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## **A pragmatist: William Edward Burghardt DuBois.**

Homer L. Meade  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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A PRAGMATIST: WILLIAM EDWARD BURGHARDT DUBOIS

A Thesis Presented

By

Homer L. Meade II

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Department of Philosophy

A PRAGMATIST: WILLIAM EDWARD BURGHARDT DUBOIS


A Thesis Presented

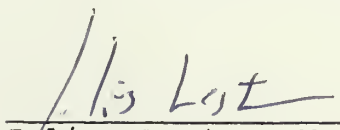
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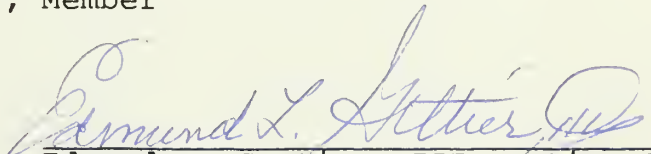
Homer L. Meade II

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Gareth Matthews, Chairperson of Committee

  
Vere Chappell, Member

  
Julius Lester, Member

  
Edmund L. Gettier, III, Acting Chairman  
Philosophy

For those who have allowed  
me to complete this very first  
of beginnings:  
Mom, Dad, Paula, Matthew

## P R E F A C E

This Master's Thesis addresses the question, "Was William Edward Burghardt DuBois a pragmatic philosopher in the strictest sense?" In answering the question this writer has had to refer to the traditions of philosophic speculation as stated in coherence, correspondence, and pragmatic theories. The historical trends of past civilizations, which were brought to bear upon the conditions of economies and politics faced by the nations of the Renaissance period, and which lead directly to the New World slave trade of the fifteenth century, had to be examined. In addition the history of the Afro-American upon the North American continent had to be researched. The need to address these wide ranging areas is based upon my claim that the statement made in 1900, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line," is DuBois' evaluation of information gathered in studying periods of world civilizations, Western European societal growth, and the history of the Black man.

Since the answers, i.e. answers to the questions which must be settled if the problem of the color-line is to be solved, are of great importance, I suggest in this Thesis that the question, "What is true?" is an appropriate first question. The discipline by which the question is addressed,

and thus answered, will, in turn, inform all answers which that researcher offers. Throughout the work of W.E.B. DuBois, we note that he continually turned his attention to the question, "What is true?". It is the central issue of this Thesis that the discipline, which was demonstrated by DuBois in addressing the question, is pragmatic and that DuBois was a pragmatic philosopher.

The work contained in the following pages is original except where necessarily cited. The suggestions and comments, concerning earlier drafts of this Thesis, made to me by the members of the Committee, have been candid, perspicacious and welcomed. However, the final decision for revision and editing has remained with this writer, and this writer is responsible for mistake or foible found. I here offer special and heartfelt thanks to the Committee Chairman, Gareth Matthews, for his quiet, yet demanding, manner; his patience in the reading of even the very first beginnings of this project.

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# C H A P T E R I

## THEORIES OF TRUTH

(The remarks which are contained in this Chapter present a formal discussion of three well known theories of truth, i.e. coherence, correspondence, and pragmatic theories. There is no reference made to W.E.B. DuBois accepting or denying any one, all, or a part of these theories. The discussion which follows is intended to suggest that if there are alternative formulations within a given theory of truth, then, perhaps, there may be a formulation of that same theory which has yet to be discussed.)

Prominent among theories of truth are these:

- 1) coherence theories;
- 2) correspondence theories;
- 3) pragmatic theories.

To be sure this list could be further extended. Remarks addressed to these theories of truth may best serve the later examination of what I take to be W.E.B. DuBois' theory of truth. Common to these theories is the attempt to state the conditions under which a statement is true. I shall first present remarks addressing coherence theory.

### Coherence Theory

Generally speaking the coherence theorist says that to say of a statement that it is true is to say that that statement coheres with a system of other statements. For example, it might be the case that a diamond is hard; however, the statement that it is hard, if it is true, and only if it is true, must cohere with the rest of my statements. Historically Leibniz, Spinoza and Hegel have been credited with positions of importance in philosophy because of their attempts to construct formal systems which would

give insights into the nature of truth and the principles of philosophy. All three have been credited, but not without dispute, to be coherence theorists. (These metaphysicians are of particular interest to this paper for they were read and studied by DuBois, e.g. 1889-1890 DuBois was enrolled in George Santayana's course offered at Harvard entitled: Philosophy 6 - Earlier French Philosophy, from Descartes to Leibniz, and German Philosophy from Kant to Hegel.) These metaphysical supporters of a coherence theory suggest, in various ways, that the truth of a statement comes to be known from the nature of reasoning which assumes that the statement is known a priori. To this end Leibniz offered his 'Monadology' which suggested that the past, present and future of any individual substance cohered within a system of "pre-established" harmony. Leibniz claimed that "every individual substance expresses the whole universe in its manner and in its full concept are included all its experiences together with all attendant circumstances and the whole sequence of exterior events."<sup>1</sup> Within such a system wherein individual substances cohere according to a pre-established harmony, or, alternatively, within a system which claims the coherence of all is in the composition of one substance, there seems to be little need to be concerned with temporal experience and reality. Yet a coherence theory does need to offer more than a set of mutually consistent statements if it is to provide a comprehensive theory of truth. If the statements

of experience are to cohere within a system of statements, then there is a connection of meaning and truth between the statements of experience and statements which may be known a priori. I shall examine this point from two perspectives.

First, I address the following question, "What are the consequences, as concerns statements of experience, when a coherence theory depends upon a set of statements known a priori?" An immediate result is that a statement of empirical findings may be rejected, not because it fails to cohere with other statements of experience, but rather because it fails to cohere with statements which are independently accepted to be true, i.e. a priori known. An example of this is the statement, "The sun is the center of our immediate celestial system," which, in spite of its crudeness of expression, is surely true. The statement, however, was denied during Galileo's time in favor of the claim that the earth was that center. The denial of the statement, 'the sun is the center of the movement of the celestial bodies most immediate to us', was based upon the accepted statements whose truths were asserted to be known a priori.

The second point to be discussed is this: that even if statements of necessary truth and statements of contingent truth cohered, problems would arise when the distinction between the coherence of meaning and truth of contingent statements is compared to the meaning and truth of necessary truths. As a question it might read, 'what is the basis for

the claim that there is a connection of meaning and truth between the statements of experience and statements known a priori?' There is a closeness in the relationship between the meaning and truth of a priori statements in mathematics which is necessarily not transferable to the relationship which holds between meaning and truth of statements of experience. The relationship of the former is one in which the statements, e.g. two is greater than one, are true in virtue of the meaning of the words. It is because the meanings of the words are internally related as they are that this statement, given as an example, is true. Consider, however, the truth of the statement, 'A 360° double slam-dunk requires more ability than a one handed lay-up.' The truth of this statement is not dependent upon the relationship of statements known a priori, i.e. the truth does not depend upon the meaning of the terms '360° double slam-dunk' and 'one handed lay-up' being a priori known. But perhaps the most expedient means of addressing these worries generated by the coherence theory is to discuss the coherence theory's definition of truth. This definition should then detail the conditions by which a statement may be asserted to be true, i.e.

- (1)  $x$  is true =df  $x$  coheres with other statements or a maximal set of statements.

By definition, a statement is true if, and only if, it coheres within a system. What, it may be asked, are the conditions required within this system for a statement to

be true? Perhaps the system requires the statement to cohere with other judgments. The advantage of such a system, as compared to a system which would admit only statements which are known a priori, is that the meaning and truth of statements are claimed to be analytic. But to assert that analytic statements are true because they cohere with one another, and that they are true because of what the world is like, is not to speak to the meaning of truth. Thus the statement, 'A diamond is hard', is true if it coheres within a system of statements. These statements, which make up the whole conjunctively, may state facts, but for them to cohere they must state facts which tell us how things are in similar cases. The system which admits the statement, 'A diamond is hard,' suggests a coherence based upon empirical evidence that the objects which bear the predicate 'is hard' are resistant to scratches. Then this same system would also include the statement that water is hard. Water too is resistant to scratches but these statements, if true, state facts but make reference to two different types of cases. And similarly we would find that statements which state facts about the sum of the angles of a triangle would cohere in spite of their assertions about different cases. Take the following as an example, 'the sum of angles in a triangle drawn on a plane is  $180^{\circ}$ ', while 'the sum of the angles of a triangle created by the intersection of three great circles may be as large as  $270^{\circ}$ .'

The coherence theory of truth claims that truth consists in coherence, i.e. truth is the coherence of one statement with another within a system. That there may be several systems which within themselves have statements which cohere but that those same systems do not cohere with one another is another of the worries directed against this theory. An additional worry rests with the criterion by which a statement is said to cohere with some other statements. If one were to argue that statements are true in virtue of the statements' coherence with facts, this would be to move beyond the theory presently considered. However, if one were to argue that the coherence of one statement to another is accepted as a practical test of truth, this could be asserted only because there was at least one statement judged to be independently true. Thus the coherence theory provides some insight into the difficulty of asserting statements of the form "x is true" with any assurance, but the theory settles few of the questions which address the conditions by which a statement may be claimed true.

### Correspondence Theory

When we turn the discussion from the coherence theory to a correspondence theory, we seek again the conditions by which this theory determines that a statement is true. Historically the correspondence theories have suggested that there is a correspondence between thought and reality of

which the truth consists, i.e. there is a truth relationship between belief and fact. The early worry generated by the Schoolmen's theory of correspondence may be summarized as follows. The Schoolmen claimed that a statement is true when, and only when, the thing is as signified.<sup>2</sup> If a thing is claimed which is not so, then it is falsely claimed. Conversely, if a thing is claimed which is so, then it is a true claim. As a result the true claim is understood to be directed to "what is" and a false claim directed to "what is not". A correspondence theory by this may then suggest that the truth of a statement is upheld or is defeated by the relationship which the statement of belief holds to fact. But a false or erroneous statement of belief on this first account suggests that to think of, or to have a thought of, what is not is to think of or have a thought of nothing, i.e. it would be just not to think or just not to have a thought. This correspondence theory may be revised by claiming that there is a relationship which exists between beliefs, and mistaken beliefs, and facts. The support which this revision offers to the theory is of two types. On the one hand there is a category which allows objective facts and objective falsehoods to be the objects of beliefs and false beliefs respectively. Additionally, this provides that there may be two statements, i.e. ". . . is", and, ". . . is not", which may be said to correspond with each fact of which only one is true. These modifications

nonetheless offer little to clarify satisfactorily the criteria by which the definition of "x is true" corresponds to the facts of which the beliefs are held. For example, the truth of the statement '4 + 4 = 8,' stands outside the belief held of the statement, and the truth of the relationship between the belief and fact is not dependent upon the statement. Bertrand Russell has addressed this separation and distinction in saying, "the world contains facts, which are what they are whatever we may choose to think about them, and that there are also beliefs, which have reference to facts, and by reference to facts are either true or false".<sup>3</sup>

A formulation of the correspondence theory's definition of truth may be presented as follows:

- (2) x is true =df there is some fact, f,  
such that f, corresponds to x.

