

## **Du Bois's Jamesian Pragmatism: Chance, Science, and Social Critique**

**Presentation by Dr. Robert W. Williams,**  
Political Science, Bennett College,  
at the American Political Science Association  
Annual Meeting in Boston, 31 August 2018,  
on the Panel, "Pragmatism, Romanticism, and  
Social Criticism in American Political Thought".

— **Draft Version** —

[www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.html](http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.html)

### **0.1. Abstract**

[1] In a definition that arguably can be applied to Political Science, the noted civil rights activist and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois defines Sociology as "the Science that seeks the limits of Chance in human conduct" ("Sociology Hesitant", ca.1904-5). How does he apply that neutral-sounding definition in his social criticism?

[2] In the presentation I will argue that Du Bois's understanding of "Jamesian pragmatism," as he calls it, helps to illuminate his incorporation of chance and science into a critique of racial injustice based on evolutionary theory. Although Du Bois does not explicitly analyze William James in conjunction with evolution, his writings can be interpreted as such. I will develop and substantiate the following argument.

[3] In Du Bois's discussion of evolutionary theory he considers that the "age of Darwin" teaches that equality of opportunity and the freedom for humans to self-develop are the lessons on which to construct social policies ("Evolution of the Race Problem", 1909). What helps us to interpret Du Bois's view of evolution as a means of social critique is his understanding of Jamesian pragmatism as a method that seeks to evaluate the "workable logic" of hypotheses if we assume their truth (letter to Aptheker, 1956). Crucial for him is the hypothesis that African Americans are members of a common humanity and have the corresponding qualities of human agency ("The Atlanta Conferences", 1904).

[4] In his application of evolutionary theory to racial injustice it is within a structure of political constraints on human actions that Du Bois interprets the evidence of African American social progress as resulting from the (non-deterministic) free will to overcome obstacles. With such an historical dynamic of scientific "law" and chance, he challenges both Jim/Jane Crow policies and Social Darwinist theories.

### **0.2. About this Presentation [Delivered on 31 August 2018]**

[1] I consider this presentation to be a *DRAFT* version, which also includes later clarifications. Herein, I explore ideas and lines of interpretation that may change in a future, more finalized form. Indeed, some aspects of the text may require further elaboration.

[2] I have implemented the presentation as a browser-based hypertext. I coded the project with javascript to provide several, hopefully useful functions. Four functions can be highlighted here. First, internal links offer numerous, non-linear ways to access the various

materials composing this project. Second, a history feature allows the user to move forwards and backwards through the hypertext pages (subsections) already accessed. Third, the show / hide feature permits the user to view and then cloak extra material, such as annotations, not initially displayed on a hypertext page. Fourth, each hypertext page that forms part of the core argument displays a summary by default. Such summaries can be toggled off.

[3] This one-page version recreates the hypertext format as a single document. Please read the "0.3. Navigating the Presentation's One-Page Format (Help)".

### 0.3. Navigating the Presentation's One-Page Format (Help)

a. This page contains the full text of the hypertext-oriented presentation arranged sequentially in one window. Any information, including images, revealed via the  buttons of the hypertext version are displayed herein.

b. The one-page format does not display any images located on the pages that start each hypertext section.

### 0.4. Online Availability of Texts

#### 0.4.1. This presentation online:

- a. [www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.html](http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.html)
- b. One-page format: [www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.pdf](http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/apsa2018.pdf)
- c. Lectures page: [www.webdubois.org/lectures/rwlectures.html](http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/rwlectures.html)

#### 0.4.2. Du Bois's Texts Pertinent to Evolution:

a. "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (1904). *The East and the West*; v.2 (January): 4-19. [Hereafter: "Future" or "FNRA".]  
URL: <http://www.webdubois.org/dbFNRA.html>.

b. "Heredity and the Public Schools" (1904). Pp. 45-52 in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Pamphlets and Leaflets*. Edited by Herbert Aptheker. White Plains, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1986. [Hereafter: "Heredity" or "HAPS".]  
URL: <http://www.webdubois.org/dbHAPS.html>.

c. "Evolution of the Race Problem" (1909). Pp. 142-158 in *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference*. New York: s.n., 1909. [Hereafter: "Evolution" or "EORP".]  
URL: <http://www.webdubois.org/dbEvolOfRaceProb.html>.

d. "The Legacy of John Brown" (1909). Ch.XIII in W.E.B. Du Bois, *John Brown*. Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Company, 1909. [Hereafter: "Legacy" or "LOJB".]  
URL: <http://www.webdubois.org/dbLOJB.html>.

#### 0.4.3. Other Texts by W.E.B. Du Bois:

a. The Works Cited section (Section 6) contains many links to online sources for Du Bois's primary texts cited in this presentation: Section 6.1.

b. My website also provides links to various Du Boisian primary sources. One can check the site map or visit the Sources page.

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### 0.5. Robert W. Williams: Bio in Brief

[1] I am a Political Science professor at Bennett College in Greensboro, NC. There I teach a range of courses in the field, including those of my academic specialization, political theory.

Expanding on my graduate education in modern, contemporary, and critical theories, I also teach courses on African American political thought and on W.E.B. Du Bois. Previously, I taught at Livingstone College in Salisbury, NC.

[2] My research concentrates typically on meta-theoretical analyses that address the assumptions and implications underpinning the theories themselves. My previous studies have focused on environmental justice, the spatiality of politics, and cyber-politics. I focus my current efforts on the philosophical dimensions of W.E.B. Du Bois's thought, especially as they relate to his philosophy of social inquiry. Such efforts also involve studying the intellectual context of his era. In addition, I conduct digital humanities research on Du Bois (projects page).

[3] My *curriculum vitae* (online) contains more information on my research and teaching experiences. Also listed on the C.V. are my other conference presentations on Du Bois (lectures page).

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[5] My personal academic website: www.webdubois.org

[6] At academia.edu: <https://bennett.academia.edu/RobertWilliams>

## 0.6. Acknowledgments and Copyrights

### 0.6.1. Acknowledgments:

[1] I wish to thank the many and various persons who have assisted me and made this presentation possible. Arranged alphabetically, the list includes:

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- Dr. Mark Ferguson, Political Science, Shaw University;
- Prof. Martha Haigler, Computer Science, Bennett College.

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## **0.7. Sub/Sections (Map)**

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### **Thank You**

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## SECTION 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Du Bois's Darwin

[Section 1.1. Summary.]

- Du Bois: "Sociology is a science that seeks to measure the limits of chance in human action...."
- He formulates his theoretical assumptions of chance and human agency in terms of what he calls Jamesian pragmatism.
- He incorporates that formulation into his understanding of Darwinian theory.
- He uses evolutionary theorizing as a means of social critique, especially against White supremacism and social Darwinism.
- (Chance + Darwin) × Jamesian pragmatism = Critique.

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois is recognized for his activism and research. He believes that the knowledge gained via careful scholarly study can inform organizations and politics that promote social justice amidst the challenges of oppression (Monteiro 2008; Outlaw 2000; Rabaka 2010; Williams 2006 & 2009; Wright 2016). Such knowledge seeks to explain human actions, but Du Bois argues that chance—i.e., what does not of necessity follow predictable patterns and what potentially can be reflective of human will—occupies an important role in our activities. Indeed, his definition of sociology embraces that perspective. In "The Atlanta Conferences" (1904) he writes:

"In reality we seek to know how much of natural law there is in human conduct. Sociology is a science that seeks to measure the limits of chance in human action, or if you will excuse the paradox, it is the science of free will." [ATLC 1904: ¶ 1]

I suggest that definition might be applied to all social sciences, including political science.

#### [Note 1—Du Bois's 1897 Definition of Sociology.]

Du Bois does not always define sociology with regard to chance and free will. His well known "The Study of the Negro Problems" provides an early definition of sociology in terms of sociological research.

"The present period in the development of sociological study is a trying one; it is the period of observation, research and comparison—work always wearisome, often aimless, without well-settled principles and guiding lines, and subject ever to the pertinent criticism: What, after all, has been accomplished? To this the one positive answer which years of research and speculation have been able to return is that the phenomena of society are worth the most careful and systematic study, and whether or not this study may eventually lead to a systematic body of knowledge deserving the name of science, it cannot in any case fail to give the world a mass of truth worth knowing." [Du Bois SNP: 1898: ¶ 1]

Here Du Bois offers a definition that focuses on the scope of sociology.

In a speech Du Bois delivers in 1897, he provides a more concise definition. In "A Program for a Sociological Society" he argues that sociology as a field of study emerges from the changing social conditions of Europe and the limitations of the field of political economy. He says:

"The industrial revolution, however, had greatly changed conditions, and brought a distinct demand for wider inquiry into the causes and scope of human action - deeper search for the reasons of present conditions and the intelligent application of such knowledge to methods of social regeneration[.] This was the beginning of the modern science of Sociology.

"Sociology is therefore the name given that vast field inquiry into human action as manifested in modern organized life. It cannot study all human action under all circumstances, but that [*sic*: that] human action which by its regularity gives evidence of the presence of laws. What these laws are we hardly know, and yet we do know that there are a life curious and noticeable coincidences - rhythm [*sic*: rhythm] in life and death, a working out of cause and effect, evidences of force action and reaction, which cannot be ignored or neglected. Many eminent men still insist that this mass of partially digested facts cannot be called a science - and indeed if you mean by science, a body [of] knowledge with definitely stated laws, and carefully systematized facts, then Sociology is not yet a science [*sic*: science] and may never become one. But if you mean by Sociology a vast and fruitful field of inquiry into the mysterious phenomena of human action, which has yielded evidence of the working of scientific laws to some extent, and promises much for the future - if such at work deserves, as many think, the name of science, then Sociology is one of the greatest of sciences." [PSST 1897: pp.3-4; capitalization and dashes in the original]

Although Du Bois here does not speak of chance and free will, he nonetheless sets forth the idea of human action as the subject of sociology. Also observe that he talks about human actions as "mysterious phenomena" to be studied, perhaps intimating here that something inexplicable is also present, a point he makes in "Sociology Hesitant" in 1904-5.

**[End of Note 1.]**

[2] Scholars of Du Bois focus on various dimensions of his thinking, especially how Du Bois tackles and counters the justifications for racial, class, and gender oppression of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Most scholars, however, do not tend to focus on Du Bois's use of evolutionary theories in his critique of social oppression, as I will sketch in Section 1.3. below. This lack of focus is understandable because Du Bois scarcely mentions Darwin or Darwinism and when he does he typically does not elaborate.

[3] Although Du Bois never fully details Darwinism, he does express his understanding of evolution and Darwinism in several works of the early 1900s. In 1904 he delivers a talk to public school teachers in Washington D.C., "Heredity and the Public Schools", which offers several important aspects of his understanding of evolution (HAPS 1904). Also in 1904 he publishes "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (FNRA 1904). The other two works appear in 1909. Du Bois delivers "Evolution of the Race Problem" at the National Negro Conference, which is part of the process that led to the founding of the NAACP. The other work is his biography *John Brown*. The book's last chapter contains many paragraphs of text on evolution virtually identical to the essay "Evolution". Du Bois's ideas of chance and human agency conjoin in the evolutionary theorizing that he puts forth in those texts. He typically uses evolution-based arguments in order to counter the prevailing interpretation of Darwin: namely, dog-eat-dog social Darwinism.

## 1.2. White Supremacism and Evolution

[Section 1.2. Summary.]

- Du Bois challenges the White supremacism and social Darwinism of his era.
- Supremacism: racial hierarchies arranged according to negative and positive traits, which may or may not be immutable.
- Social Darwinism: possibly supremacist; emphasizes survival of the fittest (i.e., some will dominate in society because of natural selection).

