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Citation for published version:

Meer, N 2019, 'W. E. B. Du Bois, double consciousness and the 'spirit' of recognition', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 47-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118765370>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/0038026118765370](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118765370)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

The Sociological Review

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W. E. B. Du Bois, double consciousness and the 'spirit' of recognition

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to unpick and explore Du Boisian ideas of minority consciousness and double consciousness, to elaborate why they are of value and worth redeeming, and to situate them in relation to the Hegelian phenomenology. The article shows that while an understanding of Hegel's master-slave dialectic is helpful in grasping how Du Bois conceives of the power held by a dominant group to afford status, Du Bois was keenly aware that no less important was the ability to invoke complicity or use coercion in denying recognition. To this end the article refuses the view that Du Bois straightforwardly adopted a Hegelian approach in a manner that minimises how this aspect of Du Bois' work also reflected remarkable intellectual originality that overcame Hegel's weaknesses. The article goes on to demonstrate how Du Bois' concept presents sociology with something of normative category that captures the dual character of unrecognised minority subjectivities and their transformative potential, alongside the conditions of impaired status that are allocated to racial minorities.

Keywords: Du Bois, Hegel, Consciousness, Race, Recognition, Phenomenology.

Funding statement

This work was supported by a Royal Society of Edinburgh Personal Research Fellowship.

W. E. B. Du Bois, double consciousness and the ‘spirit’ of recognitionⁱ

Introduction

Born before the invention of the electric lightbulb, William Edward Burghart Du Bois (1868-1963) would go on to make an astonishing contribution to the social and political sciences. By the time of his death, at which point satellites were orbiting the earth, his scholarly and wider intellectual repertoire ought to have secured his reputation as ‘one of the most imaginative, perceptive, and prolific founders of the sociological discipline’ (Zuckerman, 2004, 3). A number of contributions over the last two decades have addressed why this did not happen. Most have focused on his omission from the ‘canon’ and so especially sought to reposition Du Bois as a ‘founding figure’ of sociology (Morris, 2016; Kendhammer, 2007; Young, Jr., Watts, Marable, Lemert, and Higginbotham, 2007; Gates, 2007; Zuckerman, 2004; Gates and Oliver, 1999; Bell, Grosholz and Stewart, 1996; Lemert, 1994).

This approach has heralded some important symbolic advances. For example, in 2006 a group of sociologists led a successful campaign to rename the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) highest award, the *Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award*, after Du Bois (Morris, 2007). Elsewhere Burawoy’s (2005: 417) intervention on applied social science named Du Bois ‘as perhaps the greatest public sociologist of the twentieth century’. The most exhaustive recent attempt to relocate Du Bois within a conventional canon of sociology has probably been Morris’ (2015) widely acclaimed *A Scholar Denied*. Crediting Levering-Lewis’ (1993, 2000) two *Pulitzer Prize* winning biographies for this upsurge, Morris (2015, 1) has even claimed that we are now ‘in the age of Du Bois’ (ibid. 1)ⁱⁱ.

While not insignificant, these advances and associated optimism might also be read in the context of Bhabra’s (2014, 485) characterisation of its parameters, in so far as ‘[s]imple inclusion without reconstruction based on an acknowledgement of the difference that inclusion makes is...inadequate [...]’. That is to say, Du Bois’ recognition in some quarters has not so far not come with a willingness to revise an overwhelming white sociological canon that prevails throughout the mainstream configuration of US and European sociology. This is sustained by the active omission of a broader range of sociological work that could remake the very activity of sociology as a

disciplinary pursuit. The continuing ‘sociological segregation’, as Back and Tate (2015, para 4:8) put it in their discussion of both Du Bois and Stuart Hall, ‘weakens the field as a whole, not only for those to whom it offers a racially unequal place at the table of ideas’.

Morris (2015) nonetheless provides a detailed and compelling treatment which, like the work of Zuckerman (2004), takes the entire sweep of Du Bois’ oeuvre and orients it, very persuasively, to his omission from core features of American sociology in particular. Such comprehensive approaches are surely warranted, but this article argues that it would also be valuable to engage in a much more focused delineation of specific features of Du Bois’ corpus.