The correspondence suggested by this formulation is that which holds between a statement and fact. This relationship of a statement corresponding to fact either holds or it doesn't. "A diamond is hard" in this interpretation asserts that 'a diamond is hard' is true, if, and only if, there is a fact that corresponds to this statement, presumably the fact that a diamond is hard. (Clearly this is distinct from the coherence theory claim in which the truth of the statement did not presuppose, nor did it attempt to correspond to, a fact, such as the fact asserted by the proposition that a diamond is hard. Rather the coherence



theory only demanded that the statement cohere within some system.) However, an effective way of showing that the correspondence relationship, asserted by formulation (2) of the correspondence theory's definition of truth, is not clear is to demonstrate that the theory is not relieved of the worries which arise from the liar paradox as presented in the Epimenides' example. Consider the sentence "This sentence is not true." Is it true? If it is, then it is not; if it is not, then it is.<sup>4</sup> Formulation (2) seems to continually fall victim to this paradox for it asserts that a particular relation, the relation of correspondence, holds between any true sentence, and only true sentences, and something real. If it is the case that what we know about an object of the real world is a fact, then it is in this regard that a fact is that peculiar kind of thing which mediates knowledge. Thus to say that 'x is true' is to make an assertion about a proposition. It is a proposition which is spoken of as 'expressing a fact' and facts are expressed and regarded as a case of knowledge. Herein the correspondence theory runs a rough course. This may be highlighted by the following discussion.

The statement of which 'true' is predicated by the correspondence theory, is defined as

(2)  $x$  is true =df there is some fact,  $f$ ,  
such that  $f$  corresponds to  $x$ .

We might then ask of the statement, what is the nature of the relation 'corresponds'? Does the statement correspond

with an object of perception or does it correspond with an object which has independent existence apart from thought? What is the nature of the relation of a statement and fact? Is fact a conceptual object of existence within the mind or is fact an object which has existence without the mind? To define fact in the following manner,

(3)  $x$  is a fact =df there is a statement,  $s$ , such that  $x$  corresponds to  $s$ ,

does not aid us in our search. In this definition fact is defined in terms of its corresponding with a statement when it was 'a statement' which was problematic in the definition (2). We either must give up this theory which provides these definitions or modify the theory in some way.

### Semantic Concept

An alternative and modified theory which may give some insight into the limitations or strengths offered by the correspondence theory is the "semantic concept of truth". The worry which the semantic theory addresses is that if the definition of truth, as presented by the correspondence theory, is to hold, it necessarily must avoid the problems entailed by contradiction and antinomies. The correspondence theory has suggested that a sentence is true if that sentence corresponds to a fact, viz. a fact is that peculiar kind of abstraction which is expressed by a proposition. The semantic conception of truth suggests

that the criterion, for the material adequacy of the definition of truth, must reflect the equivalence which holds between a sentence, which we shall render as 'p', to which the word "true" refers, and the name of that sentence which is expressed by the sentence 'x is true'. Here I shall introduce the statement, x is true if, and only if, p. This is called, in Tarski's paper "The Semantic Conception of Truth", "equivalence of the form (T)".<sup>5</sup> (I do not believe that this creates a problem for 'p' is equivalent by definition, to some fact f, such that f corresponds to x.) Tarski claims that the equivalence of the form (T) serves as a partial definition of truth, i.e. "it explains wherein the truth of this one individual sentence consists. The general definition has to be, in a certain sense, a logical conjunction of all of these partial definitions."<sup>6</sup> Thus the equivalence form, suggested by the semantic theory, seems to accord with the definition of truth offered by the correspondence theory:

"A diamond is hard" is true if, and only if,  
a diamond is hard.

The use of the word "true" here is in keeping with the semantic use of the term, i.e. it expresses a relation between a certain expression and the object referred to by the expression. However, the criterion of material adequacy, by which we asserted the equivalence relation which holds between a name of a sentence and the sentence,

is clearly not stringent enough to avoid the unwanted results of the liar paradox. If, in appreciation of an example used by Tarski, we take 'c' to be the replacement of the sentence typed on page 12 of this paper, line 6 from the top, we may consider the following:

(a) c is not a true sentence.

We have been informed of the meaning of 'c' so we may claim

(b) 'c is not a true sentence' is identical with c.

As suggested by the equivalence of the form (T), we have

(c) 'c is not a true sentence' is true, if, and only if, c is not a true sentence.

The statements expressed by (b) and (c) yield the contradiction

(d) c is true if, and only if, c is not a true sentence.

This undesirable consequence can be seen to influence examples presented earlier, e.g. a diamond is hard:

(e) 'A diamond is hard' is true if, and only if, a diamond is hard.

But our notion of "what is true" must embrace all cases and not just specific cases of our own choosing. It might be that we believe we understand the statement, 'a diamond is hard' is true if, and only if, a diamond is hard, because of the familiarity we have with the words used. It would seem that if the equivalence of the form (T) is sufficient, then we should be able to substitute any

sentential variable in place of the expression 'a diamond is hard' where it occurs. But can a natural language be used to assert the true about itself? One test might be to try and quantify into a statement:

(f) (p) ('p' is true if, and only if, p)

But this is of little assistance for though the quantifier ranges over p in the statement, we do not know what the value of 'p' is. Furthermore, when we consider that for the statement 'a diamond is hard', 'p' is true if, and only if, a diamond is hard, 'p' may designate anything, including the sixteenth letter of the alphabet. We get little accomplished if we attempt to add other quantifiers to range over the statement. The problems we have encountered are based upon the requirement demanded by the equivalence of the form (T). Form (T) requires us to have a name of some sentence to take the place of x in the expression 'x is true'. The equivalence of the form (T) meets no problem as long as the sentence, which is indicated by the given name of a sentence, is denoted. When we attempt to be general rather than specific the formulation fails, e.g. (f) above. The semantic theory, which is used here to modify the correspondence theory of truth, results in reflecting the limits of description which a natural language possesses. Within the semantic theory the sentence is restricted to an expression of the natural language and the problematic terms, such as 'correspondence'

and 'fact', are relieved of their burdens, for with use of the form (T), the sentence, and thereby its name, must be known.

### Pragmatic Theory

In brief the remarks so far presented have suggested that a coherence theory of truth claims the truth of a statement can only be asserted if that statement is consistent to and ascertained by its relations to other statements whose truth are accepted. The correspondence theory of truth claims that the truth of a statement can be asserted only when the statement claiming a certain fact refers directly to that fact and in all ways represents that fact. The last theory of truth to be presented here is a pragmatic theory of truth. The discussion of a pragmatic theory of truth will briefly present two formulations:

(4)  $x$  is true =df  $x$  will prove itself good to be believed;<sup>7</sup>

and,

(5)  $x$  is true =df  $x$  is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate.<sup>8</sup>

The first formulation of a pragmatic definition of the true, (4), is offered as one with which William James would hold. The second formulation of the pragmatic definition of the true is offered by Charles Peirce. The point of common beginning which is shared by these two definitions is the search both philosophers undertook in determining

the origin of the term "pragmatism".

The generally accepted notion of pragmatism is that it is a philosophical trend closely tied to the investigation of and the recognition of that which is "practical". William James remarks that the history of the idea shows that pragmatism is a term derived from the same Greek word *πράξις*, meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come."<sup>9</sup> Peirce, however, who is recognized as the originator of what has become the modern pragmatic theory, in a 1905 article, "What Pragmatism Is", presented the following account of what he had taken to be pragmatism's Kantian origin:

Some of his (Kant's) friends wished him to call it practicism or practicalism . . . . But for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant, as the writer, along with nineteen out of every twenty experimentalists who have turned to Philosophy, had done, and who still thought in Kantian terms most readily, praktisch and pragmatisch were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the latter expressing relation to some definite human purpose. Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition

of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose: and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name pragmatism.<sup>10</sup>

Upon these two historically based descriptions of the derivation of the term 'pragmatism' rests, in part, the reason for the two pragmatic theories of truth presented above. One other introductory note is of service. This concerns the discussion which revolved about Peirce's statement of the "principle" of pragmatism, alternatively called the "pragmatic maxim". This maxim, according to Peirce, was intended to "furnish a method for the analysis of concepts. . . . The method prescribed in the maxim is to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences - this is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct - of the affirmation or denial of the concept, and the assertion of the maxim is that herein lies the whole of the purport of the word, the entire concept."<sup>11</sup>

#### Pragmatic Maxim

The whole function of thought is to produce habits of action. . . . To develop its meaning, we have, therefore, simply to determine what habit it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits



it involves. . . . What habit it depends on when and how it causes us to act. As for the when, every stimulus to action is derived from perception; as for the how, every purpose of action is to produce some sensible result. Thus we come down to what is tangible and conceivably practical, as the root of every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be; and there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. . . .<sup>12</sup>

I will discuss the impact of this "pragmatic maxim" upon the work of William James shortly. But first I will address the definition of truth which is associated with James. It would seem that the discussion of James's pragmatic theory of truth should not harp on how his definition truth relied on subjective and expedient criteria. That James was aware of the vulnerability of such a position and would not accept such a position is expressed by him as follows:

Truth . . . is manifestly incompatible with waywardness on our part. Woe to him whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experiences; they will lead him nowhere or else make false connections.<sup>13</sup>

. . . What immediately feels most 'good'  
is not always most 'true' when measured  
by the verdict of the rest of experience.<sup>14</sup>

James's defense of his position, that he recognized the pragmatism of his description was open to charges which he had recognized and attempted to avoid, is given support by Bruce Kuklick. Kuklick says the claims lodged against James's subjective element, i.e. a criterion of truth is the truth an individual believes to be correlated with fact, are lessened when it is stressed that James claimed truth not to be defined in respect of an individual but truth as an "inevitable regulative postulate - the forever satisfying for all, the truth proved satisfactory for all in the long run."<sup>15</sup> James's notion of the expedient was not that that which was claimed to be true was that which seemed most directly to answer to or correlate to a fact, rather the expedient for James was that which lead most directly "to an actual merging of ourselves with the object (of the maximal conceivable truth in an idea), to an utter mutual confluence and identification."<sup>16</sup>

The basic point which needs to be understood in the discussion of truth in respect to James is his claim that there is a correlation between belief and action. Belief (a term within which is also subsumed the notions of idea and hypothesis) is an instrument of action, and its truth

consists in its verification, i.e. in having the experiences that the belief predicts we will have. A true belief is verified by a truth process of specific involvement. Herein it seems as if the truth process allows individual subjective evaluation. Upon a closer reading the truth process is recognized to be a means by which verification and validation of true belief is asserted when an individual has not the time nor opportunity to embark personally on the truth process as concerns each and every belief. "You accept my verification of one thing. I yours of another. We trade on each other's truth. But belief verified concretely by somebody are the posts of the whole super-structure."<sup>17</sup> A true belief by this description does not come to be, does not come to exist only upon verification by somebody. James claims that the objects of true belief virtually pre-exist when every condition of their realization is present, i.e. every condition except that of being the experiencer who verifies.

Until established by the end process, its quality of knowing that (i.e. to know a belief is "for certain") or indeed of knowing anything could still be doubted; and yet the knowing really was there, as the result now shows. We were virtual knowers of the (Memorial) Hall long before we were certified to have been its actual

knowers, by the precepts retroactive  
validating power.<sup>18</sup>

To evaluate these points of explication presented by James in his own support, I shall turn to the formulation of what is presented by James as a definition of the true:

x is true =df x will prove itself good to  
be believe.

Using a statement presented earlier in this paper, then, the belief held that a diamond is hard is good to be believed. That this is so is because this belief is

- 1) verified or verifiable in our experience or in the experience of others;
- 2) consistent with our previous beliefs;
- 3) answerable to a demand of "elegance" or "economy" (i.e. it has answered to Ockham's Razor).