[4] Du Bois challenges White supremacy in its many forms. Defined most generally, White supremacy entails the establishment and justification of racial hierarchies, with different races possessing innate qualities that are often deemed immutable, although some vary on how much change away for type is possible or lasting. The justifications for such hierarchies are legion, ranging from religious beliefs and cultural norms to scientific-based reasons—that is, what supremacists believe is scientific (e.g., Nott & Gliddon 1854; S. Morton 1844; Page 1904; Stoddard 1922). Often the supremacist doctrines combine several justifications. The use of religious and cultural justifications for racial oppression predates Darwin, and as well, may be antagonistic to the idea of evolution (Anderson 1999: 261-262). (I recognize that White supremacist frameworks also can include gender, class, sexuality, and identity hierarchies. But that lies beyond the scope of this presentation.)

[5] My presentation considers Du Bois with regard to doctrines which apply evolutionary theories to the justification of racial hierarchies. I will mention two related, but not necessarily identical, intellectual currents that are salient here: neo-Lamarckism, and what is conventionally labeled as social Darwinism. Also to be noted: neo-Lamarckism and the conventional forms of social Darwinism do not necessarily support racial policies, but can be so employed.

[6] Lamarckian evolution is not Darwinian because, central to its core principles, it holds that environments provoke an internal vitalism within an organism that "causes" it to develop certain traits to cope, and that such traits are inherited by its offspring. Neo-Lamarckism holds sway in the USA chiefly in the late-19th century (G. Daniels 1968: 75-77). Neo-Lamarckians still talk of traits being selected for—better suited to—the struggle for survival. But they emphasize that human reason can devise ways to educate individual, groups, and races so that they might become better over time, or centuries, via retaining some small portion of the positive social traits acquired (see Le Conte 1895: 495-497). For example, Joseph Le Conte is a neo-Lamarckian, especially in terms of his view that traits are acquired (1892: 366). He uses this, however, to support a racist hierarchy of inferior and superior races in the U.S.A. (1892: 351, 359-363).

[7] Those deemed to be Social Darwinists typically do not consider that physical and mental capacities and traits acquired in one generation will be passed on across succeeding generations. Social Darwinists involve relating survival of the fittest and natural selection to society and to social policies. Benjamin K. Hays illustrates a social Darwinism that leads to White supremacist conclusions (Hays 1904).

[8] Although some espousing Social Darwinism are White supremacists, not all Social Darwinists support, or seem to support, the idea of innate racial hierarchies and racially inegalitarian practices even though they do support survival of the fittest (e.g., William Graham Sumner 1883, 1899). Often advocates of survival of the fittest, like Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, are *laissez faire*, recommending no government involvement to alleviate human suffering or poverty (Spencer 1896: 313; Sumner 1883).

[9] Du Bois throughout his texts does not distinguish explicitly between the different types of evolutionary theories. Typically, he refers to "Darwin" or "Darwinism", as well as a few others, like August Weismann and Francis Galton. He does not cite textual sources, with the exception of *On the Origin of Species* by Darwin. Although Du Bois criticizes "survival of

the fittest", he reformulates the idea of evolutionary fitness based on his understanding of Darwin and Darwinism.

### 1.3. Previous Studies

[Section 1.3. Summary.]

- Much scholarship on the intellectual relationship between Du Bois and James.
- Much less scholarship on Du Bois's views of Darwinism and evolution.
- Novoa: Du Bois's views on evolution lead him to foster good marriages via training, not force.
- Schuller: Du Bois uses a "qualified Lamarckian approach" that emphasizes the social environment as highly influential on action.
- Cormier: Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism theorizes chance as contingency in Black experiences and agency.

[10] For my research and for updating my academic website, webdubois.org, I scour the internet seeking materials written by contemporaries of Du Bois. Almost no one of his era writes about Du Bois **and** Darwinism. I have located one contemporary who very briefly mentions the Darwinism found in *John Brown*. The anonymous reviewer writes:

"Professor Du Bois sees a more or less steady growth during the greater part of the last century of the doctrines of liberty, equality and fraternity; but with the supremacy of Darwin's theory he notes a lapse backward." [Anonymous 1910: 371]

Perhaps the lack of contemporaneous response to Du Bois's Darwinian thinking is due to the ubiquity of the idea of evolution in the circum-1900 era; in their various forms, they are hotly debated (see Bowler 1983). Or perhaps Du Bois does not write enough about Darwinism to merit attention, if I may speculate.

[11] Until recent decades, we find few details about Du Bois's Darwinism. The biographers of Du Bois do not address his thinking on evolution; this includes Horne, Lewis, Marable, and Rampersad. Both Marable and Horne briefly discuss *John Brown*, but neither mentions the Darwinian aspects of Du Bois's last chapter (Horne 59-60; Marable 65-66). Rampersad writes briefly that Du Bois detests the racism of social Darwinism and also that in *Darkwater* Du Bois expresses a kind of "evolutionary optimism" (Rampersad 1990/1976: 98, 181). Similarly, Shaw in her analysis of Du Bois and *The Souls of Black Folk* only considers Darwin in its negative social Darwinist sense and uses (Shaw 2013: 64).

[12] We often find that when scholars have discussed of Du Bois in conjunction with evolution and Darwinism they provide few if any details or quotations. For example, in the words of Adolph Reed, Du Bois is a "reform Darwinist" (referring to *The Philadelphia Negro*: TPN 1899) and also a "neo-Lamarckian" (1998: 46, p.214n.44). This last designation Aldon Morris disputes, citing "Heredity and the Public School", but Morris does not examine why in that text Du Bois is or is not a neo-Lamarckian (2105: 33-34).

[13] The number of scholars providing more extensive discussion of Du Bois on Darwinism is slowly increasing. For example, Eric Anderson discusses Du Bois briefly and does not elaborate, in the historical context of other African American intellectuals in the decades surrounding 1900. Anderson does not elaborate on the details of Du Bois's understanding of evolution and Darwin and does not focus on all relevant texts (Anderson 1989). Also, Mark Richardson briefly mentions the Darwinian aspects of John Brown, citing two passages from the book, including the one with "social self-realization" (Richardson 2017). Afterwards, Richardson concludes his treatment of John Brown this way: "Here, Du Bois anticipates the

later insights of such politically progressive Darwinians as Stephen Jay Gould, which makes his book on John Brown a contribution not merely to history and biography but to the history of ideas." In addition, Patricia Sullivan (2009: 9) discusses the National Negro Conference and briefly mentions that, for Du Bois in the context of Darwin, freedom means "social self-realization". Three other scholars warrant a more detailed examination: Adriana Novoa, Kyra Schuller, and Harvey Cormier.

[14] Adriana Novoa sketches the details of social Darwinism, indicating that it represents an attempt to fit the unpredictable conclusions of Darwin's own theorizing with the earlier intellectual justifications of a fixed social order and of *laissez-faire* policies (2016). She examines Du Bois and "Evolution of the Race Problem" in that context, highlighting Du Bois's suggestion of "intelligent breeding" as a way to promote intentional and scientifically based selection (not natural selection) designed to foster marriages and families for the good of the race. Du Bois wishes to educate and encourage such choices. He does not advocate using forcible means to improve marriages or families.

[15] Kyra Schuller provides a very extensive analysis of Du Bois and his views on evolution. She argues that Du Bois's thinking involves a "qualified Lamarckian approach" (2018: 190). In her analysis, he stresses that social heredity in the form of a properly oriented education will have a major positive effect on individuals, who will as parents inculcate this in their children. The learned characteristics of one generation will, or potentially can, be passed along to the next generations.

**[Note 2—Du Bois's "Qualified Lamarckian Approach".]**

Kyra Schuller situates Du Bois within an overarching framework of biopower: how biological theories are used to justify social and political actors and policies (2018). Her project analyzes how dominant discourses and practices in the USA shifted from a Lamarckian-based view that changes could be effected in offspring by repeated "impressions" (her term) of discipline and training on the parents, whose actions would have inter-generational positive consequences. Accordingly, social reforms are crucial. She documents that the Lamarckian dominance in America shifted to a genetic determinism which holds that genes are the sole mechanism of passing along individual characteristics. Genes are immutable and not able to be changed by external actions. Any social reforms would influence only one generation at most. Social policies usually include involuntary sterilization, limited immigration to America from certain countries, and anti-miscegenation policies.

Schuller bases her view that Du Bois's thinking demonstrates "qualified Lamarckian approach" on several key texts, especially "Heredity and the Public Schools" and "Evolution of the Race Problem" (2018: 190). She argues that Du Bois emphasizes

- a) that the social environment has a central affect on individuals's development;
- b) that the components of a social environment, such as education and training (i.e., social heredity), can discipline individuals;
- c) that this social heredity is impressed on one generation such that the results are passed on to their offspring via the children being educated, in turn, by their home and social environments
- d) that, as a consequence, Du Bois works with Margaret Sanger in order to promote family planning and birth control in Black communities.

According to Schuller, Du Bois embraces eugenicist thinking because he wishes to improve African Americans via social policies that would presumably remove, over time, those characteristics deemed undesirable. Du Bois, however, does not espouse forced sterilization and anti-racial intermarriage policies, and he does not endorse ideas of racial purity, all of which are typically associated with eugenicist practices.

I recognize how Schuller can interpret Du Bois to be a "qualified" Lamarckian in the social policies he advocates. However, Schuller does not concentrate on Du Bois's own statements where he specifically and positively mentions Darwin and Darwinism by name. As a consequence, in this presentation, I will tend to stress Du Bois's understanding of Darwin and Darwinism, rather than Lamarckism, due to his repeated references to Darwin. I acknowledge that Du Bois's understanding of Darwin, of course, may very well have Lamarckian inflections.

**[End of Note 2.]**

[16] Harvey Cormier in "American Experimentalism" explores the parallels and the divergences of William James and Du Bois on the definition of race (2018). Cormier examines the evolution aspects in James by discussing James's thinking in relation to Darwin and Spencer, especially in terms of "Great Men and Their Environment". He argues that the elements of chance in the development of groups like races is part of Du Bois's use of Jamesian pragmatism (Cormier 2018: 230-231). He indicates that Du Bois in many works employs the idea of chance as causal contingency (my term) to explain "the ways black Americans used their particular experiences and shaped, or strived to shape, their lives and communities with their ensuing contingent choices." (Cormier 2018: 231)

**[Note 3—Cormier: Du Bois & Jamesian Pragmatism.]**

Within a section on Du Bois's education in social science in Germany Harvey Cormier quotes "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" where Du Bois indicates that he has turned away from the the pursuit of scientific law and towards Jamesian pragmatism. He examines the significance of Du Bois's turn in terms of the Darwinian aspects of James's pragmatism. Cormier writes:

"Thus he [Du Bois] adopted Jamesian pragmatism and gave up what he understood to be the Germans' search for "law" in social science. He did not give up trying to be scientific; instead, he adopted a different, more Darwinian account of scientific understanding. He would thus go on to account for black history and life in a new way. He would lay out lots of empirically observed facts, but he would still acknowledge the utter contingencies of human life in society. He would take pains to illustrate something that preceding historical and sociological works had missed or suppressed—namely, the ways black Americans used their particular experiences and shaped, or strived to shape, their lives and communities with their ensuing contingent choices.

"Du Bois appreciated what many present-day interpreters of James's pragmatism have not—namely, the whole point of it. James's theory of truth and meaning is above all a way of showing how and why we individual thinkers introduce chance effects into our world. Like nature, we strive to produce novelties that survive, endure, and shape the world so that it contains more fitness. (We strive, as Du Bois says, both voluntarily and involuntarily, though nature always lacks real volitions.) Unless we appreciate the way human thinkers introduce their new, contingent ideas in the hope of finding satisfactory guides to action, we will not really understand what people, and peoples, have done or can do in the world. But we can appreciate this human characteristic, and even in a scientific way, if we take the Darwinian natural-history approach found in James's version of pragmatism. Du Bois went on to do just this in his different kinds of writing.

