

W.E.B. DUBOIS' CONCEPT OF DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS: BEYOND JAMESIAN PRAGMATISM AND EMERSONIAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

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Abstract: Since the coinage of the phrase ‘Double-Consciousness,’ by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), critics never ceased to attribute its origin either to Hegel, adding that it is no more than a replica of the Hegel’s ‘Unhappy Consciousness,’ or to William James’ theory of Pragmatism, or still to Waldo Emerson’s Transcendentalism. My contention is that Du Bois’ use of the concept goes beyond the uses of all his predecessors. For him, the concept is the outcome of a unique experience that is, exclusively African-American. And even if the concept of double-consciousness was employed before Du Bois by many scholars, namely William James, Goethe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Du Bois’ use differs radically from all these uses, simply because Du Bois has invested and imbued the concept with traits that apply only to his race, as a consequence of their peculiar experience of slavery and its attendant consequences.

Keywords: Du Bois, Double-consciousness, William James, Pragmatism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Transcendentalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the scholars whose field of study appealed to W.E.B. Du Bois as a source of inspiration, and whose notions of the human psyche instigated and rekindled in Du Bois the image he sought to depict the condition of the African-American is William James. It seems, from the start, that the influence of James on Du Bois is relatively more manifest and concrete than the influence of Hegel, due perhaps to the former’s directness and relative clarity in the treatment of the human psyche, unlike Hegel whose treatment of the same subject is relatively abstract and more complicated. Surely, James’s pragmatism was the secret behind Du Bois’ unreserved espousal of James’s mode of thinking, because pragmatism, at least for Du Bois, had the virtue of surmounting the shortcomings of Hegel’s philosophy. In fact, this is what Cullen Rath attempts to convey in the following passage taken from “Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois.” In this passage, Rath attributes Du Bois’ espousal of Jamesian philosophy almost exclusively to James’ reliance on pragmatism. “As formulated by James and as revised by Du Bois,” Rath declares, “pragmatism overcame the determinist fatalism implicit in Hegel’s logic, leaving room for free-willed agents to affect the world - It left ‘live options.’”¹ Ruth’s declaration points to the real motive that urged Du Bois to seek in pragmatism a method and a way that would help delineate the exact condition of African-Americans, namely the live options this philosophy provided and which Du Bois, and his peers, desperately searched.

Although habit had always, almost unconsciously, associated Du Bois to Hegel, the imprints of James on Du Bois are unquestionably more apparent. In fact, there is a persistent controversy in determining Du Bois’ mentor. This idea is best

¹ - Richard Cullen Rath, “Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 84, N° 2 (Sep., 1997): 470.

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expressed by Wilson Jeremiah Moses when he says, "...one might easily assume that the most important issue in Du Bois scholarship is a controversy between those who consider him a disciple of William James and those who would make him a Hegelian."² The connection of Du Bois with James is made on the grounds that both thinkers were unquestionably pragmatists. In fact, the substance of all of Du Bois' achievements attests that he is a pragmatist. Pragmatism is felt in Du Bois' view of the world and the stance from which he has always approached the condition of African-Americans, even if this view has often been the source of many clashes between him and other intellectuals of the time. Aware of the peculiar condition of African-Americans at a specific phase of history, he deemed it necessary to adopt pragmatism as the only philosophy and mode of thinking that would help find practical solutions to the problems related to the Blacks in America. Trying to find concrete solutions to the problems of his race, Du Bois was convinced that only a scientific, practical method, untrammelled by abstractions, can spare time and effort, and serve directly his purpose. This is why, Du Bois

turns his back resolutely and once and for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, action and towards power.³