Point (2) stated above needs only a few words of clarification. James claimed that in the verification of a belief the truth-process had to be loyal to and mindful of the past true beliefs held by our ancestors. (I will have more to say about this notion in the later discussion of James and DuBois.) The ancestral connection is here claimed by James because he understood the term "usefulness" in this context demanded of a true belief that in its proving itself good to be believed, that belief could not contradict residual beliefs held in the past. James makes here the commendable suggestion that the residual beliefs with which the more recent verified true beliefs must correlate are those

beliefs of the past which are themselves true by verification.

A question which now can be asked of the "truth-process" and its allegiance to past true beliefs is this: "Can a true belief of the past be lost forever by its being presently verified to be false?" James would answer that the true belief of the past can be now verified to be false. In one respect this "mutability of truth" presents an alternative to dogmatism which is based upon a claim of the absoluteness or immutability of truth:

The great assumption of the intellectualists is that truth means essentially an inert static relation. When you've got your true idea of anything, there's the end of the matter.

You're in possession; you know; you've fulfilled your thinking destiny. . .<sup>19</sup>

Thus for James a belief is a true belief which proves itself good to be believed because it allows of itself constant reflection and, if in our reflection, a retrospective judgment asserts that there is a belief which is true, despite the judgments of the past thinkers, the belief verified by our own experience sheds a "backward light" upon the past.

Whatever are the benefits gained by suggestion of "mutability of truth", the benefits are short-lived, for the notion seems to be counterintuitive. The notion most

often associated with true belief suggests that the truth of such a belief is time-independent. If I am presented for the first time a figure of three sides whose three interior angles, when added together, total  $180^\circ$ , I may then say, "It is now true for me that this figure present before me is a triangle." But the temporal reference marked by the word 'now', does not require that if I were the first to have discovered and announced the properties of triangularity then that truth would have just come to be true. Nor would the truth of the figure's being a triangle be changed if I were to correct the mistaken assertion, offered by others who preceded me, that that same figure was a square. The true, as presented by James, is the sum total of all verified and verifiable beliefs. The parting of the pragmatic theories offered by James and Charles Peirce is marked at this point: James suggests that individuals participate in making beliefs true by specific reference to verified and verifiable individual experiences; Peirce does not agree.

It would appear that James has interpreted the "Pragmatic Maxim" to require a definition of the true to reveal the True's practical and relative effects. The relevant portion of the Pragmatic Maxim, which James took to support his interpretation, reads:

Thus, we come down to what is tangible  
and practical as the root of every real

distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be; and there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice.<sup>20</sup>

By linking his interpretation of this portion of the Pragmatic Maxim to this claim that the term "practical" is derived from classical Greek origins, *πράγμα* viz. practice, the step to the formulation of a definition reflecting the historical tie between practical and relevant is a short one. A true belief has associated with it specific actions as indicated by specific sensible effects. This for James also leads to his notion of "good", for the action associated with the true belief involves the achievement of specific effects through the consistency of behavioral responses, i.e. experience:

Truth means nothing but this, that ideas become true just in so far as they help us to get satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.<sup>21</sup>

But the Jamesian definition for the true falls short of clearly presenting criteria by which the true belief may be asserted. The confusion arises by James, on the one hand, claiming that true beliefs are constructs of historical development forming "one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development. . . . We plunge forward into the field of fresh experience with

the beliefs of our ancestors and we have made already; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do again determines what we experience; so from one thing to another, still the stubborn fact remains that there is a sensible flux, what is true of it seems from the first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the truth which is a matter of our verification of belief by experience conflicts without resolution with the true beliefs which cannot be verified and, so, on Jamesian ground are not true beliefs, e.g. "All true beliefs are verified as pragmatism requires." The truth of this statement, assuming James's pragmatic criteria, would demand that the statement be verified. Yet it seems impossible to achieve such verification.

I now turn to an alternative formulation of the Pragmatic Theory of Truth which is offered by Charles Peirce. The definition reads:

x is true =df x is fated to be ultimately  
agreed to by all who investigate.

Of initial interest is Peirce's distinction of the forum within which the truth of a true belief is investigated. The citation of "all who investigate" presented in the definition is not a non-descript group but rather a community composed of scientific researchers. These scientific researchers seek in their investigations to eliminate the "ignorance and error which distinguish our



private selves (individual self consciousness) from the absolute ego of pure apperception."<sup>23</sup> Peirce claims that that which is true belief does not exist independently of thought and that true belief is not dependent upon what or how we think. Rather a true belief is independent of all that is arbitrary and individual in thought. As a result the intellectual construct which is the result of information and thought is a definite form, the true, which would be arrived at by any other mind under sufficiently favorable conditions. "Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a foreordained goal, is like the operation of destiny."<sup>24</sup> The truth, as discussed by James, had borne the suggestion of its being mutable; the truth for Peirce is that which is universal. For Peirce true, which is itself an intellectual construct, is immutable, viz. the "unmoving form to which human thought flows." The real and the true for Peirce are the last products of human action and were simultaneous in their realization:

The truth is the opinion which is fated  
to be ultimately agreed to by all who  
investigate;

and,

The real . . . is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in . . . <sup>25</sup>

The distinction between the Jamesian and Peircean theories of truth can be now highlighted. James claimed that the truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. "Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events."<sup>26</sup> To the contrary Peirce claims that the truth of an idea is the intellectual construct which encourages us to regard sense appearance as signs of what is ultimately real. What is ultimately real demands that there be a regularity which would account for the differing relations of the real. The regularity of the general behavior evidenced under all conceivable circumstances is the meaning of an intellectual concept. The Pragmatic Maxim, as interpreted by James, suggested that individual sensations determine what an intellectual concept/construct is. Thus the truth of a belief is determined by the sensations expected from it and the reactions prepared directed towards it. The Pragmatic Maxim as intended by Peirce leads to analysis of that which is the mode of being of an object as an intellectual concept/construct, i.e. a universal. Against James, Peirce charges, "The sedulous exclusion from the method prescribed in the maxim of all reference to sensation is specially to be remarked."<sup>27</sup> The statement, "A diamond is hard" is

true belief when the subject of predication would behave in a certain general way, that is, "it would be true under given experiential circumstances, taken as they would occur in experience."<sup>28</sup> Thus the true belief is a belief which is caused by the real. The truth of the belief, that "A diamond is hard", can be claimed when a final opinion, the result of application of scientific method to belief, is obtained.

That "a diamond is hard" is to claim that in an experimental situation if the hardness was applicable to the subject 'diamond', then the operation of presenting a scratch test upon the diamond would produce the result that the diamond would not be scratched.

The description of the experimental situation just presented, joined to the Peircean definition of truth raises questions about the adequacy of claims against the Peircean theory. One may ask Peirce, "What gives the scientific method the certainty upon which the quest for truth, in your system is based?"

In answering this question Peirce perhaps would argue the following. The term 'fated', as used within the definition of the true, is not to be confounded with a suggestion of mysticism. That which is 'fated' in this respect is that which, if scientifically investigated, is bound to happen and cannot be avoided. Scientific

investigation demands situations of confirmation and testing. Each situation of confirmation and testing must be done with clearly stated boundaries which insure that all the recordable habits which are associated with an intellectual concept are recorded. This is required to avoid the undesirable results of, for example, testing mercury and finding that it too fails the "scratch test". Without the boundaries specified within scientific investigation then, like a diamond is hard, i.e. would not be scratched, so too would mercury be hard. However, in spite of such stated boundaries, those who investigate do not come to know with certainty that a given belief is true. Rather it is the recognition of the role of human error that leads Peirce to introduce the doctrine of "fallibilism." Fallibilism, if correctly incorporated within scientific investigation, will move human opinion closer to a closer approximation of the truth only. Fallibilism requires a "confession of inaccuracy and one-sidedness" be incorporated within a belief statement. "This is an essential ingredient of truth."

Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by virtue of the confession of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this

confession is an essential ingredient  
of truth.<sup>29</sup>

Fallibilism offers scientific investigation, i.e. the organized pursuit after truth, parameters within which belief statements can be measured to move closer to that which is fated to be believe. Fallibilism also requires a confession of the inaccuracies or one-sidedness associated with results of testing. By so stating the inaccuracies of investigation the end state of the infalliable is never confused with that which is ultimately moving towards that end. Just how the confession is to be incorporated within a given statement of belief is not clearly presented, but perhaps it might be done as follows:

The statement, "A diamond is hard", I have found to be true when a diamond is tested for "scratchability" under all conditions of temperature and pressure which our laboratory skills have made available to us.

The benefit of the belief qualified by the confessional is that in the experimental situation within which the inaccuracies are lessen progressively, so too does the degree to which the belief accords with truth increase. Thus this process brings the investigator toward the real, the intellectual construct, fated to be the end of investigation.

The consideration of these remarks does not settle the question of how certainty in this method of scientific investigation can be claimed beyond other methods. If there are endless investigations which can be looked forward to in one course of inquiry, such as scientific investigation, can it be that there are as many possible courses of inquiry available to us as there are number of investigations within one possible course? Do all such courses need to be engaged in to be carried to that which we are fated to believe? Do all such courses of investigation, and the ends reached through an infinite number of steps available to each, converge at the same fated belief; the same fated conceptual reality?

Had Peirce offered his definition of "the true" as itself true, the questions just listed would raise important doubts. In the face of such questions the Peircean could perhaps answer by saying that 'x is true belief if, and only if, x is fated to be ultimately agreed upon by all who investigate' is not claimed to be a true belief; nor does the Peircean claim that upon endless investigation by all who are so engaged will arrive at and agree to it. Rather 'x is fated to be ultimately agreed upon by all who investigate' is a description of the kind of conditions to which that concept of truth applies.

I do not say that it is infallibly  
true that there is any belief to which

a person would come if he were to carry  
his inquiries far enough. I only say  
that that alone is what I call truth.  
I cannot infallibly know that there is  
any truth.<sup>30</sup>

## C H A P T E R   I I

### DUBOIS AND HARVARD'S GOLDEN AGE

(The discussion presented in Chapter I suggests that, from the time of the earliest philosophical discussions to the present dialogue, discussion concerning theories of truth make-up a large and rich body of literature within philosophy. I shall now consider a theory of truth as developed within the writings of William Edward Burghardt DuBois.)

#### DuBois and Truth

An explicit philosophic discussion of DuBois' theory of truth was not detailed in any one of DuBois' works. Rather his theory was developed by necessity within related areas of academic inquiry, i.e. sociology and history. Nonetheless DuBois' theory of truth was firmly based in early and intensive study of philosophy in Harvard University 1888-1892. These are the years during which 'pragmatism' was an important subject of dialogue between two of pragmatism's early formulators, Charles Peirce and William James. We should also note that the association between DuBois and James, begun at Harvard, was to last, with personal meetings and an exchange of correspondence, until James's death in 1910. The period of DuBois and James's most intimate contact, 1888-1892, is the midway point of what Bruce Kuklick, in The Rise of American Philosophy, calls the "Golden Age at Harvard". Thus, because of this Harvard connection, and the close personal association between DuBois and James,



this subject of DuBois' theory of truth promises to be of no small interest. DuBois' ideas about truth may have importance beyond their being his personally formulated concepts. It is possible that in addition to Peircean pragmatism and Jamesian pragmatism, another pragmatic theory was developed and nurtured within the same environment, at the same time, and bearing fruit from mutual dialogue. This would include DuBois' pragmatic theory of truth.