"However, Du Bois did not acknowledge the extent to which this approach to the development of human races was continuous with any kind of biological one. Some of his best-known comments disparage the whole idea of biological race, and he explicitly rejected the mechanistic biology that saw life-processes as inevitable and socio-historical investigation as unnecessary. Did Du Bois perhaps see this

kind of mechanism in the law-seeking scientific work of his German teachers? Is this what he was dissenting from when he 'fell back upon ... Royce and James and deserted Schmoller and Weber'?" [Cormier 2018: 230-231]

Cormier then proceeds to explore Schmoller, Weber, and Dilthey in terms of their scientific methods and the corresponding consequences for the study of human activity, race, and ethnicity.

**[End of Note 3.]**

[17] Despite the gradually increasing recognition, most of those cited do not engage extensively with Du Bois's views on Darwinism in relation to the Darwinian thinking of his era. Novoa, Schuller, and Cormier are exceptions and they provide valuable information in their respective works. Schuller, however, does not approach Darwinism with regard to chance per se, while Novoa indirectly considers that Darwin's idea of evolution includes unpredictability. Only Cormier addresses Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing with regard to Jamesian pragmatism. However, although Cormier discusses Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism in relation to chance, he does not delve deeply into the workings of the "workable logic" of Du Bois's evolutionary thinking. In addition, I have found no scholar who examines in detail all four of Du Bois's major works on evolution—"The Future of the Negro Race in America" (FNRA 1904), "Heredity and the Public Schools" (HAPS 1904), "Evolution of the Race Problem" (EORP 1909), and "The Legacy of John Brown" chapter (LOJB 1909)—especially as regards Du Bois's views of Jamesian pragmatism. This is what I am addressing in my presentation.

**[Note 4—Scholars & "Heredity and the Public Schools".]**

With regard to "Heredity and the Public Schools", scholars of Du Bois on education (e.g., Alridge 2008; Provenzo 2002: p.111), focus on the central question that Du Bois poses: "Is the average Negro child capable of essentially the same training and development as the average white child?" (HAPS 1904: ¶4) Such scholars do not delve into the speech's evolutionary ideas. Aptheker in his *Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois* likewise comments only on the topic of Black school children and not on evolution (1973).

There are a few exceptions to mention. Aldon Morris briefly examines the evolutionary dimensions of "Heredity and the Public Schools" (Morris 2015: 33-34). In addition, Schuller relies on "Heredity" in her analysis of Du Bois's views on evolution. Neither one, however, concentrates on chance and Jamesian Pragmatism in relation to Du Bois's Darwinism.

**[End of Note 4.]**

## 1.4. Presentation Overview

[Section 1.4. Summary.]

- Section 2: Primary and secondary rhythms; chance and free will; free will implicates human agency; Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism.
- Section 3: Du Bois's views of evolution; tenets of Darwinian evolution; philosophical implications of Darwinism.
- Section 4: implications of Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing for social criticism; challenging Jamesian pragmatism; evolutionary and revolutionary paths.
- Section 5: concluding section; why does Du Bois not use evolutionary theorizing in later years?

### 1.4.1. Section Descriptions

[18] Section 2, "Chance and Jamesian Pragmatism", begins with Du Bois's concepts for empirical reality, primary and secondary rhythms, by which he situates chance and free will. I explore the implications of free will for human agency. Also, I discuss Du Bois's under-

standing of Jamesian pragmatism, not James's own views.

[19] Section 3 covers "Evolution and Du Bois", focusing on his views of evolution as detailed in four important texts of the early 1900s. The section also presents a short subsection on Darwin and the important features of Darwinian evolution.

[20] "Du Bois's Social Critique" occupies Section 4, which sketches the implications of Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing for his criticism of society. I discuss an implicit challenge to Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism that arises from correspondence between him and Walter Willcox. The section also briefly examines Du Bois's evolutionary and revolutionary paths, as he covers in *John Brown* (1909).

[21] The last section, Section 5: "In Closing", summarizes the presentation. It also briefly sketches the path that Du Bois takes from evolutionary theorizing to more revolutionary views of socialism and Marxism.

[22] Section 6 lists the works referenced throughout this project. It is divided into subsections on works by Du Bois and works by others.

#### **1.4.2. Scope and Limitations of This Project**

[23] I will focus on many of the ideas prevalent in the late-19th and early 20th centuries—the era in which Du Bois most specifically addressed Darwin and Darwinism in his texts. As a consequence, many of the ideas that Du Bois uses directly or indirectly represent earlier interpretations of Darwin prevalent a century or more ago.

[24] I cannot cover all pertinent sources, thinkers, and ideas. Those not detailed include Herbert Spencer, Charles Sanders Peirce and other pragmatists with regard to Darwinism, as well as other thinkers and traditions of Darwinian and evolutionary thinking (see Bowler 1983; Russett 1976; Weiner 1949). I will reiterate that the presentation concentrates on Du Bois's understanding of James and does not elaborate on James's thought per se.

#### **1.4.3. The Citation System Used in the Presentation**

[25] Du Bois is referenced within the presentation by an abbreviated title and year of publication. Section 6.1. lists the full references.

## **SECTION 2: Chance, Agency, and Jamesian Pragmatism**

### **2.1. Rhythms: Primary and Secondary**

[Section 2.1. Summary.]

- Du Bois's "Sociology Hesitant" manuscript of ca. 1904-5 is a vital text.
- "Primary rhythms": patterns of human actions in the aggregate; predictable and uniform (more or less).
- "Secondary rhythms": patterns of human actions that are potentially changeable by human volition and intent.
- For Du Bois, unpredictability = chance = "scientific side of inexplicable Will".

[26] Du Bois supports scientific research that seeks, to use his words from "Sociology Hesitant", primary rhythms. Such rhythms are the uniformities of human behavior that can be observed and quantified, especially in terms of statistical methods. Primary rhythms point to regularities of behavior in the aggregate, such as birth and death rates (SOCH 1904-5: ¶27).

[27] Importantly, Du Bois also emphasizes that humans possess the capacity of free will—"inexplicable will" (SOCH 1904-5: ¶27)—to act **potentially** in non-deterministic (i.e., not pre-ordained) ways. This Du Bois describes as "secondary rhythms" in "Sociology Hesitant". With secondary rhythms Du Bois holds that there are uniformities in human actions, for example, in an organization, but they can be changed by human volition—by human will. Such uniformities we might consider today as probabilities. With secondary rhythms he seems to point to a smaller scale of human action than with primary rhythms.

[28] Here is Du Bois's succinct summary in "Sociology Hesitant":

"That there are limits is shown by the rhythm in birth and death rates and the distribution by sex; it is found further in human customs and laws, the forms of government, the laws of trade, and even in charity and ethics. As, however, we rise in the realm of conduct, we note a primary and a secondary rhythm. A primary rhythm depending, as we have indicated, on physical forces and physical law; but within this appears again and again a secondary rhythm which, while presenting nearly the same uniformity as the first, differs from it in its more or less sudden rise at a given tune, in accordance with prearranged plan and prediction and in being liable to stoppage and change according to similar plan. An example of primary uniformity is the death rate; of secondary uniformity, the operation of a woman's club; to confound the two sorts of human uniformity is fatal to clear thinking; to explain them we must assume Law and Chance working in conjunction—Chance being the scientific side of inexplicable Will." [SOCH ca.1904-5: ¶27; capitalization in the original]

By admonishing us not to "confound the two sorts of human uniformity", Du Bois

- connects, without a full definition, the free will of an individual to chance at the level of aggregate human action; and
- reserves a conceptual space where both free will and ordered patterns of human action (in a statistical sense) both exist.

[29] Chance is very important to Du Bois. In "Sociology Hesitant" he links humanity's free will with chance: "...behind Chance we place free human wills capable of undetermined choices..." (SOCH ¶21). But there is another type of chance in Du Bois's writings, one which what I will call geo-historical contingency. He raises this other conception of chance in an essay of 1909, "The Evolution of the Race Problem". This type of chance, which he calls accident, exists in the rise and fall of civilizations or cultures.

**[Note 5—Fall & Rise: Tiber & Thames]**

In the "Evolution of the Race Problem" Du Bois seeks to convince White supremacists that, at any given point in time, one cannot ascertain whether a civilization is ascending or descending.

"[T]here is not the slightest warrant for assuming that there do not exist among the Chinese and Hindus, the African Bantus and American Indians as lofty possibilities of human culture as any European race has ever exhibited. It is, to be sure, puzzling to know why the Soudan [*sic*] should linger a thousand years in culture behind the valley of the Seine, but it is no more puzzling than the fact that the valley of the Thames was miserably backward as compared with the banks of the Tiber. Climate, human contact, facilities of communication, and what we call accident have played great part in the rise of culture among nations: to ignore these

and to assert dogmatically that the present distribution of culture is a fair index of the distribution of human ability and desert is to make an assertion for which there is not the slightest scientific warrant." [EORP 1909: ¶18]

**[End of Note 5.]**

[30] The implications of chance for Du Bois involve both

- human (individual and group) behaviors that generate unpredictable outcomes, and also
- unpredictable outcomes arising from the confluence of contextual factors, such as social structures and the natural environment.

Ultimately, for Du Bois, chance plays an important role in social critique because with it we can counter the ideas supporting White supremacist norms and practices. Chance qua free will and chance as geo-historical contingency mean that the present state of affairs is not all that it seems and is not all that is possible.

## 2.2. Chance and Human Agency

[Section 2.2. Summary.]

- For Du Bois: chance = free will ("Sociology Hesitant").
- Free will = human agency in particular.
- Agency = fundamental humanity of Africana peoples.
- Humanity, free will, and agency = assumptions to be evaluated in relation to reality = Jamesian pragmatism.

[31] Du Bois links chance with human agency, which is implicated in his idea of free will. Human agency for Du Bois includes several characteristics, which we can reconstruct from multiple works (e.g. *Black Reconstruction*, BREC 1935; *The World and Africa*, TWAA 1946/1965). In general, human agency highlights the capacity to shape actively, and to varying degrees, their life situations. Taken as a whole, Du Bois's implicit and composite concept of Africana agency holds that Africana peoples have civilizational attainments which are meaningful contributions to world history; are fundamentally equal with other races; can develop their human potential as with any other race; and can actively and deliberately influence the world within the flux of time (e.g., TCOR 1897; TN15 1915).

[32] In Du Bois's thought the link between chance and agency is sometimes explicit, such as we read with regard to "Sociology Hesitant" (SOCH 1904-5) or in his 1956 letter to Aptheker (LHA 1956: ¶7). Sometimes the link of human agency is more implicit, as with his brief mention of the rise and fall of the civilizations on the Tiber and Thames rivers (EORP 1909).

**[Note 6—Chance & Agency in *Black Reconstruction*.]**

Isaac Martin discusses Du Bois as a practitioner of comparative historical sociology. Martin examines *Black Reconstruction* in terms of how it illustrates Du Bois following his own definition of sociology by interrelating particular Reconstruction-era individuals with the constraints on their actions.

*Black Reconstruction* also seems methodologically innovative in its use of biographical detail to support a sociological argument. DuBois devoted hundreds of pages to the lives and achievements Black legislators in the South during Reconstruction. It is easy to misread this part of the book as nothing more than vindication of a few great Black men. DuBois certainly was an elitist. But in this text, his is best understood as *methodological* elitism, in service of a sociological point: he takes the elite to be interesting because following people of unusual ability allows him to reveal the social limits of human achievement, in much the same way that glass ceilings only become visible when you climb high enough to

bump into them. The book's use of personal biography to reveal both contingency (what if Lincoln hadn't been killed?) and structure (what stopped a talented politician like Hiram Revels from becoming another Lincoln?) exemplifies DuBois's distinctive approach to sociology as the scientific search for "the limits of chance in human conduct." (DuBois 2000 [1905]). {This refers to "Sociology Hesitant".} [I. Martin 2016: 24]

**[End of Note 6.]**

[33] Du Bois's assumptions of chance and agency are not simply for methodological purposes (SNP 1898; ATLC 1904; SOCH 1904-5; LHA 1956). Such assumptions also can be tested against reality. This is a hallmark of what he calls Jamesian pragmatism, the subject of the next subsection.