Here perhaps historians have led the way. For example, Axel Schaffer (2001) provides a fascinating account of Du Bois’ participation in the period known as ‘American progressivism’ (1982-1909), and reinterprets a relatively early period of Du Bois’ life and work. Elsewhere, Ellis’ (1992) study of Du Bois during the first world war, concentrating especially on the controversies over Du Bois’ insistence on the need to ‘close ranks’ in support of the US war effort, focuses on *The Crisis* magazine which Du Bois edited. Kendhammer (2007) too, engaging more explicitly with social theory, offers a historical treatment of the later period of Du Bois’ life and work, especially his Pan-Africanism, and considers the extent to which this might represent a non-linear strand throughout his work.

Kendhammer (2007) is especially interesting in his discussion of the ‘periodization’ of Du Bois e.g., early-liberal; middle-radical; later-pan-Africanist, and it would be worthwhile to explore a similar approach in Du Bois’ social theory; not to repeat the impulse of historians, but to double down on a section of writing in a manner pursued by of scholars of other canonical thinkers (not unlike the discussion of Marx’s 1844 manuscripts or Weber’s protestant ethic thesis). The objective of this article therefore is to give fuller exposure to parts of Du Bois that are otherwise obscured in approaches to his entire corpus which insist on a single ‘normative and conceptual logic’ (Reed, 1985, 432).

To this end the article provides a detailed consideration of Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness, and specifically it’s a relationship to thinking about ‘recognition’ as it is found in the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). It is fitting that this is proposed here in *The Sociological Review* given *TSR* is the only UK sociology journal to have published a paper penned by Du Bois (1911) himself (to mark the first Universal Races Congress held in London) (see Bhabra,

2016). It is further worth registering that whilst Du Bois continues to be resurrected in the American literature on sociology, with some exceptions this is less the case on this side of the Atlantic, an omission that should not go unnoticed.

A Hegelian Du Bois?

While the article is especially interested in the Hegelian ethics related to ‘double consciousness’ as a set of sociological processes, understanding the motive for this is key. The article refuses the view that Du Bois straightforwardly adopted a Hegelian approach in a manner that minimises how this aspect of Du Bois’ work also reflected remarkable intellectual originality. The tendency is contained in a variety of commentaries on Du Bois. Adell (1994, 8), for example, has insisted that double-consciousness largely ‘emerges from the philosophy of Hegel as it is articulated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*’, arguing ‘the title of Du Bois’s text itself, *The Souls of Black Folk*, remarks and reiterates the two concepts—soul and folk—(*Volk*) that are central, not only to Herder’s aesthetics, but to that of Hegel as well’ (ibid. 23). The tendency I observe, however, is not recent. Williamson’s (1978) influential essay ‘W.E.B. Du Bois as a Hegelian’ perhaps set the tone, and we could also here include Siemerling (2001, 325) who, drawing on Zamir’s (1995) longer work, seeks to read *Souls* ‘through the context of Du Bois’ appropriation of Hegel’. This strain of thought has endured in some contemporary work, including Shaw’s (2013, 12) more recent book simply titled *W. E. B. Du Bois and The Souls of Black Folk*, in which she boldly asserts that Du Bois was ‘at all times’ a philosopher in the Hegelian vein, and that in this respect *Souls* in particular is an example of ‘old fashioned metaphysics’ (2013, 130).

This is not to deny that Du Bois was informed by Hegel’s conception of consciousness. On the contrary. This article concurs with a variety of agenda setting scholars as varied as Mostern (1996), Zamir (1995). Gilroy (1993), Levering-Lewis (1993), Gooding-Williams (1987), and Rampersad (1976), each of whom explicitly argue that Du Bois was working with Hegel’s conception of consciousness and synthesising this with his own sociological imagination. As we will see, this is a different activity to seeking ‘vindicationist’ approaches tracing Du Bois’s alleged debts to European ‘greats’ (Reed, 1997, 12). Yet even these authors who register Du Bois’ creative and constructive engagement with Hegel do not dwell on this in ways that show the variety of possible continuities and discontinuities.