Du Bois could, in no way, have been otherwise, for he suffered from racial prejudices, emanating from biased and unscientific judgments and, consequently, devoted all his long life to combating these bequeathed ungrounded habits, a fact clearly manifested in his intellectual legacy. His interest in Jamesian psychology grew from a deep conviction that this science is the repository where the keys to the resolution of the black American's psychical problems are to be found; at least, it is the domain that will help disentangle his complicated psychical condition. It is in Harvard, before setting foot on the German soil, that Du Bois, as if by chance, was exposed to the psychology connected with William James, broadly known as Pragmatism. To read Du Bois through Jamesian lens, we have to answer the question raised by David Levering Lewis, Du Bois' biographer, in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*: "to what extent, if at all, the insights of James' *Principles of Psychology* were the source of Du Bois's own special insights into what he would describe as the double-nature of the African-American psyche?"⁴ Before answering this question, one has to bear in mind that Du Bois found in the notion of 'alternating personality,' which constitutes the cornerstone of James's philosophy, a real and accurate image and reflection of the condition of the African-American. This Jamesian notion could provide answers for many disturbing questions related to African-Americans, and which have preoccupied Du Bois for a long time. By his notion of 'alternating personality,' James furnished Du Bois with an image appropriate to the state of mind of African-Americans.

The contact with James was highly determinant for Du Bois who himself accounted for this preliminary contact in the following words: "I was in Harvard for education and not for high marks, except that marks would ensure my staying," Du Bois continues,

Above all I wanted to study philosophy! I wanted to get hold of the bases of knowledge, and explore foundations and beginnings. I chose, therefore Palmer's course in ethics, but since Palmer was on sabbatical that year, William James replaced him, and I became a devoted follower of James at the time he was developing his pragmatic philosophy.⁵

Du Bois acknowledges that he found his holy grail in "William James [who] guided [him] out of the sterilities of scholastic philosophy to realist pragmatism."⁶ Chronologically, Du Bois was exposed to pragmatism before he travelled to Germany to be impregnated, if so, by Hegelian philosophy. No doubt the formulation of double-consciousness that he

² - William Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (U. S. A.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 13.

³ - William James; Bruce Kuklick, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publications, 1981), p. 28.

⁴ - David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), p. 96.

⁵ - Jules Chametzky; Sidney Kaplan, *Black & White in American Culture: An Anthology from The Massachusetts Review* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969), pp. 119-20.

⁶ - Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (U.S.A.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 139.

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attached to the condition of the African-American had already taken shape, if not completed altogether before his move to Germany. Almost all the books seeking the genesis of Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness attribute it solely and straightforwardly to Hegel, often without any convincing arguments or deep analyses, or even a consideration of some important and decisive phases in Du Bois' life. While it is true that Du Bois, because he was exposed to Hegel's philosophy, was attracted by Hegel's phenomenological thinking as the study of appearances in contrast to reality and which approaches the very being of the African-American, "it would be misleading to call Du Bois a Hegelian, a characterization still made by many. To call Du Bois a Hegelian simplifies by ignoring how pragmatism shaped Du Bois' relation to Hegel. The matter is complicated and deserves extended discussion."⁷ So, Hegel's philosophy should not blind us to the versatility of Du Bois' sources by the adoption of a one-sided perspective in our approach of Du Bois' complicated concept of double-consciousness.

It is James's *Principles of Psychology* that paved the way, in large part, for the inaugural foundational tenets of Du Bois' thinking in general, and his concept of double-consciousness in particular. Du Bois and William James met at Harvard University for two years from 1888 to 1890, and it was in 1890 that James first published his memorable book *Principles of Psychology*, in which he expounded his theory of the doubleness of the mind, a theory that caught Du Bois' both attention and feeling. Du Bois himself acknowledges in his *Dusk of Dawn* that, as far as his line of thought is concerned, "the turning was due to William James."⁸ What is surprising is that even if the influence of James on Du Bois has been widely acknowledged, few critics could renege on the view that Hegel was the principal, perhaps the only, mentor of Du Bois. Eric J. Sundquist is among the critics who acknowledge the influence of James on Du Bois. In the following passage, Sundquist enumerates some of the causes that urged Du Bois to adopt Jamesian philosophy by stating:

Given That James was one of Du Bois' most influential teachers at Harvard - Du Bois later recalled him as a "friend and guide to clear thinking" - it can hardly be doubted that James's theories of psychology, so amenable to Du Bois' own complex notion of double consciousness, were as important to the young scholar as his views on moral philosophy...., James provided the key to a theory of diasporic consciousness that was capable of yoking together the conception of a split-off, perhaps hidden but in any case culturally oppositional "personality" and the conceptions of race nationalism comprised by the ideological watchword "African Personality."⁹

Also, Jamesian pragmatism which influenced Du Bois is accounted for by Charles Sanders Peirce, a prominent pragmatist, in the following words: "It appears, then, that the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."¹⁰ This is the philosophical movement that most attracted Du Bois because it would, afterwards, pave the way for him to see clearly, and to contribute usefully to shedding light on the condition of African-Americans characterized by complexity. Only a pragmatic handling - able to shun haze and to bring clarity - of the matter, would be of a weighty effect susceptible to resolve the complicated situation of African-Americans, the pragmatists' maxim being "attaining clearness of apprehension," and "whatever works, is likely true." Convinced that only a practical approach of the condition of African-Americans can give objective and reliable results that would allow to account satisfactorily for their peculiar experience, Du Bois found in James' pragmatism the appropriate tool to attain this goal.

Not only was Du Bois influenced by James's pragmatism as a philosophy or a method, practical enough to successfully approach the black American cause, but he was inspired by all of James's vision of life. The psychological findings that James put forward were, for Du Bois, the appropriate expression and the exact reflection of the internal conflicts experienced by the subordinating Black. James's notion of 'alternating selves' resembles strikingly the condition of the

⁷ - Ross Posnock, "Going Astray, Going Forward: Du Boisian Pragmatism and its Lineage," in: *Pragmatism and Literary Studies. Volume 15 of the REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*. Ed. Winfried Fluck (Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), p. 37.

⁸ - W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p.39.

⁹ - Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 571.

¹⁰ - Justus Buchler, *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 31.

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African-American who finds himself obliged to perpetually act with two selves, depending on with whom he behaves. For the pragmatists, as for Du Bois, the self is socially constructed, and the experience has proved in such contexts that

A man's Social Self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met 'cut us dead,' and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.¹¹

This passage echoes Du Bois' view that identity is socially constructed; in other words, for Du Bois as for the pragmatists, one's social identity is shaped by the view the others formulate about him. Consequently, the African-American finds himself obliged to conform to the egotistical supremacist's predilections. Aware of this reality, the master sticks with oyster-like tenacity to his mode of life, by admitting no right to difference, and by imposing his culture. As a corollary to this, the African-American has to submit to the criteria of the supremacist, and to put aside his values lest he be accused of backwardness, and be consequently categorized as 'bad nigger.'

This idea reinforces the DuBoisian fundamental notion that identity is not biological – as Du Bois never ceased to emphasize - because necessarily framed by the cobweb of social relationships; it is exactly the same idea strongly held by “pragmatists such as William James, who contend that identity is socially constructed.”¹² In short, Du Bois found his very latent ideas expressed clearly by James and summed up in his saying that man “has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind.”¹³ Here lies the inextricable dilemma of the African-American who is forced, time and again, to adopt a radically different self when he is in relation with non African-Americans. It is this duality of behavior that gives birth to double-consciousness.

James also spoke of “primary and secondary consciousness.” Projected on the situation of the African-American, these two consciousnesses, or double-consciousness, refer respectively to the state of being at the same time African and American. This duality of the individual mind could not go unnoticed by Du Bois because it points pertinently to the state of mind of the African-American. But again, there is a subtle difference between DuBoisian double-consciousness and Jamesian primary and secondary consciousness. While between James's two consciousnesses there is a major difference that makes the access to primary consciousness easier and less effortful than the access to secondary consciousness, this latter considered just like a store; for Du Bois the two consciousnesses are equally and simultaneously present and with the same impetus, which emphasizes the high degree of struggle between the two selves in Du Bois' conception of the duality of the selves. For Du Bois, the two selves exist simultaneously and concurrently, while for James, they exist alternatively.