### 2.3. Jamesian Pragmatism

[Section 2.3. Summary.]

- Jamesian pragmatism: Du Bois's 1956 letter to Aptheker.
- Assumptions necessary for research: Du Bois assumes truth, cause, and change.
- Jamesian pragmatism, for Du Bois: method that evaluates the "workable logic" of hypotheses if we assume their truth.
- He applies Jamesian pragmatism to research and activism.
- What occurs when we assume African agency?
- = Openness to research findings of social progress.
- = Activism: we orient our actions to promote justice.

[34] Du Bois, as is well discussed, studies with William James at Harvard. He often writes of the influence of his professor (e.g. A68; MEPF 1944: ¶¶ 25,27,75). Later scholars have examined the influence of James on Du Bois; they seek similarities in Du Bois's writings that parallel or call to mind James's thought (e.g., Campbell 1992; Kahn 2009; Kloppenberg 2010: 15; P. Taylor 2004; West 1989; Zamir 1995). Others are concerned that studies seeking the intellectual influences on Du Bois diminish his status, and also imply that his thought is derivative of White academics (e.g., Curry 2011 & 2014). As such scholars argue, it is very important to find the divergences and originality of Du Bois vis-à-vis his White faculty at Harvard and other universities. Indeed, Du Bois himself analyzes racial issues that some like James or George Santayana barely, if at all, mention, and that others like Josiah Royce study, but in racially problematic ways (Curry 2009; Glaude 2007).

[35] For his part, Du Bois explicitly cites the influence of James on his thinking. In a well recognized passage, he writes in 1956 to Herbert Aptheker:

"I think in general I agree with your conclusions and criticism; but I would express my philosophy more simply. Several times in the past I have started to formulate it, 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 doubts 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 and like the "Asymtotes [*sic*] of the Hyperbola" (I learned the phrase in high school and was ever after fascinated by it) 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, as you put it, but on its workable logic if its truth was assumed. Also of necessity I assumed Cause and Change. With these admittedly unprovable assumptions, I proposed to make a scientific study of human action, based on the hypotheses of the reality of such actions, of their causal connections and of their continued occurrence and change because of Law and Chance. I called Sociology the measurement of the element of Chance in Human Action." [Du Bois LHA 1956: ¶5; capitalization in the original.]

Du Bois will apply such Jamesian insights, and perhaps teachings from his other professors at the universities of Fisk, Harvard, and Friedrich Wilhelm in ways that exceed his professors' experiences and ideas (A68: Chs. VIII, IX, X). He also briefly cites "Jamesian pragmatism" by name in "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" (MEPF 1944: ¶75).

**[Note 7—William James: Definition of Pragmatism.]**

William James in his works on pragmatism does not seem to use the phrase "workable logic". He does in *Pragmatism* provide several passages that define the pragmatic method and its significance for human action (1907). For example, in "Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means" he writes:

[Pragmatism] "was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878. In an article entitled 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear,' in the 'Popular Science Monthly' for January of that year Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all." [W. James 1907: pp.46-47]

Russett argues that this changes the intent of C.S. Peirce's definition from an emphasis on meaning to James's own focus on human conduct in relation to grasping the truth of an idea for the individual (1976: 69).

James offers another example in "Lecture VI: Pragmatic Conception of Truth". Observe that he utilizes the phrase "Grant an idea...to be true" for Du Bois's use of assumption.

Pragmatism [...] asks its usual question. "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?"

The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer: *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.

This thesis is what I have to defend. 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. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying

itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*. [W. James 1907: pp.200-201; italics in the original]

**[End of Note 7.]**

[36] Following the workable logic of Jamesian pragmatism what might Du Bois expect to glean from an assumption of African American equality and agency insofar as such an assumption was manifested, or not, over time and space? I will frame it this way: we can operationalize progress as property ownership, professional job-holding, educational attainment, wealth creation and so forth. Then we gather data, and afterwards, we ask: do we observe progress among African Americans as a whole compared with earlier times? How widespread are advances among African Americans geographically and in class terms? Du Bois of course does just this sort of research and analysis in numerous works.

[37] I have conveyed my understanding of Du Bois's understanding of Jamesian pragmatism in terms such as operationalization. This might evoke in the reader the idea of conventional expressions of the scientific method. I justify my terminology by building on his own discussion of the use of hypotheses in his letter to Aptheker, part of which is quoted above.

## **SECTION 3: Evolution and Du Bois**

### **3.1. Du Bois: Expressing Evolution**

[Section 3.1. Summary.]

- What is Du Bois's theory of social development in the early 1900s? = Du Bois's understanding of Darwinism.
- Du Bois often includes the term "evolution" in his essay titles.
- However, he writes only a few key texts on evolution: "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (1904); "Heredity and the Public Schools" (1904); "Evolution of the Race Problem" (1909); and the last chapter in *John Brown* (1909).
- He criticizes social Darwinism and many uses of "survival of the fittest"; he praises Darwin by name.

[38] What is lacking in my example of Du Bois's workable logic of Jamesian pragmatism applied to African Americans? Namely, I do not discuss his theory of human development. Certainly, Du Bois examines the lessons we learn from history: e.g., "The Development of a People" (TDAP 1904). In his earlier years, he generally does not frame an explanatory framework accounting for changes over time. The exception is the central role that Du Bois accords evolutionary theory in "Evolution of the Race Problem" and in the last chapter of *John Brown*, both of which closely parallel each other's passages on Darwinism. Du Bois's understanding of evolutionary theory is informed by Jamesian pragmatism, especially in terms of how assumptions like chance and agency allow us to interpret our experiences in, and knowledge about, the world (see also Cormier 2018).

#### **3.1.1. Du Bois's Relevant Works**

[39] Du Bois himself uses the word evolution in various titles of essays. Examples include:

- "Evolution of the Race Problem" (EORP 1904);
- "Evolution of the Negro" (EOTN 1910);
- "Evolution of Negro Leadership" (EONL 1901);
- "Social Evolution of the Black South" (SEBS 1911);
- "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" (MEPF 1944).

The works vary greatly with regard to how much Du Bois explicitly relates Darwin and evolution to the themes of the particular essays. For some texts the term "evolution" exists only in the title. In such cases Du Bois is focusing on development over time but not necessarily in a Darwinian evolutionary sense.

[40] Du Bois also publishes a few works which do not contain evolution prominently in the title, but which are significant with regard to his thinking on the subject. Some examples include brief pieces in publications that he edited such as *The Horizon* (DRWM 1908) and the *The Crisis* ("Races" RTCE 1911). Other examples are longer works: specifically, "Heredity and the Public Schools" (HAPS 1904) and "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (FNRA 1904), both of which I will detail below.

**[Note 8—Du Bois on Darwinism in the *Horizon*.]**

In the *Horizon*, a periodical of which he was editor before *The Crisis*, Du Bois specifically writes of his understanding of the social consequences of Darwinian evolution:

**Darwinism**

"There was a time in the 19th century when Science was apparently dead set against unfortunate or "inferior" races. All the world of Darwinism was glib about "undeveloped" races and the "Survival of the Fittest." Later and more careful interpretation of the real facts is putting a different face on the truth: we have long since learned, for instance, that the "fit" in survival is not necessarily the Best or the most Decent—it may be simply the most Impudent, or the biggest Thief or Liar. We are getting even further than that: Alfred Wallace, who shares with Darwin the honor of conceiving the newer evolutionary doctrine, now declares that physically and in essential mental structure, the Advanced Races are not superior to the earliest barbarians; and that among the present races of man, none can be scientifically demonstrated to be physically inferior to others. In other words he agrees with Boaz,*[sic]* that genius and civilization are not the property of the white man." [DRWM 1908; capitalization in the original]

**[End of Note 8.]**

**3.1.2. Du Bois's Typical Emphases**

[41] Du Bois's application of evolution includes the following points:

- a) Du Bois typically criticizes the idea of the "survival of the fittest", especially when it is defined as being achieved via brutality or racist practices (e.g., TPN 1899; FNRA 1904).
- b) He also may reframe "survival of the fittest" in such a way that the fittest are those that have achieved success in some non-violent way (e.g., EORP 1909, which I will discuss below).
- c) He often views Darwin the naturalist in positive terms (e.g., TCOR 1897; EORP 1909).
- d) He castigates Darwinism by name when it is applied to justify the present status of White domination and Africana subordination and marginalization (e.g., IASC 1905: ¶6; TWAA 1946/1965; JBR, the 1962 reprinting of *John Brown*).

Such ideas are commonly discussed in the circum-1900s, partly as an attempt to remove the often highly individualistic dimensions of some forms of Darwinism (Russett 1976). Social selection and social heredity are important to Du Bois, as I will elaborate below, because his concepts of secondary rhythm and human agency can conflict with one vital aspect of Darwinian evolution: namely, that it is irrelevant to the mechanism of natural selection, and to Darwinian-based evolution in general, for an organism to have free will (Haskell 2000: 243-244).

[42] Du Bois provides a more extended discussion of Darwin and "socially progressive"—i.e., racially uplifting—uses of (Darwinian) evolution in several works from the early 1900s.

### 3.2. Evolution and Darwin(ism)

[Section 3.2. Summary.]

- Lamarck: environment causes change in an organism; new traits are passed on to offspring; organisms as a species can progress in complexity.
- Darwin's natural selection: offspring are born with chance (random) genetic variations from parents; organisms compete with conspecifics and/or the local environment; some survive to reproduce and pass on the traits.
- Not all traits are produced by natural selection; not all traits necessarily hinder or promote survival.
- Darwin's implications (Dewey): no grand design in nature = no end-point and no necessary progress.
- For Dewey and Du Bois: possibility of incremental, intentional changes aimed at concrete problems.

#### 3.2.1. Prior to Darwin

[43] Before detailing Du Bois on evolution, let me make an short excursus here on evolutionary theory. It will not be comprehensive or exhaustive in its summary.

[44] The idea of organisms evolving and changing predates Darwin. For my purposes, I will discuss Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Lamarck is important in the history of evolutionary thinking because of the emphasis he placed on the following factors which Darwin and many Darwinians challenge.

- a) Environmental factors induce in a causal way the individual organism to develop traits and characteristics in order to cope. (Darwinian theory holds that a local environment selects the organism in terms of traits that enable it to better survive and reproduce—such traits being generated internally within the individual itself, such as via genetic mutations, and without regard to the environment external to the organism.)

#### [Note 9—Lamarckian Example Given by W. James.]

William James in "Great Men and Their Environment" discusses Lamarckism without so naming it, when he writes that "pre-Darwinian philosophers"

"said that the presence of the trees not only maintained an animal with a long neck to browse upon their branches, but also produced him. They *made* his neck long by the constant striving they aroused in him to reach up to them. The environment, in short, was supposed by these writers to mould the animal by a kind of direct pressure, very much as a seal presses the wax into harmony with itself." [W. James GMTE 1897: 222; italics in the original]

#### [End of Note 9.]

- b) Traits or characteristics that an individual organism develops over the course of life can be passed on to its offspring.
- c) Evolution is directional, heading towards progress defined in terms of increasing complexity.