There are moreover compelling contextual and intellectual rationales to revisit the relationship between Hegelian metaphysics and Du Boisean social theory. This article is nearly entirely focused on the intellectual reasons, but the contextual factors are not insignificant and so are touched on here. They include how Du Bois' substantive encounter with Hegel first occurred during his time in Berlin, especially under the instruction of the members of the German Historical School, not least his university sponsor Gustav von Schmoller (1838-1913). This is not the same as the circumstantial encounters between Max Weber and Du Bois summarily dismissed as relatively inconsequential by Morris (2015). It instead emerges during a period of 'American progressivism' where Du Bois along with many other US students and scholars travelled to German institutions. It was a period that Du Bois himself later credited as encouraging him to 'understand the real meaning of scientific research and the dim outline of methods of employing its technique and its results in the new social sciences for the settlement of the Negro problems in America' (Du Bois, 1968, 160). According to Shaffer (2001, 926), the German Historical School's conception of social ethics as 'anchored values in social interaction and participation... had radical implications for his thinking on race'. Approaching the same issue from a slightly different perspective, specifically the ways in which Du Bois contributes to an 'early black modernism', Gilroy (1993, 133) offers a similar assessment, arguing that:

It is deeply ironic then that the obsession with black exceptionalism which endows *The Souls* with much of its intellectual drive is itself the obvious product of the author's journeying outside the United States. It gives voice to an understanding of the relationship between race, nationality and culture which, even if Du Bois acquired it in the United States (and this is debateable), was considerably refined in Germany through an engagement with Hegel and the neo-Hegelian thought that was popular in Berlin while he was studying there (ibid. 133-134).

As discussed below, much of this was expressed through an engagement with Hegelian metaphysics concerning the nature of spirit. As Du Bois would later put it, 'Black blood with us in America is a matter of spirit and not simply of flesh' (Du Bois, 1974, 19). As we will come to consider, and as described by Sandstrum (1999, 5), 'spirit, for DuBois, is created out of cultural and political strivings. Black spirit, *shwarzegeist*, is derived from common experience of being black in America and continuously exposed to antiblack American 'racial' politics.' We might at this point also note Du Bois' argument in the *Souls of Black Folks* (1999 [1903]), 370), that 'there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes', arguably reflects a Hegelian influence. Rather more

boldly, in the first of his two Pulitzer Prize winning biographies, Levering-Lewis (1993) has put it as follows:

Du Bois found in Hegelian World-Spirit, dialectically actualizing itself through history, a profoundly appealing concept. [...] Surely this was an idea Du Bois would eventually reformulate more poetically (139-40).

This notwithstanding, and beyond the contextual association, neither Levering-Lewis (1993) nor to my mind any author cited above, or elsewhere, explores this in any sustained or textually detailed fashion. Nor do these authors sufficiently consider that we might reverse the interaction and ask what might be learned from reading Hegelian metaphysics through Du Boisian social theory. In so doing this also shows the limitations of Hegelian reasoning that in important ways Du Bois was correcting. So it is a type of dialectical dialogue that is being pursued here, rather than a genealogy.

The article carries this argument forward by outlining a distinct and original delineation of double consciousness into a set of constituent parts. These, it is argued, emerge as an outcome and a resource in relation to the need to maintain a sense of self in response to misrecognition. Double consciousness for these reasons is presented as a sociological concept that has a wider normative quality, one that captures the dual character of unrecognised minority subjectivities and their transformative potential, alongside the conditions of impaired civic status that are allocated to minorities.

Delineating Double Consciousness

In his chapter 'Of Our Spiritual Strivings' in *Souls* (1999[1903]), Du Bois argues that the fate of American consciousness is dependent upon the unfolding relationships and the dialogue or interaction between minority and majority subjectivities; as two separate but entwined forms of consciousness. It is, moreover, these dialectics which will, for Du Bois, determine the course of American history. Du Bois introduces his account of double consciousness in the following passage from *Strivings*, and since this is the main text that I wish to focus upon in the proceeding discussion, it is worth quoting at length:

...the Negro is...born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields to him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two

thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spat upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois, 1999 [1903], 10-11).ⁱⁱⁱ

On the surface, this passage has as its fundamental theme a duality in African American life. Fuelled largely - but not exclusively - by racism, this duality is a kind of paradox which stems from being intimately part of a polity while excluded from its public culture, or, as Du Bois puts it, 'being an outcast and stranger in mine own house' (ibid). Yet further scrutiny reveals four different issues, loosely grouped into two sets, which encompass more. Since there are a range of issues signalled in his description of double consciousness, and because this range attempts to mediate between agency and structure, individual and society, and between minority and majority subjectivities, there has on occasions been a tendency to conflate, reduce or confuse the role of one to the other.