We have evidence of DuBois' long term interest and work which address the notion of truth. In a January 10, 1956, letter written by the then eighty-seven year old DuBois to his literary executor, Herbert Aptheker, DuBois states:

. . . it was in search of answers to the fundamental problems which you (Aptheker) discuss that I went to Harvard . . . I determined to go to the best university in the land and if possible in the world, to discover Truth, which I spelled with a capital.

For two years I studied under William James while he was developing Pragmatism; under George Santayana and his attractive mysticism and under Josiah Royce and his Hegelian idealism,

I then found and adopted a philosophy which has served me since. . . . Several times in the past I have started to formulate it (DuBois' philosophy) but met such puzzled looks that it remains only partially set down in scraps of manuscript. I gave up the search of "Absolute" Truth; not from doubt of the existence of reality, but because I believe that our limited knowledge and clumsy methods of research made it impossible now completely to apprehend Truth. I nevertheless firmly believed that gradually the human mind and absolute and provable truth would approach each other nearer and nearer and yet never in all eternity meet. I therefore turned to Assumption - scientific Hypothesis. I assumed the existence of Truth since to assume anything else or not to assume was unthinkable. I assumed that Truth was only partially known but that it was ultimately largely knowable, although perhaps in part forever Unknowable. Science adopted the hypothesis of a knower and something known. The Jamesian Pragmatism as I understood it from his lips was not based on the "usefulness"

of a hypothesis but on its workable  
logic if its truth was assumed.<sup>1</sup>

This letter raises two questions: What material within DuBois' papers gives support to the claim that he began to formulate and note his "adopted" philosophy? What supports his claim that Jamesian Pragmatism was based "on its workable logic" if the truth of a hypothesis was assumed? To begin formulating an answer to these questions, we may turn to DuBois' 1889 thesis written for James's Philosophy IV course. The work entitled, "The Renaissance of Ethics: A Critical Comparison of Scholastic and Modern Ethics,"

DuBois' senior thesis, "The Renaissance of Ethics", is given some attention in The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois by Arnold Rampersad. Preliminarily to this discussion Rampersad offers an insightful discussion of DuBois' Harvard experience. Specifically Rampersad in some detail outlines the generation of DuBois' philosophic exposure (in thought and personality) while at Harvard. Of the thesis prepared by DuBois for James, in Philosophy IV, Rampersad states;

"The Renaissance of Ethics" is by no means a mature work. . . . certain passages show an unsure grasp of his material. . . . These passages do not invalidate the general honesty or

seriousness of DuBois' paper. Its thesis revealed his current approach to that aspect of philosophy which most interested him: efficacious duty. . . . The basic determination for the individual is the exploration of the difference between the best possible world and the worst possible world. Thus, DuBois argued, the debate over ethics was teleological in nature. The question of duty depended on the resolution of the cause and purpose of life, an identification James applauded. DuBois had replaced the notion of the Summum bonum, identical with God in scholasticism, with the notion of a relativistic prime force whose existence was arrived at by an empirical process that avoided transcendental categories. DuBois moved toward the distinction that, "What was needed was recognition of a clear distinction between science and ethics. The mixture of science, metaphysics, and ethics needed to be dissolved into twin streams of science and teleology. The former would lead to what DuBois called Truth, the latter to ethical theory.<sup>2</sup>

It is appropriate at this point to address the claim that Rampersad uses to introduce this discussion, i.e. that "The Renaissance of Ethics" is by no means a mature work. It is true that "certain passages show an unsure grasp of his material", if we take the marginal notes written in James's hand to be accurate in their points of criticism. But it may also be accurate to claim that those areas of academic discussion highlighted by James are not the sole areas with which DuBois was most interested. For on pages 26-27 of the thesis we find this exchange between DuBois and James,

DuBois: "Act" says Martineau and his school "in accordance with the highest motive," which is but a subjective statement of the scholastic "Seek the Highest Good," a rule which, to anyone having faith in certain teleology, is as ultimate as possible. Lately however, with Professors James and Royce, a variation of this comes in: another attempt to base ethics upon fact - to make it a science. This theory may be so stated: the attempt to unify goods and find a summum bonum is fruitless and impossible: there is therefore no summum bonum and one must strive to realize all that

anyone anywhere calls Good.

James adds a note which is directed by drawn line to DuBois' phrase, "to make it a science", which reads: "I doubt whether we do seek to make it a science - to me that seems impossible."<sup>3</sup>

The exchange noted in the passage above raises an issue concerning the maturity of the work. The teacher/pupil relationship, which has been a subject of great interest within philosophy, holds a place of importance here. This relationship is especially important when the student wishes to protect the teacher from what the student suspects is a weakness in an argument or a claim made by the teacher which the student considers vulnerable. Can we find within DuBois' remarks, hints that he hoped to modify James's position so that criticism, which undoubtedly would surface, might either be deflected or prepared for? I believe we can find such hints within this thesis. To begin we might turn to DuBois' claim that science would bring fresh perspective to an "understanding of truth". This suggests a marked departure from James's belief that:

ideas become true in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and get about them by conceptual short-cuts . . . any idea that will carry us

prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally . . . So some new idea mediates between the ancient stock of old opinions and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently . . . This new idea is then adopted as the true one. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity.<sup>4</sup>

#### The DuBois and James Separation

DuBois' claim that "science would bring fresh perspectives to an understanding of eternal truth" was developed within the climate of Harvard University. James was the Harvard professor who had the greatest influence upon DuBois, and those years, in which he was involved with James, were clearly years of great intellectual activity for James. James's activities included intensive work and thought in both psychology and philosophy. It should be remembered that in the late nineteenth century the studies of psychology and philosophy, though separate, were not unfamiliar

to one another and in some instances shared the same classroom. For example, the question of 'the will', and how it was central in the disputes of the determinists and indeterminists was central to the psychologist as well as the philosopher. The discussion between these camps greatly involved James. However, by the time DuBois joined the Harvard student body and then enrolled in James's Philosophy IV, James clearly was in the midst of this philosophical speculation. The interplay between these academic areas of interest, i.e. psychology and philosophy, can be seen in James' efforts to resolve a conflict between the deterministic assumptions of the science of his day and the indeterministic assumptions of ethics. James wanted the rigors of the scientific discipline to aid in his search for Truth, but he needed the assurance that he sought after science of his own free will. James sought to assure himself that he was the agent of his own decision making. His attempts to arrive at a resolution of these conflicting notions led to the development of Jamesian Pragmatism. These attempts at resolution were to generate the split between the pragmatism as presented by James and the pragmatism as offered by Charles Peirce.

The attention that James gave to the 'will' and its position in the justification of indeterminism is directly connected to DuBois' developing ideas of truth in the following manner. In sympathy with James' efforts to suggest



an alternative to the associationists' position of determinism, i.e. a mechanistic explanation of and reduction of consciousness to brain activity, DuBois stressed that the will should not be correlated to "nervous discharge accompanying the feeling of effort to do something." To suggest this connection would be to suggest that the will had a physiological origin. The will for James must have an internal origin. This insured its uniqueness and demanded selectivity among the alternatives presented in light of human needs and interests. This selection was accomplished by the mind. The mind was then made an active element in decision making, not a central dispatcher for a conscious automata. But the mind in James's plan offered even greater service to the human than mere selection from among the many stimuli presented to it. The mind allowed man to be a conscious knower:

The knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create. Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action - action which to a great extent transforms the world - help to make the truth which they declare. In other words there belongs to mind, from its birth

upward, a spontaneity, a vote. It is in the game, and not a mere looker-on.<sup>5</sup>

The suggestion here is that there does not exist a world of truth independent of our own knowledge. If there were, then the mind would be passive in the presence of that body of knowledge. Contrary to this passivity James argued that because the mind, the will, was free it helped to create part of the world it came to know. The hint of the pragmatic view now comes through. The idea that the mind is a partner in the generation of truth leads us to James' argument, as presented by Morton White in The Age of Analysis:

The true is that which we ought to believe;  
That which we ought to believe is what is  
best for us to believe; Therefore, the true  
is that which is best for us to believe.<sup>6</sup>

There have been many objections voiced to this argument as developed by James. Of note for this part of our discussion are the objections to the second premise, which demand for example, that James make clear response to the question, "Good for whom?" DuBois objected to the question "Good for whom?" being answered by the response, "For the individual!"

In "The Renaissance of Ethics" written in 1889, we find DuBois making a clear distinction between choices made by the individual based upon his desires to be true of an opinion and choices made by an individual based upon his desire to seek the Truth. The Truth for DuBois was that which was

unchanging, and the advancement of man was the measure of the progress he made toward becoming more knowledgeable of Truth.

What then is the step needed to complete the renaissance of ethics and differentiate modern from scholastic ethics? It is, I take it, that thought be separated as follows:

SCIENCE to answer WHAT? → TRUTH

TELEOLOGY to answer WHY? → ETHICS

Man seeks answers to these two questions:

What is this? Why is it such as it is?

There are two methods he may pursue: he may guess at why it is, or he may systematically and carefully find out what it is in order that facts may guide his guesses and ultimately lead him to the Truth.

Manifestly if his work is any ways intricate, and if it is of any moment whether he arrives at the Truth or not, he should take the latter method: true it may never lead him to the Truth, but it will lead him nearer than any other path.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion which DuBois directs to this subject, of the methodology of the search for Truth, comprises fully the last quarter of the discussion in the "Renaissance of Ethics". All processes are sharply criticized which employ

answers to the "WHY?" without first becoming involved or benefitting from a systematic search for Truth which is the mark of science in its answering the "WHAT?".

The World has partially come to the conclusion, that it must fully come to the conclusion that the only way to find why the world is, is to find what it is - the only path to teleology is science.<sup>8</sup>

I suggest that DuBois' assertion, "The only path to teleology is science," and later, "The object then of science is Truth; Truth is the one path to teleology, teleology is ethics," are points of criticism directed against the philosophical position of his intellectual mentor. For James truth is additive and modifiable, i.e. we add to the beliefs held by our ancestors. Suppose one is confronted with data that cannot be reconciled with opinions one now holds. According to James one is to find a new truth through the pragmatic exercise of determining which is important in one's own life. James expresses his view aphoristically in these words:

'The true' is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as 'the right' is the only expedient in the way of our behavior.<sup>9</sup>

DuBois claims, to the contrary, that the individual has responsibility to seek 'the true', which is important in

one's own life, only as it will benefit men, not just what an individual determines to be important to himself. In

"The Renaissance of Ethics" DuBois states that it is

the duty of each individual to choose between the two possible worlds: a) the best possible, b) the worst possible, when the difference between the two is not based upon the like or dislike but rather upon the individual to select the universe which is Right or the universe which is Wrong. The Right and the Wrong are separated by the process of answering "What is each?"<sup>10</sup>

These demands are satisfied for DuBois by making science, i.e. a systematic search, a requirement for seeking 'the true'. Thus there in fact may be a "jolt" to the thinking and understanding of the individual which James sought to avoid. The argument presented by DuBois is consistent with his experiences of the past and the designs which, even then, he was in the process of constructing for his future work.