#### 3.2.2. Darwin's Theory

[45] The Darwinian theory of evolution is quite intricate, as is the so-called Modern Synthesis which unites Darwin with 20th Century genetics. Despite the important, later elaborations, there are several crucial concepts that represent Darwin's contribution to science. For my purposes here, I will stress natural selection and chance herein, because those are the

concepts that Du Bois encounters in a circa-1900 context.

[46] Stephen Jay Gould in *Full House* offers a good definition of natural selection and the logical unfolding of the evidence that Darwin provides in *Origins*. Gould writes:

1. All organisms tend to produce more offspring than can possibly survive....
2. Offspring vary among themselves, and are not carbon copies of an immutable type.
3. At least some of this variation is passed down by inheritance to future generations. (Darwin [Gould writes] did not know the mechanism of heredity, for Mendel's principles did not gain acceptance until early in our century. However, this third fact requires no knowledge of how heredity works, but only an acknowledgment that heredity exists. [...]).

The principle of natural selection then emerges as a necessary inference from these facts:

4. If many offspring must die (for not all can be accommodated in nature's limited ecology), and individuals in all species vary among themselves, then on average (as a statistical statement, and not in every case), survivors will tend to be those individuals with variations that are fortuitously best suited to changing local environments. Since heredity exists, the offspring of survivors will tend to resemble their successful parents. The accumulation of these favorable variants through time will produce evolutionary change. [Gould 1996: 138]

Natural selection generates, according to Herbert Spencer, the "survival of the fittest". He suggests the phrase to Darwin who includes it in later editions of the *Origin*. Overall, "survival of the fittest" is often framed as being devoid of, or indeed damning, human sympathy and solicitude towards others, especially those in need of assistance. Natural selection becomes a major point of contention in the discourse of the times.

[47] Significantly, in his later *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin indicates that moral faculties such as fairness and sympathy, are intrinsic to some animals, including humans. Natural selection operates on those humans whose traits of fairness and sympathy lead to cooperation amongst the individuals. In such cases, the groups of individuals tend (on average over time) to be better able to survive in harsh local environments and in physical struggles with other animals, including other humans.

### 3.2.3. Chance and Darwinism

[48] Chance in Darwin is framed as randomness and arises in genetic variation occurring within individual members of a species, among other means. That is, one cannot predict the extent to which the genes mutate (C. Johnson 2015; Ramsey & Pence 2016). Modern biology also recognizes several other random factors that can exert evolutionary pressures on an organism's reproductive success, including genetic drift and recombination.

[49] A concept related to chance is contingency, a concept that Stephen Jay Gould not only popularized among the lay public, but which has exercised the specialists in biology and paleontology (Erwin 2016; Losos 2017). John Beatty has gleaned that Gould sets forth two, complementary meanings of contingency (Beatty 2006). Contingency is used to highlight both unpredictability as well as causal dependence (contingent upon). The former refers to causal events that we cannot predict accurately, such as gene mutations and accidents, such as an asteroid striking the earth about 65 million years ago. (Although nowadays we might be able to predict the course of a near-Earth object *once observed*, even if we do not know about all of the possible N.E.O. at this very minute.) Contingency as causal dependence means that,

without a causal sequence occurring along a particular path (evidenced by, or inferred from, the data), then the result as we know it would not have happened. To use Gould's metaphor, we cannot replay the tape of life and retrace the same historical path (*cf.* Conway Morris 1998).

### 3.2.4. The Influence of Darwin

[50] Numerous authors from the 19th into the 21st Centuries have written on the consequences of Darwinian evolution for understanding society and humans (e.g., Bowler 1983; Giddings 1909; Kidd 1894; Kropotkin 1904; Russett 1976).

[51] I will single out John Dewey, because he succinctly frames several vital issues with regard to Darwinian thinking, but also because he speaks at the National Negro Conference at which Du Bois delivers "Evolution of the Race Problem" (EORP 1909). In "Darwin's Influence upon Philosophy" Dewey argues that Darwinian evolution undermines the age-old quest for the rational essences of things that exist beyond empirical experience, and that develop progressively and more perfectly towards a fixed end-point (or *telos*), which conveys the thing's ultimate purpose (Dewey DIUP 1909). Dewey writes:

"The Darwinian principle of natural selection cut straight under this philosophy [as Dewey has conveyed]. If all organic adaptations are due simply to constant variation and the elimination of those variations which are harmful in the struggle for existence that is brought about by excessive reproduction, there is no call for a prior intelligent causal Force to plan and preordain them. Hostile critics charged Darwin with materialism and with making chance to cause of the universe." [Dewey DIUP 1909:95; capitalization in the original]

As a result of Darwin's *Origins*, Dewey continues:

"Philosophy forswears inquiry after origins and absolute finalities in order to explore specific values and the specific conditions that generate them.

"Darwin concluded that the impossibility of assigning the world to chance as a whole and to design in its parts indicated the solubility of the question." [Dewey DIUP 1909: 95-96]

As Dewey indicates, natural selection works without requiring an end goal and without requiring intentional direction by deities. Consequently, there is no special creation of organisms, including humans, by a higher power.

[52] Dewey concludes with the intellectual and practical consequences of Darwinian thinking:

[Regarding] "the nature of that intellectual transformation effected by the Darwinian logic. Interest shifts from the wholesale essence back of special changes to the question of how these special changes serve and defeat concrete purposes; shifts from an intelligence that shaped things once for all to the particular intelligences which things are even now shaping; shifts from an ultimate goal of good to the direct increments of justice and happiness that intelligent administration of existent conditions may beget and that present carelessness or stupidity will destroy or forgo." [Dewey DIUP 1909: 96]

Dewey here concentrates on how Darwinism encourages incremental adjustments on the path to ameliorating social problems.

[53] I will reiterate an important facet of the modern scientific understanding of evolution. **According to Darwinian evolution, in addition to there being no deity creating change, there are also no necessary intentional actions that generate evolutionary changes**

(Haskell 2000: 244). Evolution via natural selection can and does function without an organism's conscious agency. Nonetheless, the irrelevancy of human agency vis-à-vis evolution does not forswear the possibility that humans can influence evolutionary paths, via incremental steps (according to Dewey), and indeed thereby be a conscious part of how evolution might unfold. For example, via sympathy some members of society can assist others in need of help to survive hardships or to live through a cold winter. Darwin himself recognizes such possibilities in *The Descent of Man* (Darwin 1871: Ch.V).

[54] In the passage more recently quoted, Dewey seems to indicate that one influence of Darwinism would be conscious actors designing a plan—i.e, intending to act—in order to effect the steps oriented to solve a specific social goal, such as "direct increments of justice and happiness that intelligent administration of existent conditions may beget" (Dewey DIUP 1909: 96). According to Dewey, that plan can be evaluated for its results and adjustments made to the steps used to pursue a goal. For him, such testing of plans against reality seems to be analogous to Darwinian natural selection.

[55] Likewise for Du Bois and many others in the circum-1900s, Darwinian-based evolutionary thinking can be deployed by human actors in order to consciously support social and political actions. This in turn will focus attention on the social settings (or to use alternate terms, the social relations, conditions, and structures), in which we live. In short, rather than deeming the environment (only) as a given—that which provides selective pressures on at least some of an organism's traits—Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing problematizes the (social) environment and challenges its inequalities. Accordingly, Darwinism will help Du Bois to justify the struggles for racial justice.

### 3.3. Du Bois: Theorizing Evolution

[Section 3.3. Summary.]

- For Du Bois: a "**properly interpreted**" Darwin means no inevitable dog-eat-dog competition and oppression.
- Du Bois's Darwinian concepts:
  - = Social selection: cooperation is possible.
  - = Social heredity: passes culture and knowledge across the generations via education.
  - = Social environment: the predominant influence on human development (even more than education).
- For Du Bois: human evolution is "social self-realization".
- For Du Bois: chance is implied by the unpredictable results emerging from equal conditions of possibility.

#### 3.3.1. A "Properly Interpreted" Darwin

[56] In "The Future of the Negro Race in America" Du Bois argues that Darwinism is not necessarily socially repressive.

"But do the theories of Darwin and Spencer, properly interpreted, support any such crude views of justice and right and the spread of civilisation as those current today?" [FNRA 1904: ¶20]

Indeed, for Du Bois and others, Darwinism can be used for positive social goals. The issue becomes how to interpret Darwin, as Du Bois (and others) do, so as to emphasize how Darwinian principles can be applied in socially uplifting ways. In particular, he faces a problem that also affects other social reformers. Darwinian evolution, in the strictest sense of its originator, does not need—and indeed directly excludes—an intentional actor/agent, whether

deity or human, from the process of natural selection. Hence, Du Bois encounters a philosophical problem: how can human free will have a significant role in evolution of humanity, if one wishes to interpret Darwin properly?

[57] Whether or not such interpretations and applications by Du Bois are truly and fully Darwinian is beyond the scope of this project, although I will mention a few other concerns with Du Bois's interpretation throughout the following. Also, it is important to caution that Du Bois is not addressing all salient aspects of Darwin's theory or any related Darwinian or non-Darwinian theories. Rather, Du Bois is counter-attacking the application of evolution, especially certain concepts, to African peoples and African Americans in particular. Accordingly, Du Bois's theorizing is not a comprehensive analysis of Darwinian thinking in the circum-1900 era. (Read, for example, Bowler 1983 and Hamlin 2014).

[58] In 1904 with "The Future of the Negro Race in America" and "Heredity and the Public Schools" Du Bois begins explicitly to spell out what Darwinism "properly interpreted" means. And in 1909, the year of the semi-centennial of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, Du Bois provides further details in "Evolution of the Race Problem" and its counterpart section in the concluding chapter of *John Brown*, entitled "The Legacy of John Brown".

### 3.3.2. Du Bois's Darwinian Concepts

[59] Du Bois utilizes several Darwinian concepts in the aforementioned works, even if he does not necessarily label them in the conventional manner. His concepts include selection (and the corresponding "survival of the fittest"), heredity, and the role of the environment.

- **Selection**

[60] "Survival of the fittest" is a hallmark of natural selection, which involves an organism's struggles to survive. According to Darwin, the struggle arises from an individual organism in conflict with other individual organisms of that species, over the needs of life. Such organisms also can struggle with the physical environment (e.g., drought, famine). Struggles, for Darwin do not necessarily involve fights to the death. Moreover, he acknowledges that cooperation among individuals of a species may also occur (Darwin 1871: Chapter V).

[61] In "Evolution" (and "Legacy") Du Bois is very clear that "survival of the fittest" arises from a natural selection of "brute force" and guns, rather than "mental stamina and moral fitness" (EORP ¶¶ 20-22=LOJB: ¶¶ 36-37). As a result, the "survival of the fittest" has not preserved the best, but rather the worst among the Whites in terms of race and class distinctions (EORP ¶¶ 23-24=LOJB: ¶¶ 38-39). Du Bois's moral, and moralizing, judgment attacks the supremacist claim that Whites are the superior race on the planet. For Du Bois, abolishing race and class distinctions will generate, he writes, "the survival of the fittest by peaceful personal and social selection, a selection all the more effective because free democracy and equality of opportunity allow the best to rise to their rightful place." (EORP 1909: ¶23)

[62] In "Evolution" and "Legacy" Du Bois emphasizes social selection, rather than natural selection, because that humans no longer have to worry about the physical environment for humanity's continued existence (EORP ¶23=LOJB ¶39). He writes: "the era of physical struggle for survival has passed away among human beings and that there is plenty of room accessible on earth for all..." (EORP ¶22=LOJB ¶37). In his definition of social selection, Du Bois seems to emphasize cooperation among humans rather than zero-sum competition (see also Dewey & Tufts 1909: 371-372). He writes:

"So to-day we are told that free racial contact—or "social equality" as southern *patois* has it—means contamination of blood and lowering of ability and culture. It need mean nothing of the sort. Abolition of class distinction does not mean universal intermarriage of stocks, but rather the survival of the fittest by peaceful personal and social selection, a selection all the more effective because free democracy and equality of opportunity allow the best to rise to their rightful place." [Du Bois EORP 1909: ¶23]

Du Bois's definition of social selection does not comport with the more conventional definitions of his era or later.