In the opening half of the passage, Du Bois outlines his reading of the self, specifically the significance of (1a) the internalisation by African-Americans of the contempt white America has for them, and (1b) the creation of an additional perspective in the form of a 'gifted second sight' to which experiencing this gives rise. In the second half of the passage he identifies how societal in-congruencies emerge from (2a) conceiving of African-Americans as having fewer civic rights but no less the duties or responsibilities of an ideal of American citizenship, and (2b) diverging sets of un-reconciled ideals or 'strivings' held by African-Americans which are objected to by white society, specifically emerging from an 'enduring hyphenation' signalled in his notion of 'twoness'. In sum, these four interacting constructs give rise to a condition of double consciousness as Du Bois understood it. The function of descriptive metaphors such as the 'veil' cut across and straddle these interacting issues, and are therefore discussed when they appear relevant.

The conflicted construction of the self

The notion of the self plays an important role in Du Bois' concept, and - beginning with his reference to looking at one's self through the eyes of others - Du Bois, like Hegel, seeks to illustrate how our sense of self is necessarily constructed in a dialogue that is continually subject to implicit power relations. Of course all theories of the self in sociology emphasize the importance of the 'generalised other' and the 'significant other'. Mead (1934), for example, would later refer to this process as 'engaging with our significant others', and Goffman (1959) would situate it in the context of 'dramaturgy'. It is worth stressing that recognising how Du Bois elaborated notions of the social-self *prior* to those named above, and others who come later, is not the same as anchoring Du Bois in the same register as 'symbolic interactionists' or other action theorists. In Du Bois's case one is not thinking of a benign self-other relationship but one predicated on domination, such that the refusal of others to acknowledge one's humanity or faculty to contribute something meaningful, inevitably underscores a sense of alienation. There is a Hegelian feature to this in so far as Du Bois sees something unique about the consciousness of the self among African-Americans. As Williamson (1984, 405) put it: 'out of slavery and out of the later striving of black folk...in an oppressive white world came a rising sense of black soul'.

Yet as an 'other' and as 'a problem', 'black folk' developed a double consciousness where they have a sense 'of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others'. Presenting African-Americans as possessing a degraded cultural heritage or limited contribution to American life creates an internal echo of white America's racist judgements. It should be clear then that this conception of the self is not, for Du Bois, a reflection of the atomistic self. It is instead conceived of as culturally embedded and socially mediated; leading Du Bois to argue that self-recognition is a form of cultural recognition which, necessarily, sees one's cultural identity in connection with the cultural identities of other members of one's community. Hence the injuries suffered from racism are not only due to the overt hostility from the majority, but also come from minority invisibility. This first source of conflict in Du Bois' passage can then be seen as contributing to a sense of double consciousness through the unwillingness of one group, contingent on their historical dominance as 'master', to recognise African-Americans satisfactorily, to the extent that the consciousness of self is established distortedly through that of another.

The creation of an additional perspective or 'gifted second sight'.

Accompanying Du Bois' understanding of the self is the role of subjectivity, for he situates the standpoint developed within minority-majority relations at the centre of his account of double consciousness. This comes through in his insistence that oppression allows African-Americans to understand the promise of freedom in a way that white Americans cannot.^{iv} In the passage from *Strivings* Du Bois refers to this as 'a second sight', a way of seeing things that escape the notice of the majority, specifically the distance between democratic ideals and the practice of racial exclusion, so that 'once in a while through all of us there flashes some clairvoyance, some clear idea of what America really is. We who are dark can see America in a way that Americans cannot' (Du Bois, 1971: 416). This is realised in everyday scenarios where it is raised to a conscious level, serving as a means to probe deeper meanings and contradictions of a racialized experience and providing the resource for transformative change. For Du Bois, then, racial alienation is arguably similar to forms of class alienation in its potential for initiating consciousness.

This notion of 'second sight' also ties into his metaphor of the veil which, in the passage, serves as an expression of how those behind it – African-Americans - see the dominant society, whilst those in front of it – white America - do not see the excluded as full co-members of their polity. In this way, it might be argued that Du Bois presents an inverted version of the early Rawlsian thought experiment of placing a 'choosing subject' behind 'a veil of ignorance' in an effort to ascertain unbiased, and transcending, propositions of human interest. What such an understanding means is that the Du Boisian subject is looking out in full knowledge of critical aspects of their identity. Moreover, and unlike the early Rawls (1971), Du Bois does not consider it possible to presuppose that a person can be detached from the contingent aspects provided by society, history and culture. In fact, he explicitly advances an account of social pluralism in which people are encouraged to cultivate the moral and aesthetic insights that are contained in their culture for the benefit of humanity.