DuBois' rejection of James's pragmatic view is highlighted in the text of the Commencement Address given by DuBois in 1890 when he received his Bachelor's Degree from Harvard. The address was titled, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization". In it DuBois described

Jefferson Davis in this way:

However Jefferson Davis may appear as a man, as race, or a nation, his life can only logically mean this: the advance of a part of the world at the expense of the whole; the overwhelming sense of the I, and the consequent forgetting of the Thou.<sup>11</sup>

Davis did not attempt to make the best possible world. According to DuBois, Davis did not do so because he made decisions based upon dogma, rather than upon evidence empirically gathered through a science. In James's words, the true for Davis had become the expedient way of thinking and the right had become the expedient in the way of behavior, however, the result had little good, if any, for all concerned.

In The Commencement Address of 1890, as in his "Renaissance" thesis of 1889, we see that Duty for DuBois is to be guarded by actions which answer to the Truth as honestly determined through systematic investigation which considers as many alternatives as is possible. Thus the involvement of Jefferson Davis "in the crowning absurdity, became the peculiar champion of a people fighting to be free in order that another people should not be free." Given James's view that the true is the expedient in our way of thinking, then Jefferson Davis can be viewed as a

pragmatist and it is such pragmatism which DuBois attacks.

So far I have mentioned that according to James' pragmatic theory, truth is what is "Immediately satisfying to some individual", i.e. that which gives one the maximum possible sum of satisfactions, but consistency with previous truth and with novel fact". What is true for an individual is certainly important, but James argues that more important are

our fundamental ways of thinking about things which are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time . . . We plunge forward into the field of fresh experience with beliefs of our ancestors; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do again determines what we experience; so from one thing to another, altho the stubborn fact remains that there is sensible flux, what is true of it seems from the first to the last to be largely a matter of our own creation.<sup>12</sup>

The text from which the above is cited was first published in 1907, twenty years after James' first meeting with DuBois. About ten years earlier, 1898, James presented an address entitled "Philosophical Conceptions and

Practical Results" which gave first voice to what he called the principle of practicalism or pragmatism. This address presented ideas with which James had been in contact since Peirce had presented related thoughts in 1878 (actually Peirce had earlier presented the principle of pragmatism before the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge in 1872). The period of the DuBois/James encounter was thus a formative period in the development James's pragmatic thought and of positions he later explained in lectures and books. The passage from James quoted above concerns the debt we pay to our ancestors in what we hold to be true. I suggest that we can uncover another area of concern for DuBois, which sparks the repetition of DuBois' call made within "The Renaissance of Ethics" i.e. a systematic approach in the search for Truth. A systematic approach would avoid the problems generated by the first person pronouns used by James, e.g. "our fundamental ways of thinking", "our remote ancestors", "we determine", "our nouns and adjectives", etc., which did not include DuBois, the descendent of Africans. The history of Africa, viz. the cultures and societies which flourished, the art, the social structures and systems, trade, language, philosophy, etc., was denied, by the historical researchers, to have ever had any significance or importance. In the late 19th century this attitude was used as one point of justification for the expansion into and colonization of Africa.



Before coming to Harvard DuBois had spent three years (1885-1888) earning a Bachelor's Degree from Fisk University. Fisk was then a school with an all-Black student body, in Nashville, Tenn.. During the summers there DuBois worked in the hamlets of the countryside tutoring and giving instruction to the Black children now newly born into freedom. The adults within these hamlets had some twenty years before also been newly born into freedom. The lessons which DuBois taught were not to match the lessons he learned. He learned to appreciate the intellectual hunger present in his young charges, a hunger which he could not satisfy during a summer's meeting and a hunger which had not magically appeared after the emancipation. But more important was the resolve DuBois developed to investigate scientifically the facts which lead to the bondage that, by law and social convention, kept a freed people in a new slavery, i.e. the color caste system. The pain of this continued oppression was exacerbated because DuBois realized that the history of this oppressed people had content which was denied importance. If the 'truth', of James's understanding, was based upon the discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, then DuBois' ancestors of Africa must too be included; however, he found no such record nor reference. If the truth is realized in stages and the beliefs of our ancestors determine what we notice, what we do, what we experience, then that truth is untruthful when it denies

part of that by which it is determined. In demanding a systematic search for truth based upon a science unbiased by dogma or scholastic teleological faith, DuBois can be seen calling into question the credibility of the Jamesian pragmatic theory's understanding of truth, and its suggested answer to the question 'what is the true?'

## C H A P T E R   I I I

### DUBOIS: HIS OWN PHILOSOPHY

(Though I suggest in Chapter II that DuBois was not as closely associated with Jamesian pragmatism as generally thought, I present in this Chapter some worries which suggest that DuBois would not have been at ease embracing Peircean pragmatism. A subtle point which lies in the background, but has some importance on the Chapter's point of view, is the suggestion that within Peirce's work is exemplified mid-nineteenth century thought which had not yet come to grips with the complexities engendered by racism: the problem of the twentieth century.)

#### The DuBois and Peirce Separation

Bruce Kuklick, in his discussion, "Charles Sanders Peirce", in The Rise of American Philosophy, suggests that Peirce's revised theory of knowledge was based on the "primacy of subject-predicate logic." Though it is unlikely that DuBois and Peirce discussed Peirce's pragmatic philosophy, DuBois seems to have either encountered or anticipated Peirce's theory. Within "Of the Dawn of Freedom", the second essay in The Souls of Black Folk, DuBois presents a study of the 'period of history from 1861 to 1872 so far as it relates to the American Negro." In this essay DuBois stressed the efforts of the Negro people to defeat the South, as well as Negro people who gave themselves to the defense of that social institution, slavery, which was predicated upon their being members of an inferior race. In this essay DuBois details the programs leading to and comprising the

Freedman's Bureau. The hopes and successes of Blacks were noted, in addition to a developed intellectual climate which undermined hopes, plans, achievements of Black people. A reflection of that theoretical framework, upon which hung the principles of the nation, which undercut the Blacks' aspirations to realize full and equal participation within American society, can be found in Peirce's theory of knowledge. Peirce was developing his theory of the "logic of relations" during the 1860's; this is the period during which DuBois discussed in his essay "Of the Dawn of Freedom". Kuklick represents Peirce's theory of knowledge as follows:

- (1) "If relations were as abstract and as fundamental as the qualities of subject-predicate logic, the meaning of our concept of an object might be in its relations to other objects or in the relations among its states at various times."<sup>1</sup>

This may be read to imply, when considering the Negro problem:

- (1') The Negro is related to all things as I, a white man, am related, or the Negro is a man who has at various times relations different, than mine, among his states.

Which disjunct of (1) would be considered persuasive by a nineteenth century white intellectual. Peirce argued for the second disjunct; he continues

- (2) ". . . the relations in which a thing stood to other things might determine its "essential nature" (quality) rather than this nature determining its relations to other things."<sup>2</sup>

This may be read to imply, when considering the Negro problem;

- (2') The manner in which a Negro is, in regards to all those things about him, e.g. culture, education, skills, intelligence, etc., may readily reflect his "essential nature" rather than the Negro being considered a man determining his position as I.

And, if one were to have asked in 1863 of a white Bostonian intellectual, such as Peirce, "How do you explain the apparent differences between the white and black races?", he might have answered

- (3) ". . . the meaning of our conception of an object might depend on the law governing its relations to other objects and not on the quality it embodied."<sup>3</sup>

This may be read to imply, when considering the Negro problem;

- (3') The Negro is a man who stands in a different relation to other things when compared to a white, and it is not a shared quality of

"manhood" that he embodies.

Peirce may have never had occasion to discuss the Negro problem, though such a discussion of the Civil War would have been difficult for a twenty-two year-old male to avoid. However, we do find hint of such a concern within the following:

though the question of realism and nominalism has its roots in the technicalities of logic, its branches reach about our life. The question whether the genus homo has any existence except as individuals, is the question whether there is anything of any more dignity, worth, and importance than individual happiness, individual aspiration, and individual life. Whether men really have anything in common, so that the community is to be considered as an end in itself, and if so, what the relative value of the two factors is, is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence.<sup>4</sup>

It seems evident to me that the first two lines of the above announce Peirce's recognition that the language which is used in logic, by which properties are ascribed of objects, and, which is expressed by a formal theory of sets,

also "reaches about our life". What does he mean by "reaches about our life"? Given Peirce's theory of meaning he had to include, in any perception of an object of experience which had meaning, knowing the habits it involves. What is the habit involved with the branches of the technicalities of logic reaching about our life? The habit is asserting statements which are true. It seems that Peirce's pragmatism asserted that the same way questions of philosophy are addressed and answered so too could the questions which are asked by societies of men be addressed and answered: "The question whether the genus homo has any existence except as individuals is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence."<sup>5</sup> What is the power spoken of here? Who are the 'we' for whom he speaks? What is the constitution which will be influenced and how will that influence be exerted? Quickly said the "power" and the "influence" seem to be correction of faulty use of words which state many things which are not true; the constitution is an abstract thing which collectively makes up the laws which rule the organization's functionings. However, if Peirce's theory of meaning, not extended beyond the questions which address it as a philosophy, is met by worries to which satisfactory reply cannot be given, then the power and influence that philosophy might have upon the constitutions of every public institution is questioned.

The Collapse and Rise of a Pragmatic Theory

Peirce's theory collapsed at two points. Peirce in one case asserted that to know a thing's meaning was simply to determine what habits (modes of action) it engendered. "What a thing means is simply habits it involves."<sup>6</sup> Objects were then no more than all their conceivable "effects".<sup>7</sup> While holding this position Peirce also argued that there was an independently existing object which caused the phenomena of "effects". To accommodate this notion of phenomena Kuklick reports Peirce asserted "the real was both a permanent and inexhaustable possibility of sensation and wholly cognized. He rendered this notion consistent by postulating an infinite future that realized those possibilities of sensation."<sup>8</sup> One problem which such a notion could not convincingly respond to was that if inquiry were to be carried on infinitely then inquiry would be incognizable. This notion also seemed to contradict Peirce's earlier work which claimed, in agreement with Kant, that metaphysical realism was an "instantly fatal" idea, i.e. the idea of a thing in itself conceived as a thing existing independent of mind:<sup>9</sup>

The essence of (Kant and Peirce's) philosophy was to regard the real object as determined by the mind. . . . In short reality was regarded as a normal product of mental action, and not as the incognizable cause of it.<sup>10</sup>



Unlike Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning, James's pragmatic theory of truth became untenable when, within James's scheme, truth became dependent upon the experiences had by individuals. This could not guarantee universality. Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning collapsed with Peirce's attempt to construct meanings upon beliefs held of an object. An object of thought, because of the infinitude of inquiry being incognizable, was claimed to be incognizable. Furthermore, Peirce's "belief" demanded 'modes of action', 'habit', 'effects' of and upon thought. The theory of meaning was lost when the objects which have meaning, i.e. objects of thought, became objects independent of thought - metaphysical realism is instantly fatal. DuBois offered another pragmatic theory of meaning. His statement of that pragmatic theory of meaning is continuously used as the cornerstone of his pragmatic theory of truth. It was 'truth' for which DuBois strove. He claimed that a correct theory of meaning postulated that we, as thinking beings, moved toward the absolute, Truth, only by pursuits of intellect. The following is from DuBois' 1908 lecture presented at Fisk University on the occasion of DuBois' twentieth reunion visit. The lecture is titled "Galileo Galilei".