**[Note 10—Other Definitions of Social Selection.]**

Du Bois's use of "social selection" is not how contemporaries and later scholars have defined it. For example, James Mark Baldwin, who is a contemporary of Du Bois, defines social selection in competitive terms:

"*First*, we have the form of social selection which results from the competitions with one another in society. There is a social survival, and even often a physical survival, the socially fittest *individuals*. The man with the 'pull' gets the political place because he has the social qualifications which his 'pull' represents; and the man who passes the best competitive examination also gets the place because his qualifications are also specially fit....

[. . .]

"*Second*, there is the form of social selection which illustrates natural selection operative upon *social groups*. Here is the survival of the *group as such*. The fitness is fitness for the requirements set by the collective conditions of the life of the group. Historically this principle, which is strictly a case of natural selection, has many important illustrations in tribal and national competitions due to migration, colonization, occupation of territory, etc." [Baldwin 1897: 181-182; footnote removed; italics in the original]

Recent evolutionary biologists define and use the term selection more in line with James Mark Baldwin's usage. For example, Joan Roughgarden writes:

"The name 'social selection' as used here indicates the hypothesis that the adaptive function of choosing mates and other actions taken during reproductive social behavior is to fashion the social infrastructure from which offspring emerge."  
[Roughgarden 2012]

**[End of Note 10.]**

[63] Du Bois's use of social selection also permits us, as later interpreters of his thought, to recall his concept of secondary rhythms from "Sociology Hesitant". Such secondary rhythms combine the idea of free will with the patterns of an organization, to use Du Bois's example in that work.

[64] I will observe that Du Bois does not follow James and his way of theorizing individual actors within a context of natural selection. James, true to his radical individualism, stresses the great "man" (woman) in relation to his/her social environment. The great individual is generated by chance (random) processes within the human body. The social environment selects, to use James's own word, the individual for greatness because of the traits possessed by the individual. That person possesses what is needed at that point in time and space. Despite what we might expect from his conception of the "Talented Tenth" (T10 1903), Du Bois does not emphasize in his formulation of Darwinism the singular, great individual or a small group of such individuals.

**[Note 11—W. James: Selection & Great Individuals.]**

William James in his speech "Great Men and Their Environment" considers that "[a] remarkable parallel obtains between the facts of social evolution on the one hand, and of zoölogical evolution as expounded by Mr. Darwin on the other." (W. James GMTE 1897: 216)

For James the importance of (natural?) selection is found in how Darwin distinguishes between factors that cause a trait to occur and factors that preserve (or not) the trait after birth. James writes:

"If we look at an animal or a human being, distinguished from the rest of his kind by the possession of some extraordinary peculiarity, good or bad, we shall be able to discriminate between the causes which originally *produced* the peculiarity in him and the causes that *maintain* it after it is produced; and we shall see, if the peculiarity be one that he was born with, that these two sets of causes belong to two such irrelevant cycles [of operation]. It was the triumphant originality of Darwin to see this, and to act accordingly. Separating the causes of production under the title of 'tendencies to spontaneous variation,' and relegating them to a physiological cycle which he forthwith agreed to ignore altogether, he confined his attention to the causes of preservation, and under the names of natural selection and sexual selection studied them exclusively as functions of the cycle of the environment." [W. James GMTE 1897: 221-222; italics in the original; footnote removed]

**[End of Note 11.]****• Heredity**

[65] In a speech Du Bois delivers in March 1904 before school teachers in D.C. he sets forth what is his most detailed interpretation of Darwinian thought and his critique of (neo-)Lamarckism (HAPS 1904). Du Bois, citing August Weismann, accepts that acquired traits are not inherited by offspring and that this presents, not a setback, but rather an opportunity for education (HAPS 1904: ¶ 15).

**[Note 12—Dewey: The Lack of Acquired Traits.]**

In the "Address of John Dewey" at the National Negro Conference, Dewey agrees with Du Bois's views in "Heredity" (HAPS 1904) that acquired traits are not inherited and that this offers an opportunity for education to provide needed skills and knowledge. Hence, for Dewey, each generation starts anew and thus there are (to use his phrase) no "inferior races" (Dewey AJD 1909: 72). Du Bois presents "Evolution" at the National Negro Conference.

**[End of Note 12.]**

[66] As Du Bois writes, children receive their physical heredity from their parents, but they receive their knowledge about the world from society at large. Du Bois writes:

"The human child receives its body and the physical bases of life from its parents, but it receives its thoughts, the larger part of its habits, its tricks of doing, its religion, its whole conception of what it is and what the whole world about it is from the society in which it is placed; and this heredity which is not physical at all has been aptly called social heredity." [HAPS 1904: ¶ 16]

Du Bois's use of "social heredity" is in line with others of his era (HAPS 1904: ¶¶ 16, 19; also Baldwin 1897: 57-64). In the "Heredity" speech he also employs a synonymous term, "social heritage", and with more frequency (HAPS 1904: ¶ 21=p.50; ¶ 25=p.51; ¶ 26=p.52).

[67] Social heredity is also in line with Du Bois's understanding of social selection and his overall emphasis on bettering the social conditions of marginalized communities. As he

indicates, "the public school of today is the largest and most efficient single organ for transmitting the social heritage of men" (HAPS ¶21=p.50). Hence, public education, for Du Bois, provides a vital way to overcome, or at least lessen, the deleterious effects of poverty and negative social surroundings, all of which are less conducive to a productive life.

[68] But, as I will elaborate in Section 4, improving and/or sustaining public education is not the main lesson that Du Bois derives from his understanding of evolution, at least as framed in "Heredity". Indeed, and despite Du Bois's recognition of the important role of public education, the "other organs of social education", such as home life and the streets, are even more important factors in racial progress or regress (HAPS ¶26=p.52). In other words, social heredity exists in space—it takes and makes place. This highlights the role of the environment in Du Bois's evolutionary thinking.

#### • The Environment

[69] In Darwinian evolutionary theory, natural selection operates on (genetically induced) variations among individuals of a species existing within a local environment. That physical environment selects, so to speak, the traits among the organisms which are more favorable to survival and ultimately to reproduction. Darwin talks of the environment in terms of the conditions of life. Although an integral component in evolutionary theorizing, the environment is taken as a given. The environment exists; it "is". And we do not question nature.

[70] Similarly speaking with regard to humans, the social environment, and the attendant social relations among groups, can be taken "as is"—something that exists and cannot be challenged because that is the way things are. Likewise, social Darwinists promoting *laissez faire* policies discourage the use of government to aid the poor because they consider that society is an unchangeable given.

[71] However, Du Bois questions the naturalization of the social environment. In a passage where he is discussing social heritage, he implicates the social setting. He puts forward a thought experiment on the role of social heredity, writing:

"[T]ake for instance a boy; he is born and reared in the slums of New York; conceive now a boy of actually similar endowment, born on a farm in Ohio; that you are going to have two entirely different men under such circumstances is as clear as noonday. But why? It is not [at] all necessary that they should have had a different beginning in the world, that they should have sprung from a different kind of human seed; we may indeed conceive them to be own brothers; and yet in the one place the social influences of the slums of New York are going to form a street Arab, quick, keen, depraved, perhaps criminal, while the surroundings of the other boy are going to give to the world a slower, more honest, and more open nature; nor is it the mere physical surroundings that are going to make this difference; it is the spiritual surroundings, the thought, the talk, the economic organization, the different ways in which these two different worlds conceive themselves as parts of some larger world; and so vast and important are these social surroundings to any human being, either today or yesterday, that it is undoubtedly true that nine tenths of what a man is, depends on social rather than on physical heredity." [HAPS 1904: ¶ 16=p.49; the bracket "[all]" was added by Herbert Aptheker.]

Based on his language in this passage, Du Bois focuses on the social relations of class and race, while also ignoring the potential concerns of gender and ethnicity.

[72] Du Bois does not take the social environment as given, something that can be ignored. The environment must be taken to theoretical task as a structural constraint on human actions. But it also centers our attention on the opportunities for change, which can be incorporated into social policies (Section 4).

### 3.3.3. "Social Self-Realization"

[73] Du Bois's idea of social heredity is implicated in how he reframes Darwinian theory in terms of "social self-realization", emphasizing freedom and equality for an "endless chain of selves". He writes:

"What the age of Darwin has done is to add to the eighteenth century idea of individual worth the complementary idea of physical immortality of the human race. And this, far from annulling or contracting the idea of human freedom, rather emphasizes its necessity and eternal possibility—the boundlessness and endlessness of possible human achievement. Freedom has come to mean not individual caprice or aberration but social self-realization in an endless chain of selves, and freedom for such development is not the denial but the central assertion of the evolutionary theory. So, too, the doctrine of human equality passes through the fire of scientific inquiry not obliterated but transfigured; not equality of present attainment but equality of opportunity for unbounded future attainment is the rightful demand of mankind." [EORP 1909: ¶ 19=LOJB ¶ 35]

Such a passage might be interpreted to mean that Du Bois is indicating that evolutionary theory is socially progressive. This is not what scientists of today argue is the import of Darwinian evolution and its modern synthesis. Although Darwin himself included language, for example in *Origins*, that speaks of evolutionary progress, modern interpreters hold that Darwin understands, and Darwinian logic upholds, that evolution is not progressive and that no organism is better morally than another.

[74] I suggest that Du Bois himself avoids explicitly endorsing social progress as the result of evolutionary processes. His emphasis on freedom and equality as resulting from evolution is not about inevitable social progress for African Americans. It is not about a deterministically necessary end point—despite his use of the word necessity. Rather, Du Bois emphasizes how evolution as social self-realization highlights the potential to advance over time to the extent that the preconditions underpinning possible advancement—viz., equality of opportunity—are secured. Following Darwinian theories, Du Bois emphasizes that the future is unwritten and that humans have the potential, but not necessarily the inevitability, to do the writing. For Du Bois the possibility of African American advancement has some tentative confirmation by evidence, hence the exuberance, I suggest, of his words in the quotation above (i.e., EORP 1909: ¶ 19).

[75] Du Bois's reconceptualization of evolution as "social self-realization" also addresses the question about free will vis-à-vis evolution that I posed above. The self in self-realization highlights that he is focusing on an individual, not on an undifferentiated group—a focus that scholars of evolution would hold is true to Darwin's tenet of individual organisms facing the struggle for existence. For Du Bois, "social self-realization" occurs within a larger context that influences individual actions, and within which individuals potentially can avail themselves of equal opportunities, if such exist. Insofar as discriminatory practices constrain actions for some individuals, but not for others, then we volitionally can seek to remove such impediments. Thus, as I interpret Du Bois, what evolution does spotlight as a necessity is the removal of social and political obstructions so that one and all may participate in the opportunities to advance.

### 3.3.4. Du Bois on Evolution and Chance

[76] It is interesting to observe—especially given Du Bois's definition of sociology as involving chance with regard to human action—that Du Bois typically does not name chance explicitly in his texts on evolution. There is an exception to this: he mentions accident as one possible factor, among others like climate and cultural contact, for the development of civilizations in the areas of the Sudan and the rivers Seine, Tiber, and Thames (EORP ¶18=LOJB ¶34).

[77] Nevertheless, some of Du Bois's ideas in his evolution texts seem to imply chance. This is most evident in his "Heredity and the Public Schools" (HAPS 1904). I suggest that we can discern two dimensions of Du Boisian chance:

- chance as unpredictability; and
- chance as causal contingency.