Du Bois' veil might then best be described as a one-way mirror, with the minority seeing the majority through the glass, whilst the latter sees only their own reflection (of mastery or dominance) as the former remain behind the mirror. This quite obviously challenges Hegel, specifically in Du Bois' suggestion that those without power are able to see those with power in a different light, since the actions of those without power must always take the powerful into account, and specifically that the master can coerce the slave

with a power that the slave lacks, which may explain why Du Bois argues that 'second sight' is both a gift and a burden.

Bound by the requirements but not the rewards of citizenship

The overarching structural factors which Du Bois identifies as contributing to a sense of double consciousness are twofold. The first is revealed in his assertion that historically embedded racial dualism in mainstream American society denies African-Americans the civic rights afforded to their white counterparts. Simultaneously, however, this racial dualism continues to conceive of African-Americans as having no less the duties or responsibilities of an ideal of American citizenship. He thus argues that within the rhetoric of democratic citizenship and its attendant ideals, 'the Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land' (Du Bois, 1999 [1903], 12). For Du Bois however, an otherwise overlooked but important symptom of this dichotomy is the effect it has in stifling internal criticism and descent, giving rise to what he describes as a 'moral hesitancy that is fatal to self-confidence' (1999 [1903], 127). This is because internal criticism is impeded or sacrificed within the minority group, because the starting point of representation takes the form of a combative defence against societal biases. Du Bois calls these 'peculiar problems of inner life' which occur because 'our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasised that we are denying that we ever had a worst side [so that] in all sorts of ways we are hemmed in' (ibid).

Diverging strivings and two-ness

The second structural factor which Du Bois identifies as contributing to a sense of double consciousness is outlined both in his discussion of different sets of 'strivings' or claims upon the public sphere, and 'twoness' as a hyphenated identity. These are both quite distinct from the potentially debilitating effects evident in the first two, since they, like the third, provide a resource for a new synthesis. This derives from 'strivings' or cultural attributes amongst African-Americans who seek to affirm both their American and African identities. The following statement, repeated from the passage taken from *Strivings*, tries to sketch this out:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife...to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit

upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed in his face (Du Bois, 1999 [1903], 10-11).

Du Bois here is encouraging a reflexive understanding between origin and destination, between what Gilroy (1993) has called ‘roots’ and ‘routes’, and not only arguing that there is space for both, but that both be positively cultivated in an effort to maintain a critical perspective towards a new synthesis or hyphenation. As he put it in another essay, ‘The Conservation of Races’, from a similar period:

Here, then, is the dilemma, and it is a puzzling one, I admit. No Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America has failed, at some time in life, to find themselves at these crossroads; has failed to ask at some time: What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? [...] We are Americans, not only by our birth and citizenship, but by our diverging political ideals... (Du Bois, 2003 [1897], 24).

This is then an unapologetic objection to forms of cultural assimilation or separatism, strongly endorsing a view that cultural and/or moral diversity may be captured within hyphenated identities.

A Pragmatist Provenance?

Before I relate this to a Hegelian story a parallel observation concerns whether or not it should indeed be anchored in a ‘pragmatist’ milieu. To some extent, this is precisely the move West (1989, 148) makes in *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, and in which he argues that ‘Du Bois provides American pragmatism with what it sorely lacks’. Specifically, West maintains, Du Bois went beyond figures like William James ‘who did not see social structures, only individuals’, John Dewey who *did* see social structures ‘yet primarily through an American lens’, and Sidney Hook ‘whose cold war sentiments’ gave him ‘tunnel vision’ (West, *ibid.*). Du Bois in contrast goes beyond them all in ‘the scope and depth of his vision: creative powers reside among the wretched of the earth even in their subjugation, and the fragile structures of democracy in the world depend, in large part, on how these powers are ultimately exercised’ (*ibid.*).

Whether this characterisation of James, Dewey and Hook is necessarily fair, what is interesting is that despite West’s (1989) positioning of Du Bois as a solution to these shortcomings, his ultimate appraisal of Du Bois is that he ‘falls short of the mark’ (West, 1996, 55). The reasons for this are as much biographical as intellectual. As a ‘black New England Victorian seduced by the

Enlightenment ethos and enchanted with the American dream', in West's reading Du Bois remained anchored in 'the prevailing presuppositions and prejudices of modern Euro-American civilisation' (ibid.).