. . . Judge this World Genuis not simply by the things he learned, but rather by the ignorance of his Age. This was a day when falling and gravitation were

things too slight for human minds to ponder over; when time depended on sundials and hourglasses; and when the grand old legend of Joshua and the sun in Analon was regarded as a plain and literal statement of fact. It was a day when men assumed knowledge of the whole Truth and argued down to individual fact, instead of ceaselessly, endlessly, and minutely studying the fact and then guessing as we do today cautiously at the mighty shadow of Reality.<sup>11</sup>

DuBois' theory entailed studying fact and then trying scientifically to extrapolate Truth. How does one, according to DuBois approach Truth? Initially, the meanings of words which have been accepted and are in common use within a language must be examined to seek discrepancies and correct such if found.

. . . There was never a time in the history of America when the system (slave trade and the institution of slavery) had a slighter economic, political, and moral justification than in 1787; and yet, with this real, existent, growing evil before their eyes, a bargain largely of dollars and cents was allowed to open the highway that led

straight to the Civil War. . .

With the faith of the nation broken at the very outset, the system of slavery untouched, and twenty years' respite given to the slave trade to feed and foster it, there began, with 1787, that system of bargaining, truckling, and compromising with a moral, political, and economic monstrosity which makes the history of our dealing with slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century so discreditable to a great people. . . . One cannot, to be sure, demand of whole nations exceptional moral foresight and heroism, but a certain hard common sense in facing the complicated phenomena of political life must be expected in every progressive people. In some respects we as a nation seem to lack this; we have the somewhat inchoate idea that we are not destined to be harassed with the great social questions, and that even if we are, and fail to answer them, the fault is with the question and not with us. Consequently we often congratulate ourselves more on getting rid of a problem than on

solving it. Such an attitude is dangerous; we have and shall have, as other peoples have had, critical, momentous, and pressing questions to answer. . . .

It behooves the United States, therefore, in the interest both of scientific truth and of future social reform, carefully to study such chapters of her history as that of the suppression of the slave trade. The most obvious question which this study suggests is: How far in a state can a recognized moral wrong safely be compromised?<sup>12</sup>

DuBois designed to solve a problem, the problem of the color-line, i.e. racism. Before that problem could be addressed the meanings of the words and concepts had to be first established; for there was no understanding between the races. That this problem was long standing was reported DuBois:

The colonists averred with perfect truth that they did not commerce this fatal traffic, but that it was imposed upon them from without. Nevertheless, all too soon did they lay aside scruples against it and hasten to share its material benefits. Even those who braved the rough Atlantic for the

highest moral motives fell early victims to the allurements of this system. Thus, throughout colonial history, in spite of many honest attempts to stop the further pursuit of the slave trade, we notice back of nearly all such attempts a certain moral apathy, an indisposition to attack the evil with the sharp weapons which its nature demanded. Consequently, there developed steadily, irresistibly, a vast social problem which required two centuries and a half for a nation of trained European stock and boasted moral fibre to solve.<sup>13</sup>

How and where were efforts being made to encourage and establish moral standards of a nation in the middle of the 19th century? Most notably at centers such as Cambridge, Massachusetts. In January 1860, a committee of the Harvard Board of Overseers stated, in a committee report "Intellectual and Moral Philosophy", that training in philosophy was "brief and hurried," "an exercise of memory more than understanding." "The effect of this curtailing and abandonment of the most important studies in the course of a liberal education was evident and . . . well known."<sup>14</sup> Without proper drill in moral philosophy, Harvard graduates, it was feared, might succumb to attacks on "the fundamental principles of religion and ethics, and without proper drill

in intellectual philosophy they would never attain the mental development and self-discipline necessary for successful work in the world.<sup>15</sup> Early members of the Harvard Department of Philosophy were

Francis Bowen born 1811;  
 Chauncey Wright born 1830;  
 John Fiske born 1842;  
 Francis Ellingwood Abbot born 1836;  
 Charles Sanders Peirce born 1839;  
 William James born 1842;\*  
 George Herbert Palmer born 1842;\* and  
 Josiah Royce born 1855.\*

All of these listed above had lived through the Civil War period. (George Santayana is not included for he was born and raised in Spain.) The point is that DuBois brought a unique genius to Cambridge in 1888. It was a genius which grasped the "pragmatism" than newly born and evolving. DuBois' approach to pragmatism was based upon searches for meaning and truth. Owing to his unique intellectual, social, and cultural background, even when compared to the other Black students, who had preceded him as undergraduates at Harvard, a distinct pragmatic theory of meaning was offered.

\*Instructor of DuBois.

## C H A P T E R I V

### DUBOIS AS AN EPISTEMOLOGIST

(The study of human history begins with an investigation of men and events whose names have been recorded and preserved for posterity. The study of the effect of those events and the meaning of the terms and concepts, used to describe them and the thoughts of the men and women involved, is a study of what we know, i.e. a study of knowledge. In the academic pursuits, found within the discipline of philosophy, the study of knowledge is called "epistemology". William Edward Burghardt DuBois investigated a body of human knowledge by means of the meaning of terms and concepts which he believed to be generally held and accepted by those who used and applied such terms and concepts. He took his training, in the discipline of philosophy, and applied it to the investigation of the problems of race relations. W.E.B. DuBois, I claim, was an epistemologist. His name, however, is not found in the "Index", nor is his name mentioned in any discussion within the Encyclopedia of Philosophy. I believe this is a serious omission. This Chapter is written to claim: 1) DuBois was indeed a 'philosopher' in the academic sense of the term; and 2) that DuBois, more specifically, was an epistemologist who offered important insights into the studies of knowledge and truth, which even today are overlooked.)

#### DuBois' Background

During the years 1894-1909 DuBois was determined to accomplish one goal. He was determined to become a 'classic figure', e.g. Aristotle, Socrates, Homer, Virgil, etc.. DuBois' early interest lay with the men who had defined concepts of the ages past. The influence of these ancient thinkers was important, but, unlike them, DuBois further determined that he would have to be the reporter, the sculptor, the biographer, the translator, the doctor;

all of these for himself and by himself. The aid of the societies' institutions, which had offered their nominal benefits to the classic figures of the ages, was not available to DuBois. The task of a man designing to become a 'classic' figure is rarely considered today. The areas of expertise have broadened too greatly. The task of a Negro being remembered or planning to be remembered as a classic figure during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was unthought of, except by DuBois. DuBois accepted the challenge to formally study that human trait of assigning meanings to terms and concepts. It was within that process of assigning meanings that DuBois claimed racism was to be uncovered. With a study of the processes of naming and defining, DuBois planned to show the injustices racism perpetuated within interracial associations. DuBois assured himself that if he could add to the body of human knowledge he would be remembered as a classic figure. DuBois' contribution to the body of human knowledge was presenting a corrected and more accurate definition of racism.

#### Racism Defined

Racism had come to be understood in the last score years of the nineteenth century as the suppression of one race by another race with the subsequent racial relationship to primarily benefit the suppressor. Racism would not be a moral wrong if there was a suggestion, no matter how



slight, that the race oppressed and suppressed was different from the oppressor in more meaningful ways other than external and physical features. This claim, for example, is attacked in the following which appeared under "Editorial", CRISIS, vol. 1, No. 2, December 1910:

#### The Inevitable

In the argument of the prejudice there is a certain usual ending: "But this is inevitable." For instance, a crime is committed by you. I am lynched. "It is inevitable," cries the bystander, "they were both Negroes." A brown man is admitted to a theatre, misbehaves and is ejected. I apply for a ticket and am refused. "It is inevitable," sighs the manager, "you are brown." A yellow man is a fool; therefore, Smith, who is also yellow, is treated like an idiot. "I am sorry," remarks the policeman, but they are both yellow."

What is the real argument in these cases? It is this: "People who resemble each other in one important respect ought to resemble each other in all important respects and therefore be treated alike.

If by any chance they do not so resemble each other, this is unfortunate, for the same treatment must be meted out. This is inevitable."

Is it? It is not inevitable. It is a criminal injustice. It is inhuman treatment and it is socially dangerous. It is based on the unscientific assumption that human beings who resemble each other in one important particular, like color of skin, resemble each other in all particulars. This is patently false. Moreover, the social condemnation of an undesirable act or character loses all force or reason when it is directed against one who has not committed the act or has not the condemned character. To allow the mistreatment of such an innocent man--to condone it or defend it, is not inevitable; it is a crime.<sup>1</sup>

DuBois later argues that racism is the predication of the exercise of power, by a group over another group, when the dominant group believes that there is a significant difference between the two. Racism, additional, demanded that the dominant group argue, without definitive evidence,

that there existed a possibility that meaningful differences could be found between the races represented by each group. DuBois faced a body of statements which argued that there indeed existed a significant difference, i.e. that there were races of men which exemplified a more highly developed human than were other races. DuBois presented a definitive response, supported by research, denying that there was a difference of significance.

For example, suppose that an issue of concern within a national community, made up of peoples from several different races, creates a question of such importance that the question's not being answered threatens the lives and well-being of at least one of the involved races of that nation. Suppose further that a decision needs to be made to carry on those activities which will lead to the settling of the question. Suppose it is also the case that the answer to the question is continually alleged not to be known by the authorities of the controlling, non-threatened group. DuBois suggested that, in such a case, actions, predicated on the possibility that the answer would be "true", are wrong just as much at the time committed, when only the possibility of their wrongness was present, as when the answer 'false' is realized of the question. Until DuBois the question, "Is there a difference of significance between the Caucasian and Negroid races?" was unsettled. The Western

European peoples and their societies were predicated upon the assumption that there was the possibility that races were different. DuBois argued that that claim was not available to racism's defenders. To support his claim DuBois embarked upon scientific investigation of race relations and evolution. DuBois planned an investigation of the histories of selected races. Each race was to be scientific examined, as understood within the terms of scientific investigation of the late nineteenth century. If the races were meaningfully similar there would be evidence gathered from this search. Thus there would be material to counter the claims of 'possible' inferiority of a race. For the African people DuBois had to reconstruct much of their history. The beginning of the project to reconstruct the history of Africa was undertaken as an act of love. The benefits of such an investigation would add to the broadening body of knowledge about peoples.

Thus, DuBois purposefully undertook studies of recorded history. He examined the meaning of words of past and present cultures. An example of DuBois' examination of a word is the following:

#### SOCIAL EQUALITY

At last we have a definition of the very elusive phrase "Social Equality" as applied to the Negro problem. In stating

their grievances colored people have recently specified these points:

1. Disfranchisement, even on educated Negroes.
2. Curtailment of common school training.
3. Confinement to Ghettoes.
4. Discrimination in wages.
5. Confinement to menial employment.
6. Systematic insult of their women.
7. Lynching and miscarriage of justice.
8. Refusal to recognize fitness "in political or industrial life."
9. Personal discourtesy.

Southern papers in Charlotte, Richmond, New Orleans and Nashville have with singular unanimity hastened to call this complaint an unequivocal demand for "social equality", and as such absolutely inadmissible. We are glad to have always suspected this smooth phrase. We recommend on this showing that hereafter colored men who have hastened to disavow any desire for "social equality" should carefully read the above list of disabilities which social inequality would seem to prescribe.<sup>2</sup>

(CRISIS, Vol. 1, No. 3, January 1911)

DuBois and Race

DuBois had carried on studies, between the years 1885-1894, on the campuses of Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin in which subjects and topics of classical history had been insightfully presented. To that, which was depicted as a continuum of history, i.e. the history of Western Culture, DuBois pieced together a parallel line of history of African peoples. The shards of DuBois' archaeological dig were items which had been recorded within Western history which, though, small and seemingly unconnected, suggested hints of uncovered past thought. DuBois developed tools to look beyond and behind the physical evidence and reported on those statements which reflected African thought. These statements, which reported the African view of the world, answered to two truth conditions, i.e. the statements were either true or false. DuBois suggested, however, that with every statement which was asserted about peoples of African lineage, came three, rather than two truth claims. The three claims were that the statement was either true, false, or possible (with the claim of the possible siding with the answer desired by the questioner). Without access to the claim that it is possible that the African is less human than other races, the force of the arguments of racism was lost.