#### • Du Bois: Chance as Unpredictability

[78] Du Bois's idea of chance as unpredictability can be found in "Evolution of the Race Problem" (and Ch.XIII of *John Brown*) and in "Heredity and the Public Schools". In "Evolution", Du Bois's concept of evolution as "social self-realization" implicates chance *qua* unpredictability, as I will infer, because it involves the unknown, indeed empirically unknowable, results emerging from equal conditions of possibility—i.e., equality of opportunity. Who can determine *a priori* what actually will unfold when some members of a society are not constrained by the laws, norms, and practices that do not apply to others in that same society? This type of chance also might be called chance as opportunity.

[79] "Heredity and the Public Schools" also presents examples of chance as unpredictability. Du Bois follows Darwinian theorizing when he discusses how (genetic) variation in organisms derives from the parents (HAPS 1904: ¶11). But I suggest that another example of chance as unpredictability is present in his sketch of the relationship between a racist social environment and the individual potential for self-development via education. He puts forward an example of two youth, one White and one Black, whose social circumstances and personal home environment vary (HAPS ¶¶16, 25). In an important sense, such differential circumstances happen to individuals by chance of birth, or what I am calling here, chance as unpredictability. Obviously, such manifestations of unpredictability have real consequences for an individual's life.

#### • Du Bois: Chance as Causal Contingency

[80] Those social relations and personal circumstances just described also are involved in chance as causal contingency. The scenario created by Du Bois in "Heredity" holds that social environments provide the conditions with which the individual youth *must* contend, if social progress is to be achieved. Du Bois argues that, although education is certainly vital and necessary for what he later will call social self-realization, any development of an individual or a community is contingent upon—depends upon—providing a better, and equal, social environment. In other words, in "Heredity" Du Bois argues that the effects of education are contingent upon social structures; thereby, education is a necessary but insufficient factor for individuals and communities to socially progress. Whether or not such preconditions will be achieved in practice is hoped-for, but not certain. With his Jamesian pragmatism, Du Bois can push forward, based on observable small achievements and on the resiliency he observes in African communities and individuals.

[81] Du Bois is not theorizing for the mere sake of intellectual exercise. Indeed, he derives a social critique from his foray into Darwinism, as well as a few policy suggestions (including

the promotion of public education, which I have already mentioned here). Such will be outlined in the next section.

## SECTION 4: Du Bois's Social Critique

### 4.1. Jamesian Pragmatism and Evolution

[Section 4.1. Summary.]

- **How do we interpret Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism in relation to his Darwinism?** What is the "workable logic" if he assumes African agency and free will?
- Du Bois theorizes changes over time via "social self-realization" which he can evaluate via research.
- His research uncovers data to support the assumptions.
- Also his research highlights chance as the unpredictability of equal opportunity. Thus: remove racial barriers.
- Willcox implicitly challenges Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism: the color line is not necessarily the main factor.
- Du Bois's reply: his "intimate soul contact" justifies assuming agency, but does not scientifically confirm it.

#### 4.1.1. Implications for Research and Activism

[82] Du Bois can justify his definition of evolution as "social self-realization" via Jamesian pragmatism. This section will elaborate on that claim. The "workable logic" of Jamesian pragmatism supports the use of the assumption of fundamental humanity, and the associated capacities of free-will and agency. What would we expect to come to pass over time among African Americans if we assume their humanity and the attendant capacities? That meta-question would then guide scholarship in terms of operationalizing research questions.

[83] Du Bois is recognized for his social-scientific and historical research. As he conveys in his numerous publications, he discovers African American progress in terms of educational attainment, business ownership, artistic endeavors, and wealth accumulation. He also indicates that poverty, crime, illiteracy, and so forth, still persist. However, his overall message is generally positive despite the racist obstacles experienced by African Americans (e.g., AUPs, NFVA 1897, TPN 1899).

[84] In light of his scholarly research, how might Du Bois express evolution qua "social self-development" in a more Jamesian-pragmatist manner? Consider the following passages from another of Du Bois' evolution texts, "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (1904):

"From enforced ignorance so great that over 90 per cent. of the coloured people could not read and write at the close of the war, they have brought themselves to the place where the 56 per cent. can read and write. Starting a generation ago, without a cent or the ownership of their own bodies, they have saved property to the value of not less than 300,000,000 dollars, besides supporting themselves; and finally they have begun to evolve among themselves men who know their situation and needs.

"All this does not prove that the future is bright and clear, or that there is no question of race antipathy or negro [*sic*] capacity; but it is distinctly and emphatically hopeful, and in the light of history and human development it puts the burden

of proof rather on those who deny the capabilities of the negro [*sic*] than on those who assume that they are not essentially different from those of other members of the great human family." [FNRA 1904: ¶¶ 36-37]

This publication and his conclusions will surface in later correspondence between him and a White collaborator, Walter F. Willcox (next subsection).

[85] Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism is evident in the passage just quoted.

- a) The essential humanity of African Americans is a guiding assumption, such as he refers to in "The Study of the Negro Problems" (SNP 1898), and "The Atlanta Conferences" (ATLC 1904).
- b) African American agency, in the sense of the capacity to act intentionally, is implicated in the data.
- c) The research data demonstrate overall African American advances (we might even say progress over time).
- d) But there is no certainty of future successes.
- e) The lack of certainty results from the chance dimensions arising from and through human actions: unpredictability, opportunity, and causal contingency.
- f) The data also imply that some areas have witnessed no advances (as his other works over time document).
- g) Nonetheless, the evidence points to hope for future success;
- h) The evidence presented also means that those who deny Black capacities to self-development need to provide data that would strengthen their argument (because the data that Du Bois has gathered tends to support Black humanity and agency.)

In short, the workable logic of Jamesian pragmatism is itself manifested in the provisional research results. Any anticipated success or progress implies that hope itself can be cast in terms of hypotheses, which in turn must be tested in and against worldly practices.

[86] But pragmatically inspired research, for Du Bois, means more than the conventional notion of disincarnated scholarship. Because hypotheses and beliefs must be evaluated by the researcher (or believer) in the world, embodiment is highlighted, I contend, as an important aspect of Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism. The inescapable embodiment of the researcher becomes all the more clearly delineated for him because he is an African American scholar in a racist society and world. Such embodied scholarship will become explicit in a 1904 challenge to his research conclusions. Du Bois will respond with reference to "intimate soul contact".

#### 4.1.2. A Challenge to Jamesian Pragmatism

[87] What happens if someone approaches the data that Du Bois presents in "Future" (as quoted above), or via other projects, but in a non-pragmatic way? This indeed is at issue in an exchange of letters between him and Walter F. Willcox during March 1904. They previously have collaborated on a major project (U.S. Dept. of Commerce & Labor 1904). Willcox writes Du Bois, thanking him for sending the article, "The Future of the Negro Race in America" (1904). However, Willcox disagrees with several points that Du Bois makes in the essay. The point that I will elaborate here refers to Willcox's saying that he is "an agnostic on the subject" of whether the factors influencing African American "economic conditions" (as he phrases it) derive more from innate characteristics or from social conditions. He indicates that there is no data to support one factor as more influential than the other (Willcox 1904). That is to say, Willcox criticizes Du Bois's assertion in the essay that African Americans can continue to socially advance into the future, despite socially repressive conditions, because "they are not essentially different from those of other members of the great human family." (FNRA 1904: ¶ 37) In short, Willcox criticizes Du Bois's pragmatically-inflected idea of

hope for continued African American progress.

[88] Du Bois's response indicates that, as far as he is concerned, there is enough information to argue that social causes are primarily operative, and not innate causes. Du Bois writes:

"The fundamental difficulty in your position is that you are trying to spin a solution of the Negro problem out of the inside of your office. It can never be done. You have simply no adequate conception the Negro problem in the South & of Negro character & capacity. When you have sat as I have ten years in **intimate soul contact** with all kinds & conditions of black men you will be less agnostic. I have my prejudices but they are backed by knowledge if not supported. [. . .] If you insist on writing about & pronouncing judgment on this problem why not study it? Not from a car-window & associated press despatches [*sic*] as in your pamphlet on crime but get down here & really study it at first hand. Is it a sufficient answer to a problem to say the data are not sufficient when they lie all about us? There is enough easily obtainable data to take you off the fence if you will study it first hand & not thro' [*sic*] prejudiced eyes?—my eyes, or those of others."  
[LWWM 1904; emphasis added]

Du Bois is careful to distinguish between his opinions and prejudices in favor of a positive view of African Americans, on the one hand, from data that would support such a claim, on the other. Nonetheless, Du Bois himself feels warranted to argue that African Americans in general can socially advance, or to use the language of "Future", they can be deemed as fit as any race.

[89] Du Bois's "intimate soul contact" provides him with a pragmatic basis to act on the assumption of humanity and to conduct research to find out if socio-economic success is really happening. For Du Bois, in opposition to Willcox, there are real-world examples by which one can interpret whether economic success is occurring over time. Du Bois indicates that in his experience Blacks are becoming more socially successful within a social context of repression and segregation.

**[Note 13—The Du Bois–Willcox Correspondence.]**

The Credo repository has Du Bois's handwritten reply placed directly at the end of Willcox's letter (LWWM 1904). After searching, there does not seem to be a typewritten version among the Credo collection of Du Bois materials. Nevertheless, his reply is sent and received by Willcox, as evidenced by an exchange of letters between Willcox and Alfred Holt Stone. In the exchange they directly comment on, and criticize, Du Bois's response to Willcox (Hollandsworth 2008: 142-144).

**[End of Note 13.]**

## 4.2. Politics and Potential Violence

[Section 4.2. Summary.]

- Du Bois uses his evolutionary theorizing to advocate for peacefully implemented social policies:
  - = the promotion of civil and political rights;
  - = the fostering of equal educational opportunities;
  - = the creation of societal (environmental) preconditions that enhance education and equal opportunity;
  - = training in the "thoughtful selection" of spouses, and the end to the repression of racial intermarriages.
- As Du Bois argues in *John Brown*, the potential of violence is present, if racial oppression does not stop.

#### 4.2.1. Policy Areas

[90] For Du Bois in the texts under scrutiny here, rather than perpetuate oppression and violence against persons of color, a "properly interpreted" Darwinian theory offers general support for social justice policies. As he also conveys in other works, Du Bois supports the equality and freedom that inform civil and political rights. He encourages governmental actions to ensure those rights. In addition to a general support for rights, the evolution texts under study herein, show a Du Bois concentrating on two policy areas: education and marriage.

[91] For education to be more effective, Du Bois contends, then the social environment must be addressed (HAPS ¶¶ 25-26). In order to address the social environment, we must remove structural obstacles and repressive norms. But there is a concern expressed by some. In the removal of social repression, the danger according to White supremacists will be racial intermarriage (EORP ¶ 25). For those believing in racially separated marriages Du Bois suggests some advice that is rather general in tone. He argues for a "civilized human selection of husbands and wives". He writes:

"The civilized method of preventing ill-advised marriage lies in the training of mankind in ethics of sex and childbearing. We cannot ensure the survival of the best blood by the public murder and degradation of unworthy suitors, but we can substitute a civilized human selection of husbands and wives which shall ensure the survival of the fittest. Not the methods of the jungle, not even the careless choices of the drawing room, but the thoughtful selection of the schools and laboratory is the ideal of future marriage. This will cost something in ingenuity, self-control, and toleration but it will cost less than forcible repression." [EORP 1909: ¶ 26]

In his attempts to allay the concerns of those who fear racial intermarriage, Du Bois's language bespeaks the Darwinism of his day. It also calls to mind his concept of the "Talented Tenth" (T10 1903).

[92] There is another major consequence to the "civilized human selection of husbands and wives", one which accords with his evolution texts. His marriage advice also holds, I suggest, for how he might advocate for improving the quality of home life. As he argues in "Hereditity", a supportive or negative home life is part of the social environment that conditions the success or failure of African American youth (¶¶ 25-26). Educating youth in skills and "correct habits", as those of Du Bois's era might suggest, will be repaid if and when they become parents.