This is a remarkably partial reading, and not for the first time then Du Bois is simultaneously located both 'inside' and 'outside' an unfolding history of America, but I would suggest that it is better to position Du Bois as such in terms of the vestiges of American pragmatist thought; so outside looking in, rather than inside, looking out. I am not alone in this view. Indeed, it is precisely the argument of Rampersad (1976), Goodings-Williams (1987), Outlaw (2001) and Gilroy (1993) advance, the latter arguing that 'this way of positioning Du Bois's work can lead to the novelty and power of his critique of modernity being overlooked' (p. 137). No less than that, maintains Gilroy, in the pragmatist appropriation, 'Du Bois's studiously constructed projection of doubleness gets lost', specifically through 'a needless affirmation of American intellectual ethnocentrism' (ibid.).

There are a corresponding set of arguments here about the etymology of the concept of double consciousness and pragmatism. The previous and subsequent discussion squarely locates this, following authors such as Zamir (1995), in relation to the *Phenomenology* studied in Berlin and then with George Santayana at Harvard. Again this is not a mechanistic adoption since Du Bois' reading diverges from the prevailing American appropriation that services a teleological story about American context: 'His use of Hegel can be read against the widespread adoption of Hegel in support of American nationalism and manifest destiny in America in the nineteenth century, from the voluminous productions of the St. Louis Hegelians to the essays of the young John Dewey' (Zamir, 1995, 113). Bell (1996, 89) meanwhile variously points to Emerson's (1843) essay on *The Transcendentalist* which includes the term 'double consciousness' (as well as Goethe's reference to 'two souls' in *Faust*) and William James' (1890) *Principles of Psychology* in which a patient is assessed to have 'double consciousness'. While I am in no doubt that a Hegelian influence is undeniable, and less sure of the others, perhaps they all bore down on Du Bois in subtler ways. Others are less persuaded, as Levering-Lewis (1993: 96) puts it, as an African American of his time Du Bois experienced 'a psychic purgatory fully capable by itself of nurturing a concept of divided consciousness, whatever the Jamieson influences'.

‘A self-consciousness has before it another self-consciousness...’

Turning back then to his famous allegory of the master and the slave, Hegel outlines a series of conflicts and their dialectical relationship to different forms of consciousness. In examining reciprocal relations of power, he attempts to ‘lift the veil’ and reveal processes mediating the transformation of a consciousness from *dependence* to one of self-consciousness and *independence*. It is worth clarifying at the outset that his is not an empirical account of power-relations in actual slave societies. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic should instead be understood as an abstracted ‘state of nature’ argument conceived as a corrective to Hobbes (Davis, 1975). By this it is meant that through the master-slave dialectic (MSD), Hegel is trying to show the way a Hobbesian war of ‘all against all’ is unable to maintain the very individuality or independence upon which it is premised. This is perhaps best captured in Binder’s (1989, 1435) interpretation of the MSD as an attempt to show that ‘freedom [has] to be conceived as some form of association rather than independence; and that it [has] to be mediated by politics rather than defended from politics’. Besides stressing the primacy of the political, Binder positions the MSD as ‘an intellectual foundation for modern communitarian conceptions of freedom in its devastating critique of the ideal of independence’ (ibid, 1437).

It perhaps also needs to be stated that what we are interested in this section is not principally the vignette about slavery or the social implications of its history and politics per se. It is accepted at the outset that Hegel and Du Bois would speak past each other on the specificities of empirical cases. The point of this dialogue is to show that features of the MSD also bear fruit in Du Boisian thought, but that Du Bois addresses a key problematic contained within. The ethical basis this provides in terms of its potential normative, implications for Du Boisian conceptions of consciousness are that we cannot receive recognition outside of a political community characterised by reciprocal or mutual recognition. That is, the obligations rendered under conditions of *Sittlichkeit*^v or ethical life, ‘by virtue of being members of one of the ongoing bonded communities of common life and common freedom’ (Taylor, 1989a, 864).

Following the initial conflict then, Hegel sees the dialectic as a representation of how the fate and consciousness of the two parties is no longer independent but, albeit unequally, interdependent in that they have become inextricably linked in a process that necessitates some form of resolution; that they

effectively have to sink or swim together. Taylor (1975, 155) shares this interpretation when he stresses that the process of coming to self-consciousness is a 'dualistic' one. For both Taylor and Kojève the slave must recover their self-consciousness not only for their own survival, but also to resolve the existential impasse of the master. Similarly, the master must recognize the fact that their fate is now directly dependent upon the development of the consciousness of the slave. The anticipated independence of the master becomes not only a dependence upon the slave for their present form of self-consciousness, but, more importantly, rests upon the possibility of the future development of that consciousness to a state of true self-consciousness or independence. Specifically: the movement from a self-consciousness *in itself* to the transformative potential of a self-consciousness *for itself*, or from one's historically ascribed identity to one's politically self-constructed identity.

