative structure, so it lacks the kind of justificatory force that would underwrite “talk about right.” This means not only that, by our own lights, the man has no grounds for believing that he has his mind around a definite sensation. Worse, he has no grounds for believing he has his mind around a sensation in contrast to something else or even nothing at all. This is how Wittgenstein attacks the idea that a bare presence might figure in thought in the way that sensations do. He invites us to see that a conception of sensations as mere “givens” falls apart under the weight of our attempts to actualize it.

It is not difficult to see how this Wittgensteinian exercise can inspire critiques of nonconceptualism about (“outer”) perception. We need only change the vignette so that now it features a person who, instead of construing her sensations as bare presences, construes perceptual inputs to thought as such presences. Just as we can tell a story about how the person who thinks of sensations in starkly nonconceptual terms fails to account for having her mind around anything at all, we can tell a story about how the person who thinks of perception in these terms winds up in such a vexed position. There is, moreover, a plausible philosophical rationale for approaching a critique of nonconceptualist views of perception via a critique of their counterpart views of sensation. The appeal of nonconceptualism is arguably especially strong with regard to “inner” experience (McDowell 1989), and as long as a nonconceptualist stance seems tenable in this case it is likely to seem that it must be possible to defend such a stance also with regard to perception. The sections of the *Investigations* just discussed—sections on “inner” experience—may thus be seen to speak particularly strongly against nonconceptualist doctrines about perception.

There is, admittedly, a large body of philosophical work devoted to countering the sort of conceptualist attack on nonconceptualism that is in question. A fair number of contributions to this body of literature are dedicated to highlighting what are perceived as fatal flaws of any conceptualist alternative to nonconceptualism. Critics of conceptualist outlooks frequently charge that these outlooks cannot account for the fact that many nonrational or not fully rational creatures—for example, very young children and some nonhuman animals—resemble rational human beings in having perceptual capacities (see, for instance, Dreyfus 2005 and 2007;

MacIntyre 1999, esp. 60–1 and 69; Peacocke 2001, esp. 613–14; and Vision 1998). But this charge typically turns for its force on the equation of concept-mongering with full-blown rationality, and this equation is questionable, flying in the face of the fact that the capacities integral to concept-use come in degrees and are possessed by many nonrational and not fully rational beings (Crary 2012). So, it is not clear that this strategy for defending nonconceptualisms holds forth any real hope of success, and, consequently, not clear that it holds forth any lifeline for the narrower conception of objectivity. Nor does it help the prospects of the narrower conception to turn to the work of philosophers who distance themselves from the conceptualist critique of nonconceptualism outlined above by rejecting the—plausible—assumption that experiential input plays a rational role in perceptual thought (see, for example, Brandom 1994, chapter 4 and 2000, chapter 3). Without touching on the tenability of any philosophical enterprises fitting this mold, we can see that the projects don't offer comfort to the narrower conception of objectivity. Although they represent our sensory lives as points of transparent contact with the world, they also deny that sensory input is as such rationally significant (and they thereby distance themselves from an understanding of the relevant transparent contact as in itself thought about the world). In light of these different observations, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that there is no real prospect for the sorts of fully abstract modes of mental contact with the world that would be required to motivate the narrower conception of objectivity.

At this point, we might feel justified in saying that we lack a compelling *a priori* case for the abstraction requirement needed to motivate the narrower conception of objectivity. Would it be appropriate, therefore, to revisit our “narrower” ideas about what falls under the concept of objectivity? It might appear that, even in the absence of an antecedent philosophical argument for the narrower conception, it is still possible to provide the conception with empirical support, specifically, by showing that respect for its abstract constraints is a guiding element of methods properly deemed scientific. Asking whether this kind of empirical support for “narrowness” is available is certainly worthwhile, but it is important to note that, even if the relevant support were there, it would not amount to a defense of the narrower conception of objectivity. We would still have no reason to impose the abstract restrictions distinctive of the conception on disciplines outside the sciences such as, say, ethics or aesthetics. To issue this caveat is not to deny the sciences their proper due. We don't express a lack of recognition of the cultural importance or distinctive character of

the various natural sciences just because we don't assume ahead of time that their methodological precepts have universal applicability. Moreover, if, in the absence of compelling argument, we insist that these precepts apply everywhere—if we insist that “science is the measure of all things” (Sellars 1956, §42)—then we pass beyond proper respect for science to scientism. But these cautions, although important, don't speak against an empirical inquiry into whether the quest for abstraction is an essential feature of scientific thought. They speak only for care in interpreting the results of such an inquiry.

Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison undertake an inquiry of the relevant sort in their 2007 book *Objectivity*. To explain this, it's necessary to say a word about Daston and Galison's terminology. The authors speak of “objectivity” in reference to the epistemic demands of what above is referred to as “the narrower conception of objectivity.” To be “objective” is, for Daston and Galison, “to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving” (2007, 17; see also 124 and 139–40). Moreover, they self-consciously allow for the possibility of modes of thought, in the sciences and elsewhere, that as such do justice to the fabric of the world without qualifying as “objective” in this sense. When, at their book's opening, Daston and Galison announce that they are setting out to determine whether “objectivity,” thus conceived, is “a precondition of all science worthy of the name” (2007, 34), they are not asking whether science is always dedicated to revealing the world as it is in itself. They are presupposing that scientific investigations are governed by what earlier in the current chapter is called our “concept of objectivity,” and they are asking whether pursuit of the abstractness distinctive of a “narrower” interpretation of this concept is the mark of all scientific endeavor. One of Daston and Galison's larger aims is to defend a negative answer to this question. They argue that “objectivity” in their sense is a historical phenomenon and, further, that, while it plays a significant role in illuminating some scientific advances, it competes with nonabstract ideals that likewise have claims to be shedding light on the progress of science.

A selective overview of Daston and Galison's historical narrative might be given as follows. “Objectivity,” understood in their sense as a “form of unprejudiced, unthinking blind sight” (2007, 16) starts to be regarded as pivotal for a range of scientific endeavors around the middle of the nineteenth century. It is initially identified and articulated as a challenge to existing epistemic ideals that encourage the cultivation of researchers' “genius” and treat an original sensibility as contributing substantively to

the description of nature. What drives the emergence of “objectivity” is the belief—in tension with the view that the fate of science depends on the original contributions of the “interpretive, intervening” genius (2007, 121)—that we progress toward an undistorted image of nature by eliminating as far as possible researchers’ every subjective contribution. But, in early decades of the twentieth century, this sort of “objectivity” becomes an object of partial criticism for scientists who are convinced that it obscures rather than clarifies some aspects of their work. These scientists maintain that the kinds of connections and classifications that interest them only come into view for observers whose modes of sight, far from tending toward abstractness, are shaped by familiarity and experience. Daston and Galison place the resulting epistemic ideal under the heading of “trained judgment” (and, interestingly, they treat the sections of *Philosophical Investigations* in which Wittgenstein speaks of “family resemblance” as providing a philosophical argument for such judgment; see Daston and Galison 2007, 318 and 336). Within their discussion of trained judgment, Daston and Galison stress that the scientists advocating it do so in the name of accuracy and that these advocates are claiming, as one pair of researchers is quoted as saying, that “accuracy should not be sacrificed to objectivity” (2007, 324). In these and other ways—their book also includes an exploratory chapter on the recent emergence of new nonabstract epistemic ideals in relation to nanoscience—Daston and Galison invite us to see that “objectivity,” while a significant epistemic ideal for particular sciences at particular times, needs to take its place, in an evaluative landscape that is decidedly “pluralistic,” alongside a variety of nonabstract ideals (see 2007, 18). They in this way make a striking case for the thesis that we should reject “an identification of objectivity with science *tout court*” (2007, 28).

This is not the right place for a detailed examination of Daston and Galison’s sources and methods. What merits emphasis here is that, although there is certainly room for critical discussion of Daston and Galison’s project (see, for example, Kusch 2009), even the critic who somehow succeeds in making a plausible case for thinking, in opposition to their claims, that objectivity *is* an essential feature of science will not thereby have scored a victory for the narrower conception of objectivity. Such a critique will at best show that the sorts of abstract demands internal to this conception are hallmarks of work within that subset of our cognitive practices that we dignify with the label “scientific,” and this local conclusion—which Daston and Galison at the very least succeed in making look more questionable than it may once have seemed—would fall far short of establishing the unrestricted authority of the narrower conception as

a rendering of our concept of objectivity. There is, we can now fairly say, good reason to doubt that a successful defense of the narrower conception of objectivity is forthcoming (and, as a result, good reason to explore a vision of our cognitive predicament that is no longer structured by this conception's constraints).