What is at stake here is my claim that DuBois determined that it was an important task to demonstrate that complexity of thought, which seemed to be the argument of those who desired to mark a difference between races, was not vouchsafed to a race. By showing that complexity of thought was general among people and not peculiar to a race, DuBois could then claim that racism was the predication of action designed to bring about the destruction and genocide of the history of a people. For example DuBois asked, of an African song sung to him during his early childhood, "What is its meaning?" Though not trained in music, he recognized that the songs of the African, as exemplified by the one sung to him, accurately recorded one understanding, one consciousness, of the relationship which man had had with that which was beyond himself, i.e. metaphysical expressions. Could it be that periods of human history, which are marked by a particular consideration of a philosophic issue (e.g. examine, in detail, structures and implications of certain statements; complexity of thought) were not determined by a race of a people at a given time. However, if this history, which is recorded human thought, is obscured, then argument asserting a possibility of meaningful difference existing between races is given support, i.e. there is no evidence to the contrary. The 'possibility' of such difference had to be dispelled. The question whether or not there did exist a meaningful difference between races,

especially as it concerned African peoples, could no longer remained unsettled. In particular, American citizens had to be shown that the slave trade from 1638-1870, and all American institutions which sprung from the slave institution, was founded and supported by this claim. America, merely as a representative of Western Culture continued to believe of the possibility that Western science and thought was to prove itself superior over other races. This belief lead to the following paradox:

- (T) 1. W.E.B. DuBois is a Negro.
- (F) 2. W.E.B. DuBois is a Caucasian.
- (T) 3. W.E.B. DuBois is not a Negro.
- (T) 4. W.E.B. DuBois is not a Caucasian.

If the truth values noted in the left hand margin are to hold, it is probable that 1-4 must have come from some proposition such as the following:

- (T & F) 5. W.E.B. DuBois is a Negro and  
W.E.B. DuBois is a Caucasian.

Since DuBois was descended from African, Dutch, and French ancestors then we can only achieve the falsity of (2) by the proposition (5) offering itself as a contradiction. So what is the relationship which holds between the two races which so firmly suggests that there is a definitive answer to the question, "What proportion of Negro to Caucasian ancestry does it take to denote that individual is a Negro?" As of 1967, intermarriage between Negro and



Caucasian was forbidden in seventeen (17) states including Delaware, Missouri and Oklahoma. This act of marriage was punishable with fines up to \$1,000 and imprisonment up to five (5) years. It had been after World War II, that fourteen states west of the Mississippi had repealed such laws. Undoubtedly, as these seventeen states in 1967 demonstrated, the proportion was not important, the merest trace of Negro blood was enough for the marking. To attack this thought DuBois employed his pragmatic methods which were announced before the American Academy of Political and Social Science, on November 19, 1897. "The speech outlined the theoretical framework and practical means for studying the black race in America."<sup>3</sup> DuBois' pragmatic principle, which was to be applied to that study, is stated in 'Section 5: A Program of Future Study' of the speech entitled "The Study of The Negro Problems":

The plan of study is without a doubt, long, difficult and costly, and yet is not more than commensurable with the size and importance of the subject with which it is to deal. It will take years and decades to carry out such a plan, with the barest measure of success, and yet there can be no doubt but this plan or something similar to it, points to the quickest path toward the ultimate solution of the present difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

The ultimate solution was to establish that the possibility that there was a significant difference between races was

either true or false. DuBois was descendent from African, French Huguenot, and Dutch forefathers. And yet he, and those who had far less African blood, was considered Negro. The study of the Negro problems was then designed to accomplish two objectives: 1) that though a social problem "is the failure of an organized social group to realize its group ideals, through the inability to adapt a certain desired line of action to given conditions of life, there is not one Negro problem. . . rather (the Negro problem) is a plexus of social problems some new, some old, some simple, some complex. These problems have their one bond of unity in the act that they group themselves about these Africans whom two centuries of slave-trading brought into the land;"<sup>5</sup> 2) that the presence of African heritage in the lineage of any individual does not limit not separate that individual's humanness but points to an irrationality as concerns the notion of human by which some argue for the existence of such a separation. To accomplish these objectives DuBois undertook the task of completing a scientific study of the Negro. He offered his results to show that the contradiction implied by the statement, The sentence 'W.E.B. DuBois is a Negro and Caucasian' is true, is a result of laws and social thought having been made "to fit a class distinguished by its condition more than by its race or color."<sup>6</sup> The body of researched material compiled by DuBois during his

work on The Suppression of the Slave Trade to The United States of America, 1638-1870; The Philadelphia Negro; sixteen (16) monographs published as The Atlanta Studies, (the first attempts to scientifically study the problems of Black people); and, The CRISIS; all this lead DuBois to answer that there was no difference between races in any meaningful way. Consequently, if there was no difference between races, then racism, based upon the possibility that there was a difference was a wrong. If there were no significant differences between races, then it was a moral wrong for one race to arbitrarily suppress another group when the suppression was justified by false criteria. The actions, needed to bring about the elimination of racism, were initiated and defined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by DuBois. He based his definition upon his epistemological interests and expressed his definitions in keeping with his developed pragmatic principles.

An example of DuBois' adaptation of his pragmatic principles, as applied to combating racism, is found in his early editorials of The CRISIS magazine. The CRISIS functioned as the official news organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1910). There were many influential individuals involved in this Association's creation. However, what is indisputable is that DuBois was the individual who had the greatest experience and the longest record of actively forming organizations

and developing programs to fight the encroachments of racism within American society. The encroachment of racism abnormally restricted certain individuals' expressions of personal choice, desire, will, volition, etc.. This encroachment, of course, became a restrictive element forced upon a race of people. The first "Editorial" of The CRISIS, Vol. One, No. One, November 1910, contained the following two articles:

#### THE CRISIS

The object of this publication is to set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested today toward colored people. It takes its name from the fact that the editors believe that this is a critical time in the history of the advancement of men. Catholicity and tolerance, reason and forbearance can today make the world-old dream of human brotherhood approach realization; while bigotry and prejudice, emphasized race consciousness and force can repeat the awful history of the contacts of nations and groups in the past. We strive for this higher and broader vision of Peace and Good Will.

The policy of The CRISIS will be simple and well-defined.

It will first and foremost be a newspaper: it will record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of interracial relations, and especially those which effect the Negro-American.

Secondly, it will be a review of opinion and literature, recording briefly books, articles, and important expressions of opinion in the white and colored press on the race problem.

Thirdly, it will publish a few short articles.

Finally, its editorial pages will stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race. For the highest ideals of American democracy, and for reasonable but earnest and persistent attempt to gain these rights and realize these ideals. The magazine will be the organ of no clique or party and will avoid personal rancor of all sorts. In the absence of proof to the contrary it will assume honesty of purpose on the part of all men, North and South, white and black.<sup>7</sup>

#### AGITATION

Some good friends of the cause we represent

fear agitation. They say: "Do not agitate--do not make a noise; work." They add, "Agitation is destructive or at best negative--what is wanted is positive constructive work."

Such honest critics mistake the function of agitation. A toothache is agitation. Is a toothache a good thing? No. Is it therefore useless? No. It is supremely useful, for it tells the body of decay, dyspepsia and death. Without it the body would suffer unknowingly. It would think: All is well, when lo! danger lurks.

The same is true of the Social Body. Agitation is a necessary evil to tell of the ills of the Suffering. Without it many a nation has been lulled to false security and preened itself with virtues it did not possess.

The function of this Association is to tell this nation the crying evil of race prejudice. It is a hard duty but a necessary one. It is Pain; Pain is not good but Pain is necessary. Pain does not aggravate disease--Disease causes Pain. Agitation does not mean Aggravation--Aggravation calls for Agitation in order that Remedy may be found.<sup>8</sup>

The argument presented in "Agitation" is of some interest:

- i) A toothache is agitation.
- ii) A toothache is not a good thing.
- iii) Not a good thing is not useless.
- iv) Therefore, a toothache is not useless.

DuBois continues the argument by stating that the usefulness of a toothache is in its telling the "body of decay, dyspepsia and death" within it. Within the Social Body the agitation can only be carried on by individuals. Agitation is Pain. DuBois' use of Pain as a metaphor for 'Agitation', should be allowed various interpretations. To present these various interpretations, before the reading public, demanded that DuBois begin his own publications. DuBois gave some form to his developed philosophical positions within the limitations of the purposes of the particular journal, magazine or newspaper. The CRISIS: A Record of the Darker Races, during DuBois' term as editor (1910-1934), had more impact upon twentieth century America than any other magazine. The CRISIS reflected the spectrum of experiences had by some who suffered here in the United States. When we examine DuBois' work we confirm his claim that he applied philosophy to the study of the problems of race relations. DuBois was determined to make a career of philosophy. We are told that at both undergraduate institutions he attended, influential men in his academic experience tried to dissuade

him from seeking a career in philosophy.

As an undergraduate, I had talked frankly with William James about teaching philosophy, my major subject. He discouraged me, not by means because of my record in his classes. He used to give me A's and even an A-plus, but as he said candidly, there is "not much chance for anyone earning a living as a philosopher." He was repeating just what Chase of Fisk had said a few years previously.

I knew by this time (1892) that practically my sole chance of earning a living combined with study was to teach, and after my work with Hart in United States history, I conceived the idea of applying philosophy to an historical interpretation of race relations.

In other words, I was trying to make my first steps toward sociology as the science of human action. It goes without saying that no such field of study was then recognized at Harvard or came to be recognized for 20 years after.<sup>9</sup>



## C H A P T E R V

### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS OF DUBOIS' PRAGMATISM

(The testing of a theory of truth involves presenting arguments which offer differing points of concern. In this Chapter, I argue that problems of the color-line faced today may be addressed using DuBois' guidelines. I also argue that DuBois' pragmatic approach may yet bring benefits.)

#### A Modern Argument of Possibility

In his January 8, 1980, nationally syndicated column, James J. Kilpatrick discussed the "Perspective needed on the King Holiday Bill". The topic concerned the efforts of some Congressmen to have a national holiday designated in January to honor Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.. Of interest to this discussion are the two arguments advanced against the bill which Kilpatrick found convincing:

It is wrong simply as a matter of public policy apart from Dr. King, to accord permanent public honors to any person until a sufficient time has elapsed to put his achievements in perspective. Secondly the bill would make Dr. King the only American in the whole of our history to have a national holiday.<sup>1</sup>

The Morning Union 1/8/80 Springfield, MA  
The first argument echoes the argument of possibility presented earlier, i.e. it is possible that Dr. King's

achievements will be found less than "our" standard. Yet, the possibility that Dr. King will measure up to a standard Kilpatrick seems unwilling to consider. About Robin Beard's amendment, which would designate the third Sunday in every January for formal observance," Kilpatrick states, "The Beard amendment is honor enough. I would let the matter go at that." This too easily eliminates the consideration that if after a "sufficient time has elapsed" and Dr. King's achievements have lasted unchallenged, then the permanent public honors would be rightly placed. Similarly, the honors would have proved as rightly placed and given if nationally conferred and recognized at this time.