There is of course a teleological prescription in some of these readings but what is of interest is the way in which something valuable can be stated, as it was by Du Bois, without it necessitating a teleological course, and this is no less true with the leap that Hegel makes from individual to group psyches. In common with a tradition amongst philosophers to begin with the rational self, Hegel also starts with the self but, as we have seen, argues that this cannot exist in a self-substantiating process, and so therefore communalises it. Thus in contrast to Hobbes who argued that in leaving a 'state of nature' we lose freedom, Hegel shows that the social and the political is the condition of freedom in which self is a social or communal self. As it is argued below, however, the sorts of recognition that Du Bois espouses does not follow from this alone. That is to say the case for mutual recognition does not on its own establish the legitimacy of inclusion for Du Bois.

Du Bois merges ideas of difference with citizenship, centred around modernist notions of hyphenated identities, in making a universalistic ethical move in arguing for the equal but differentiated inclusion of different groups on the basis of their common membership of a polity. This is returned to below, but what is required at this stage is a closer inspection of the internal logic of Hegel's dialectic, where it is revealed that during his initial discussion of the development of consciousness, Hegel fails to distinguish between what appear to be three separate constructs in the MSD.

In this article these multiple dialectics might roughly divide between (a) the present-focused as a logical interaction or binary, which distinguishes between the existence and non-existence of an interaction between two parties and (b)

the empirical possibilities to emerge from the power retained by the master who, in the final analysis, possesses an autonomy that the slave lacks. These possibilities shape the future of this relationship and the ways in which it might continue (reciprocity being one possibility, coercion another). The nature of the relationship as it exists and changes may then be described by tracing (c) the moral dialectic, which seeks to engage - through the masters' authoritative paternalism - the slaves' reciprocal complicity in the dialectic, serving to externalise and normalise the ethical constraints of this relationship. In what one might cite as an unreasoned inference, Hegel utilises the two constructs of the dialectic, outlined as (a) and (c), which herald a mutual dependency for attaining status (however uneven that may be) between the master and the slave, before - through a sleight of hand - moving to tie the very development of consciousness^{vi} upon this struggle for status recognition. My view is that Du Bois picks up on how Hegel circumvents a step in his allegory (b) which pertains to the empirical possibilities that, should the slave refuse to acquiesce with the master's dominance, the master can coerce the slave as a subordinate and thwart the reciprocity required to make the dialectic function on the basis of recognition alone.

Regardless, therefore, of the appropriate recognition granted to the master by the slave, the slave is dependent upon the Master for their coming to self-consciousness, whilst the master retains the agency to minimise their own dependence upon the slave. Thus, from a Du Boisian perspective it becomes clear that Hegel ignores the extent to which coercion can be either a competitor or partner of recognition. In light of this, it might be more helpful to speak of master-slave dialectics in the plural, rather than the singular, and to suggest that there are actually three different interactions taking place in this allegory. This appears to be a more promising insight than the initial reading offered by Taylor and Kojève, specifically because it can be employed to probe the intricacies of forms of consciousness developed in the present-focused and moral dialectic outlined by Hegel, in order to distinguish between these and the empirical dialectic of majority-minority relations that so occupied Du Bois.

'Enduring hyphenation'

Expressions of double consciousness are neither mutually exclusive nor one and the same. By definition they must interact, but are suitably distinctive to be discussed separately. What they all have in common is the sense of an unresolved - but not irresolvable - conflict, anchored in a process of structural and psychic misrecognition. Thus, although formed in a specific context and

concerned with the conditions of a particular peoples, it is clear that in many ways Du Boisian conceptions of consciousness are relevant to the contention that socio-cultural self-esteem emerges from forms of group recognition, alongside personal recognition. The relationship between personal and group recognition that is alluded to in Du Bois' account is characterised by the idea that the 'inner strife' affecting African-Americans individually is informed by the mastery or dominance possessed by white Americans in depreciating their African-American counterparts. This is described well in the following passage as:

...that nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this, he stands helpless, dismayed and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain... (Du Bois, 1999 [1903], 15).