At this point, we have before us sketches of a connected series of (largely Wittgenstein-inspired) arguments against the narrower conception of objectivity. These arguments proceed by attacking the coherence of the idea of wholly abstract mental contact with the world, and by thereby presenting us with an image of our modes of thought on which they are invariably *our*—subjectively inflected—modes of thought. The suggestion that we should accept this sort of irredeemably nonabstract picture of our mental lives will seem to have a skeptical ring to it if, in scrutinizing it, we operate with the assumption that abstraction is a regulative ideal for all thought about the world. It is accordingly important to bear in mind that this assumption is itself the main critical target of the above arguments against the narrower conception. It is with an eye to undermining the appeal of an assumption about an “abstraction requirement” that the arguments bring into question the intelligibility of the idea of wholly abstract mental access to the world. If, following up on the arguments, we abandon this idea as unintelligible, we effectively concede that we lack the kind of intelligible grasp of it that would enable us to use it as a resource for assessing the cognitive credentials of our—more or less abstract—modes of thought. Now there is no longer a question of insisting, in the manner dictated by the narrower conception of objectivity, that every departure from abstraction in our thinking is as such a departure from fidelity to how things objectively are. The exercise of washing our hands of the narrower conception, far from threatening us with loss of the concept of objectivity, positions us to refashion our construal of this concept so that abstraction—or antipathy to everything subjective—is no longer its touchstone. It positions us to exchange the narrower conception of objectivity for a wider alternative capable of encompassing some subjective qualities.

The transition to the wider conception of objectivity has the potential to transform how we conceive legitimate avenues for research within many areas of philosophy. To “widen” our understanding of objectivity is to allow that subject-dependent aspects of the world may qualify as objective. In making this allowance we aren't yet saying anything about which subject-dependent aspects, if any, do in fact qualify. The question of how much, and in what ways, the transition to the wider conception of objectivity promises to change our investigations is thus open and ought to

be intensely explored. Encouragingly, in some local settings, this work is already being done. There are projects arguing, in effect, that narrowly objective constraints are artificial and wrongly restrictive in reference to, among other things:

- *aesthetics* (see, for instance, Cavell 1969/2002, chapters 3, 7, and 8; Crary 2016, chapter 6; Diamond 1991, chapters 11 and 12; McDowell 1983; and Mulhall 2009),
- *epistemology* (see, for instance, Alcoff 2010; Anderson 1995; Code 1991; Crary 2002a and 2018; Harding 1991; Hartsock 1983; and Mills 1988),
- *philosophy of mind* (see, for instance, Cavell 1969/2002, chapter 9; and 1979, part four; Crary 2016, chapter 2; Gaita 1998/2000 and 2002; and Winch 1981),
- *political philosophy* (see, for instance, Mills 2005 and Zerilli 2016),
- and—perhaps most notably—*ethics* (see, for instance, Crary 2007 and 2016; De Mesel 2017; Diamond 1991, chapters 11–15, and in press; Gaita 1998/2000; McDowell 1979, 1994/6; and 2000; and Wiggins 1987/2002).

The kind of rethinking of our domains of philosophical inquiry that is at issue in these projects—and many more could be mentioned—can be urged solely on the sorts of philosophical grounds discussed above. But it would be a serious oversight not to mention that this rethinking can also be recommended on the basis of specifically moral considerations. What unites the thinkers pursuing the specific projects just listed is an interest in defending the cognitive power of world-directed modes of thought that, far from being maximally abstract, are—quite conspicuously—evaluatively loaded. These thinkers are persuaded that the evaluatively non-neutral methods they favor contribute irreplaceably to uncovering genuine moral, political, and aesthetic insights that are not indifferently available, and it is not uncommon for the thinkers in question to claim, sometimes on the basis of alignment with the methodological stances of radical political traditions, that some of these insights are politically transformative and morally liberating. To the extent that the narrower conception of objectivity, with its demand for abstraction, seems to block recognition of the objective authority of such insights, it appears to be not merely philosophically untenable but also morally problematic. Given that this conception has a staying power in analytic philosophy and, indeed, well beyond it, that cannot be accounted for by the—evidently debatable—strength of the arguments that get presented on its behalf, it is fair to say that it has become ideological and that there is moral urgency to the task of addressing it.