Within the second argument, "the bill would make Dr. King the only American in the whole of our history to have a national holiday," there is a hint of the narrow Jamesian use of the third person possessive pronoun "our". It may be inferred from Kilpatrick's statement that the problem is not that Dr. King would be the only American in the whole of our history to have a national holiday in his honor, rather the larger problem seems to be that, in the honoring of Dr. King, attention would be focussed on those areas of American history which American society is still not yet ready to recognize. In Dr. King's last major public address in Carnegie Hall, February 23, 1968, on the centennial of DuBois birth, Dr. King spoke to this inference

found in statements similar to Kilpatrick's notion of the "whole of our history".

. . . it would be well to remind white America of its debt to Dr. DuBois. When they corrupted Negro history they distorted American history because Negroes are too big a part of the building of this nation to be written out of it without destroying scientific history. White America, drenched with lies about Negroes, has lived long in a fog of ignorance. Dr. DuBois gave them a gift of truth for which they should eternally be indebted to him.<sup>2</sup>

"Honoring Dr. DuBois" 2/23/68 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

We are told by Kilpatrick that "Washington's Birthday is lawfully 'President's Day'. Kilpatrick's mentioning of this would seem to shift the concentration from considering the individual, Washington, to the consideration of the symbolic use of Washington to bring the honor of the public to all Presidents following and including him. This honor is a gesture of respect that is paid to those who have been elected into the nation's highest office. These are elected standard bearers. In honoring one name, we honor not them all individually, but the office they have shared successively. Similarly it is with Dr. King. In honoring him we do not, as Kilpatrick claims, honor "an American". In

honoring Dr. King we honor all who have shared the office of Negro Leader, all who have been the standard bearers. Foremost among them we would honor Dr. DuBois.

The question, which faced DuBois, and the other standard bearers of the Negro cause, was, "What was the supposed threat that the Negro presented to the white?" At bottom the supposed threat which caused the greatest alarm was miscegenation. (Miscegenation is understood to be taken in its broadest terms.) Miscegenation was not only the mixture of races through social and sexual intercourse, but, also, miscegenation was the intermingling of races via a violation of space which was valued by the possessor of that space. "You're on my land!" "This is my country!" "This is our community!" "I don't want them in my neighborhood!" "And the next thing you know is that they are living next door!" "I don't want them marrying my daughter!" From this grouping of statements, the last has particular interest. The unwanted group is given plural reference. The supposedly desired object is metaphorically and symbolically given singular reference, "my daughter". "My daughter" is all women, she is the embodiment of the female image in which resided the purity of the race, Slavery, war, murder, armed rebellion destruction of societies have sprung from this and related and/or concurrent images which many groups of people have sought to protect

and possess. In this manner, carried to further extremes, this continent of North America, by right of conquest and development, had fallen to whites. DuBois responded to this basic argument of territorial possession by claiming that white Americans could not claim this land, the moulding of American Society, nor the building of any of these institutions. White America could not claim any of these without recognizing and respecting similar, and as forceful, claims of possession and protection made by the Black American. In DuBois 1900 lecture, "The Negro in the South and in the North", we find the first printed usage of, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." For the next three years this essay and thirteen others were written and then gathered together under the cover, The Souls of Black Folk. Because this work argued against the idea of the white American having a claim on all that America had developed, without respecting the claims of the Black American, it is often suggested that it was written primarily for the white reading public of 1903.

. . . it is a classic culmination of DuBois' thought at that time . . . This volume is written primarily for a white audience and though some of what is said is outdated, it still powerfully exemplifies the fierce belief in man's willingness to reason with man.<sup>3</sup>

This suggestion is not entirely appropriate. The opening paragraph in "The Forethought" reads:

HEREIN lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line. I pray you then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for the sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.<sup>4</sup>

The direct address form, I suggest, was intended for the Black reading public. DuBois presented to the Black reading public a form of argument which he believed would be a model for other Blacks to use in arguing against racism. Racism's effects upon the actions of the people were evidenced through the justifications of actions practiced within the society. Once the areas affected by racism were recognized a Black could better protect himself and family from the onslaught of racist actions. DuBois' work which outlined and detailed the argument in full was The Souls of Black Folk. There was much factual material within the reading of The Souls of Black Folk. More factual material than could be taken

in by a reader without long study. Nevertheless DuBois presented to the casual reader melodies and refrains, both figuratively and literally, of the experiences found within the souls of Black folk. DuBois began each essay by transcribing the staff, key, meter, notes and rest notations of a "Sorrow Song".

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days - Sorrow Songs - for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men.<sup>5</sup>

The argument supporting the claim, made by some Americans, that it is a right of those who have possessions to protect those possessions may be presented as follows:

If one claims possession of a thing, then one has a right to protect that thing.

If a race claims possession of a social or cultural institution, then it is the right of that race to protect that institution.

If a possession is one which is to be protected, then it is of value to the possessor.

If one claims the right to protect, then one claims the right to possess.

The things which one possesses are claimed by right of invention, origination, and/or conquest.

The force of this argument was gotten from the belief that the American society was founded upon and fashioned from those things developed from European settlers. DuBois decided to argue against such argument by claiming that even if it were valid, it would be invalid, thus not a valid argument. The argument line which DuBois used against such thought is found within The Souls of Black Folk. There he argued that there was little present to the members of American white society which did not also owe some indebtedness to the African. This argument first appeared in Atlantic Monthly, August 1897, entitled, "Strivings of the Negro People":

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world. . . One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.<sup>6</sup>

These statements may have been of interest to a white reader. On the other hand the meaning gathered by a Black reader was striking. To the Black reader DuBois argued that the reason why the Black reader was anger, and anxious, throughout much of his life was that the American white society had attempted to divide that reader. The division was brought



about by the white society not wanting the African as an African but rather as that society determined the position and place the African was to occupy. In that attempt the Black had become a person who retained part of the person he would naturally be but could not be within the society, and there was a part that the white society had attempted to force upon the African which the African could never be. Thus the anxiety and anger stemmed from the fact that the Black American could not be that which the white American desired. The Black American could only be a participant within American society in which he shared an equal opportunity to participate.

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 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 roughly in his face.<sup>7</sup>

In 1897 many Blacks who read those lines had experienced that anxiety described. Never before had they been told from what or why the anxiety and anger stemmed. These passages also suggest that DuBois had a related interest at issue here, a concern for the 'mental health' of the people. DuBois here addressed that process of thought which presented the emotions to the consciousness. The Black reader was asked to recall personal experiences and events of anger; anger in response to the insults endured daily. The anger a Black experienced when called "nigger" was an anger which sprung from the understanding that there was no such thing as a "nigger" as conceived in a racist society. What an American Black was, was not a "nigger". What the Black American sought rightly to achieve, to be a sharing partner within American society, was not a "nigger". Only that image which American white society had tried to force upon the African, as perceived by the white American, was a "nigger". The anger which the Black experienced promised only to continue. And so The Souls of Black Folk spoke eloquently to a white audience as it also spoke forcefully to a Black audience. Before the white audience, DuBois presented factual material which displayed evidence of the anger which existed. Before the Black audience DuBois presented material which demanded more than casual reading,

"I pray you receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me . . . and seeking the grain of truth hidden there."<sup>8</sup> (Forethought) Within The Souls of Black Folk DuBois argued that Blacks did not threaten the cultural institutions of American white society. Within The Souls of Black Folk DuBois argued when, and only when, the Negro was recognized as an equal participant within the institutions of American society would American society be truly realized. In the following DuBois first begins by describing the importance and the gift of "The Sorrow Songs", i.e. Negro spirituals; he then moves on to argue that the Sorrow Song was not the only gift given by the Negro to developing nation. But because those other gifts are taken for granted, the injustices perpetrated against the Negro are allowed to continue:

. . . Though all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope--a faith in the ultimate justice of things . . . Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?

The silently growing assumption of this age is that the probation of races is past, and that the backward races of today are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving. Such an assumption is the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men. A thousand years ago such an assumption,

easily possible, would have made it difficult for the Teuton to prove his right to life. Two thousand years ago such dogmatism, readily welcome, would have scouted the idea of blood races ever leading civilizations. So woefully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of "swift" and "slow" in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are veiled, unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science. Why should Aeschylus have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born? Why has civilization flourished in Europe, and flickered, flamed, and died in Africa? So long as the world stands meekly dumb before such questions, shall this nation proclaim its ignorance and unhallowed prejudices by denying freedom of opportunity to those who brought the Sorrow Songs to the Seats of the Mighty?

Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song--soft, stirring melody in an

ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit. Around us the history of the land has centered for thrice a hundred years; out of the nation's heart we have called all that was best to throttle and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only the the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,--we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not

these gifts worth the giving? Is not this  
work and striving? Would America have been  
America without her Negro people?

## L A S T W O R D

During the years 1965-1970 a body of American students, whose number has yet to be determined, experienced trauma on their college campuses. The cause of the trauma was American society's institutions of higher learning reacting badly when they attempted to confront full-face the problem of the color-line which existed within them. Just as the effects of exposure to doses of radiation larger than 50 REMS will measurably affect a human in time, so have the effects of the traumatic collegiate experience taken time to show. Some of the students of the sixties, who read DuBois, are beginning to show the benefit from the study of those same lessons now in the eighties. However, the interest which this Master's Thesis has addressed is not that the lessons gathered from DuBois' sociological studies remain to be learned and applied, though this is true. The interest rather has been in the philosophical manner DuBois chose to present those lessons. This, I have argued, was not done by chance nor coincidence but, rather, was an expression of a disciplined process of thought one might expect of a trained nineteenth century philosopher.

An example of a lesson offered by DuBois which bears upon discussions and research presently being carried on, and is also philosophic food for thought, is found in a

March 1928, CRISIS. DuBois had received a "Letter to the Editor" which complained of the CRISIS' constant use of the word "Negro". The letter further voiced a hope that the use of the word "Negro", i.e. to designate Americans of African descent, would one day be abolished. DuBois answered the letter with:

My dear Roland:

Do not at the outset of your career make the all too common error of mistaking names for things. Names are only conventional signs for identifying things. Things are the reality that counts. . . . Moreover, you cannot change the name of a thing at will. Names are not merely matters of thought and reason; they are growths and habits. . . .

The point DuBois makes, and the lesson which is being offered as concerns the word "Negro", is that it is not a person of some skin color that the name picks out. "Negro" is a thing of reality, a thing of history, a thing whose history should be appreciated. The word "Negro", and that thing which it designates, shares of truth and reality as do the words "Caucasian", "Anglo-Saxon", "Mongol", "German", and so on. However, the recently designed tests and expressed attitudes, which argue that there are differences between things designated by these words, are predicated on the assumption that



the tests' results and the statements which offer support to some accepted attitude can be generalized. The target of the generalization of the tests' results and attitudinal expressions, in some cases, is a group of people who supposedly share similar skin color and thus similar mental aptitudinal traits. An argument such as this, DuBois claims, is an argument of racism.

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<sup>7</sup>Morton White, The Age of Analysis: Twentieth Century Philosophers, George Braziller, Inc.: New York 1957, p. 171.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 257, 5:400.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 270-271.

<sup>19</sup> Israel Scheffler, Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey, Humanities Press: New York, p. 112.

<sup>20</sup> Peirce, Papers, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> James, Pragmatism, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>23</sup> Kuklick, p. 114.

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<sup>7</sup>DuBois, "Renaissance", pp. 30-31.

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