#### 4.2.2. John Brown's Legacy

[93] According to Du Bois, social policies informed by evolutionary theorizing can point to a potentially less violent path, one that builds on extending liberal values in order to reform society. However, Du Bois even in early 20th Century does not avoid discussing one type of revolutionary path. He uses the material on Darwinism in "Evolution of the Race Problem" for the last chapter of his book *John Brown*, which was published in 1909, the same year "Evolution" is published in the *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference*. He titles this last chapter "The Legacy of John Brown" (LOJB).

[94] The transitions between the evolution material and the respective non-evolution material (in both "Evolution" and "Legacy") do not seem forced. In "Evolution" Du Bois briefly mentions John Brown, who is a valuable historical figure and an example of someone who sought racial equality, uplift, and social justice based on the ideas of (a Du Boisian-

interpreted) Darwinism that promotes the conditions for freedom and equality. In short, human traits are not immutable; social change and development are possible.

[95] However, there is a important difference in consequences between the two texts. In "Legacy" Du Bois more forcefully highlights the potential consequences if an evolutionary path of securing rights is not followed. Violent acts of rebellion and revolution, like John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, may be necessary if peaceful policies of social reform and racial equality are not implemented (Livinston 2018). In addition, in "Legacy" Du Bois highlights the international aspects of colonial exploitation based on the doctrine of "survival of the fittest". He extends this international dimension in the 1962 reprint of *John Brown*. He inserts material towards the end of "Legacy" which emphasizes that Darwinism is used to justify colonialism and exploitation. (I will observe that in the 1962 reprint, Du Bois retains the interpretation of Darwin found in the paragraphs of the 1909 edition, the interpretation that I have been discussing in this presentation).

[96] My focus in this project might suggest that Du Bois concentrates extensively on evolutionary thinking and concepts across his many works. This is not the case: as his vast corpus will witness, Darwinism does not occupy much of his attention. He never disavows the natural sciences or their research methods "properly interpreted", but his theoretical frameworks differ over time. As part of my closing in the last section, I will discuss briefly his views on evolutionary and revolutionary change.

## SECTION 5: In Closing

### 5.1. Recap and Criticisms

[Section 5.1. Summary.]

- Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing—his idea of social self-realization—undermines racial hierarchies.
- Assumptions of chance, change, and agency permit further study and provide the bases for activism.
- We must direct social policies at the structural causes of the inequalities and unfreedoms of marginalized peoples and communities.
- Criticisms of Du Bois's Darwinism:
  - = Technocratic "pragmatists" will find his Jamesian pragmatism lacking in measurable, terminal objectives.
  - = Evolutionary biologists will disagree with his ideas of social selection and social heredity.

#### 5.1.1. Du Bois's Evolutionary Theorizing as Social Critique

[97] The idea of chance in nature, and by extension society, as framed by some forms of Darwinism, accords with Du Bois's view that evolution supports freedom under conditions of equality of opportunity. Du Bois's use of the assumptions of chance and Africana humanity and agency reflects his understanding of Jamesian pragmatism, rather than William James's own views on pragmatism or on evolution.

[98] Those assumptions permit Du Bois to continually study and conduct scholarship despite—indeed, because of—the prevailing supremacist norms and practices (SNP 189; BREC 1935). Experiences and anecdotes, personal and otherwise, permit hypotheses to be formed that propel research forward seeking their confirmation (or not) in the world. Absolute truth is not possible, he admits later (MEPF 1944; LHA 1956), so the evidence gathered by Du

Bois and many others is always provisional. But he also indicates that the evidence of research is often hopeful. If research points to regress or stasis, then the assumptions of chance and Africana humanity highlight the need to search for social causes.

[99] The 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries contain virulent forms of White supremacy. The adherents of White supremacy have fabricated racist hierarchies based on the supposedly innate and typically immutable qualities of racial groups. Darwinian-based theories often have been used to support such hierarchies, denying the agency of races or the role of chance for groups to self-develop over time.

[100] Du Bois frames his understanding of evolution as social self-realization; he thereby incorporates chance and free will into a theory of human development. He seeks to counter White supremacy, social Darwinism, and the oppressive policies of marginalization and segregation built upon racist principles. For equality of opportunity to provide the foundations on which to freely advance in socio-economic terms, we need to make personal as well as political changes. Pointedly, those various changes also must correct the unequal social structures (i.e., social heritage), if we are to abolish Jane and Jim Crow.

### **5.1.2. Criticisms of Du Bois's Evolutionary Theorizing**

[101] Ironically, some of the criticisms that could be leveled against Du Bois's Jamesian pragmatism can be raised from those who nowadays might be considered pragmatic. They would argue that Du Bois does not provide quantifiable measures for the idea of social self-realization or for any of its components, such as freedom and equality. The open-ended dimensions to the always-ongoing research by Du Bois are true to the assumption of agency and humanity from a Jamesian-pragmatic perspective. However, were Du Bois to be advising a government bureaucracy or an organization on a program to enhance Black economic success (however defined), then bureaucratic rationality would require a more-or-less fixed point in time as well as an operationalized success/failure rate among the population group, all so as to evaluate the success or failure of the program itself. Ultimately, then, Du Bois's philosophically inspired pragmatism comes into conflict with today's capitalistic-technocratic pragmatism (so-called).

[102] Other criticisms would be raised by evolution theorists focusing on Du Bois's emphasis on the environment as more important than the molecular aspects of organismic evolution. In that spirit, Du Bois's idea of social selection might be criticized, except insofar as he also might stress how natural selection and other forms of evolutionary change are also at work (Roughgarden 2012).

[103] Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing is limited to a few works; he does not address all relevant aspects of evolution. Indeed, his efforts represent the debates of a century ago, which evolutionary thinkers such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett probably would consider long resolved (Dawkins 1990; Dennett 1995). Examining Dawkins, Dennett, and others is beyond the scope of this presentation.

## 5.2. Evolution / Revolution

[Section 5.2. Summary.]

- Du Bois's evolutionary theorizing permits us to focus on freedom and equality, which if obstructed, become the basis for redress.
- However, over the years Du Bois does not write of evolutionary changes.
- Instead, for him the U.S.A. and the world require revolutionary changes to the structures of capitalism and imperialism.
- Yet he retains the ideas that free will and chance still affect our lives.
- Not to so believe in free will and chance is to abandon hope for a better world. Du Bois does not abandon hope.

[104] There are some advantages to using Du Bois's formulation of evolution as social self-realization.

- a) It promotes small-l liberal values of individual freedom and equality, including debates over what counts as freedom and equality.
- b) The denial of freedom and equality, however defined, becomes the basis for critique.
- c) The individual is socially mediated, not atomistic; thereby allowing the formation of regulatory and redistributive policies to tackle social problems.

[105] Nevertheless, as the decades of the 20th century pass, Du Bois does not theorize about social change in terms of evolution, as he puts forth in "Evolution" and "Legacy". As with the natural sciences in general, he still supports the science of evolution "properly interpreted". (Read the notes below on his letter to Adam Clayton Powell and on a 1946 speech). Yet Du Bois also repeats earlier critiques of Darwinism that is used to justify oppression (e.g., JBR 1962; see also Yang 2014).

### [Note 14—Du Bois, Adam Clayton Powell & Darwin.]

An exchange of letters between Du Bois and Adam Clayton Powell in 1932 includes a few brief comments about Darwin. Having read a text by Powell, he writes that he disagrees with Powell's criticisms of the negative aspects of Darwin:

I have read your article with the greatest interest. I should criticize adversely only one statement, and that is on page 10-11 about Darwin's "Origin of Species". I do not think that it is historically accurate to say that this book advocates the "survival of the fittest" or the "conservation of favored races". That's doctrine was developed entirely apart from Darwin's book and long before its appearance. The book was seized upon to support the doctrine, when as a matter of fact, it did not at all. What Darwin said about the "survival of the fittest" was simply a scientific statement of the results of competition between living beings. But he did not for a moment mean by "fittest", those who ought to survive. It was simply a statement that as a matter of fact some would survive.

As an interpretation of unanswerable scientific facts, Darwin and his successors are to my mind, unanswerable, but on the other hand, the philosophy of superior races, etc., built up long before Darwin, is, of course, deserving of all the criticism what you put upon it. [LACP 1932]

### [End of Note 14.]

### [Note 15—"Color and Democracy" (1946 Speech).]

Interestingly and rather too briefly, Du Bois links evolution and democracy in a 1948 speech entitled "Color and Democracy". Referring to supporters of democracy, he writes:

"Are they in favor of democracy or are they in favor of oligarchy based upon wealth and color, and to a large degree upon sex and religion? These people have got to face the real argument for democracy which is seldom stressed. The

argument for democracy bases itself upon much of that very theory of evolution which was misconceived and misinterpreted to uphold the color line.

"We ought to have learned that diversity in itself is a source of wisdom; that difference is a clear way to knowledge; that absolute uniformity is retrogression and that compromise is natural selection. Segregation of persons or ideas is death." [CDSL 1948: 31-32; in the original typescript all text occurs as capital letters; included in this quotation are all of the handwritten corrections made to the text]

Clearly indicated is Du Bois's continuing support for democracy and the important role of science in support of it. With his statement holding that compromise is (like?) natural selection, he seems to stress how compromise in a democratic polity is analogous to how natural selection functions in evolutionary theory. This understanding of natural selection, however, would probably evoke criticism from biologists.

**[End of Note 15.]**

[106] All in all, Du Bois puts forth critiques, not based on evolutionary principles, but on revolutionary ones. He moves away from liberal-democratic principles that seek justice merely by ensuring that society upholds the equality and freedom enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Instead, he increasingly concentrates on democratically controlling the production processes themselves so as to hinder capitalistic exploitation and imperialist aggression. Accordingly, Du Bois's socialism of his earlier years (e.g., "Socialism and The Negro", SANP 1913; *Darkwater*, DARK 1920) becomes more aligned with Marxism as the 20th Century proceeds (e.g., "The Revelation of St. Orgne the Damned", RSOD 1939; "Jacob and Esau", JAE 1944; "The Pan-African Movement", TPAM 1947). Ultimately, he joins the U.S. Communist Party in 1961. For Du Bois, the repressive structures of what we would call today, in intersectional terms, patriarchal, racist capitalism will not change in an evolutionary sense. Revolutionary changes are needed (Mullen 2016; Sinitiere 2013).

[107] Regardless of his changing emphasis from evolutionary to revolutionary ideas, for Du Bois, free will and chance remain integral to activism. It is the same for us now. Free will is a precondition for the intentional, moral action by individuals promoting social justice. Chance, understood as opportunity within social structures, highlights the constraints of insufficient knowledge, uncertain outcomes, and personal doubts—all of which individuals encounter in their struggles for equality and freedom.

[108] For W.E.B. Du Bois, free will and chance are inevitable, inexplicable assumptions because they cannot be fully and definitively confirmed. But they also cannot be fully and definitively disconfirmed. Not to believe in, and failing to act on, free will and chance is to abandon hope for a better world. And here Du Bois offers us another valuable lesson: he does not abandon hope (DBLM 1963).

— FINIS —

## SECTION 6: Works Cited

### 6.1. Works Written or Edited by W.E.B. Du Bois

**Note 1:** The in-text citations to Du Bois's works include an abbreviated title and year of publication. Below, the works are alphabetized by their abbreviated titles.

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**"The morning breaks over blood-stained hills.**

**We must not falter, we may not shrink.**

**Above are the everlasting stars."**

**— W.E.B. Du Bois, "Address to the Country" (ATTC 1906)**

**• Thank you for your time.**

**— Robert W. Williams**