In this sense, the subject group are more disenfranchised than alienated so that, as Holt's (1990) reading suggests, 'it is not so much cultural difference but cultural disfranchisement that that shapes their struggle'. This means that institutions and social practices attribute minority status to some inherent qualities in the minority group, as if those qualities were the reason rather than the rationalization for not taking their sensibilities into account. This leads Du Bois to raise the following question: how can one achieve a mature self-consciousness and an integrity or wholeness of self in an alienating environment? If, in the eyes of another, your humanity is perceived as lacking self-evidential qualities, how do you go about showing its existence? The solution that Du Bois points to is not one of abandoning the double self but is, instead, to merge the 'double self into a better and truer self' – one that does not deny experience and history but seeks to build on it. As Levering-Lewis (1993, 281) argues:

The genius of *The Souls of Black Folk* was that it transcended this dialectic in the most obvious way—by affirming it in a permanent tension. Henceforth, the destiny of the race could be conceived as leading neither to assimilation nor separatism but to proud, enduring hyphenation.

This is a kind of approach in which minorities can espouse a hyphenated identity, contribute and participate equally but not necessarily uniformly. This would not only produce a better America but the 'better and truer self' Du Bois thought possible. At the same time, and although Du Bois implies the eventual resolution of this paradox of a divided self in time, much of what he writes simultaneously suggests that African-Americans should accept - and embrace – this contradiction arising from double consciousness. This is

because 'living in two worlds at once' cultivates powers to see what the majority are blind to and so, through 'second sight', add something to the equation of diversity in the way Parekh (2000) would later describe as an expansion of horizons of thought and human fulfillment.

Conclusion: an existential impasse writ large?

The purpose of this article has been to unpick and explore Du Boisian ideas of minority consciousness and double consciousness, to elaborate why they are of value and worth redeeming, and explore where they sit in relation to Hegelian phenomenology. In finding and correcting flaws in the MSD, Du Bois' concept of double consciousness might lead us to reverse the interaction and ask what might be learned from reading Hegelian metaphysics through Du Boisian social theory.

At a time when writers are justifiably rediscovering Du Bois and challenging prevailing disciplinary hegemonies through his work, amongst others, the article has also argued that there is virtue in trying to double down on a section of his writing in a manner pursued by of scholars of other canonical thinkers (not unlike the discussion of Marx's 1844 manuscripts or Weber's protestant ethic thesis). The objective of this article therefore is to give fuller exposure to parts of Du Bois that are otherwise obscured in approaches to his entire corpus which insist on a single 'normative and conceptual logic' (Reed, 1985, 432).

Focusing on his writing on double consciousness, the article has argued that Du Bois' concept is premised upon the idea that a consciousness *for itself* is characterised by an active mobilisation, one that is striving to be recognised, but which turns inward and becomes a double consciousness when it is benignly ignored or malignly coerced. Double consciousness thus captures the dual character of unrecognised minority subjectivities and their transformative potential, alongside the conditions of impaired civic status that are allocated to racial minorities.

What is being advocated is both a deepening of cultural particularities and a broadening of these insights. Sociologically, this might be characterised as a schema which becomes progressively 'thicker' in capturing (a) the contexts in which minority subjectivity is formed, (b) the nature and form of this subjectivity in and for itself, alongside (c) the transformative potential it heralds for society as a whole. This includes an examination of both the

conflicting accounts evident in the construction of the self, and the grounds on which minorities who are subject to exclusion can strive for recognition in ways that remake the whole.

Notes

ⁱ I am very grateful to the journal editors and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism. For reasons I am unsure this article has taken me over well over a decade to sit down and write, but I continue to be indebted to my former PhD supervisor for not turning me away all those years ago when I changed from my initial topic to focus on Du Bois.

ⁱⁱ See the double special sections of *Ethnic and Racial Studies Review* on this book.

ⁱⁱⁱ In some versions that reproduce the *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1897) essay, the ending of the final line reads: ‘without losing the opportunity of self-development.’

^{iv} Lukacs (1971) later argued that structurally defined class positions could offer a superior vantage point with which to view social realities. Later still some feminists, particularly Harding (1986), put forward the idea of ‘standpoint epistemologies’ which stressed that women’s experiences and location – their standpoint - could provide a better place from which to view knowledge production.

^v Referring to ‘the moral obligations I have to an ongoing community of which I am a part’ (Taylor, 1975, 376).

^{vi} Including the subsequent development of freedom because, for Hegel and later Du Bois, one can never be ‘free’ without at first developing a sense of consciousness, since the latter governs the former.

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