Moreover, if for James the two selves are present in an alternating way, one is near the concerned person and the other is remote, which implies a kind of imbalance between the two; for Du Bois, there is a balanced, simultaneous dichotomous presence of the two selves because the personality of the black American is inescapably the outcome of the split of a personality into two omnipresent selves, which are neither alternating nor mutually exclusive, but rather mutually inclusive. This last distinctive trait of Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness can, also, serve as an answer to Gwen S. Bergner's assertion that

¹¹ - William James; Bruce W. Wishire, *William James: The Essential Writings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 85.

¹² - Anita Haya Patterson, *From Emerson to King: Democracy, Race, and the Politics of Protest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 153.

¹³ - William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1* (U.S.A.: Cosimo, 2013), p. 294.

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Du Bois did not coin the term “double consciousness,” though he was the first to use it in relation to African American identity..... As early as 1817, a medical journal used the term to describe the case of a woman reported to alternate between two distinct personalities, each of which had no knowledge or memory of the other.¹⁴

Unlike the case of the woman reported in the journal cited by Bergner, the African-American’s two selves have knowledge and consciousness of each other. As a matter of fact, James’s theory of the primary and secondary consciousness, to become later known as short term memory and long term memory, provided only the basis for Du Bois’ double-consciousness, which is more advanced, more complicated, and more elaborate, able to suit the special condition of the African-American whose two selves can, in no way, be separated. Here, again, Du Bois did not take idly James’s ready-made theory, but reworked it to pertinently comply with, and reflect, the approximate peculiar situation of African-Americans; it is a situation determinedly ineffable, a fact which justifies, in part, “the enduring validity of Du Bois’ theory and trope of double consciousness as the distinctive sign of African-American culture and character.”¹⁵ It is the simultaneous presence of the two selves which constitute the African-American identity that bestows on this identity its peculiarity.

But though Du Bois’ legacy bears unquestionably “the very imprint of his philosophic pragmatism, which he learned directly from William James”;¹⁶ and though “Du Bois certainly was familiar with Emerson, and his long-standing relationship with and sense of intellectual indebtedness to James are well known. On examination, however, his *specific usage of double consciousness seems to share little with theirs besides the label*”¹⁷ (Italics added). This can be explained by the fact that “James saw the divided self as alternately a psycho-physiological and a spiritual or mystical phenomenon; for Du Bois the idea was sociological and historical.”¹⁸ So, even if Du Bois uses the same concept already used by James, his use is different because it is the outcome of a specific experience in a context governed by racism and its aftermath, and which has given birth to a peculiar feeling. This peculiar experience can yield but a peculiar and different, though perhaps already existing, concept, modeled in a way to suit the African-Americans’ peculiar sensation.

On deepening the research on the origin of pragmatism as a source, among others, of Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness, one can conclude that both James and Du Bois inherited pragmatism from its golden sources, especially from Emersonian tradition. In fact, the phrase ‘double-consciousness’ was first used by Emerson, but remained almost unconsidered, or if so, not really pursued. Rare are the studies that connect Du Bois’ double-consciousness to Emerson’s, even if some scholars like Whittier, George Eliot, and Werner Sollors, admit that the phrase ‘double-consciousness’ is absolutely Emersonian. Ralph Waldo Emerson used the phrase in an 1843 essay entitled “The Transcendentalist” which he gave as a lecture and in which he opposed the self to the world and the Divine to the mundane, with the emphasis on the antagonistic powers that tear the soul apart between these opposing poles. No matter how far-fetched this analysis may seem to some, still the connection between Emerson and Du Bois is always inviting and the similarities between the two, as far as their philosophical traits are concerned, do but testify to a great harmony of the two thinkers’ thoughts. As the transcendentalist knows “moments of Illumination,” Du Bois’ African-American is endowed with a “second sight.” In fact, this notion of seeing what lurks behind and beyond what a layman can see or perceive is a romantic notion that makes of “[t]he poets the unacknowledged legislators of the world,”¹⁹ to use Percy Bysshe Shelly’s expression. In this sense, the poet, like the African-American, succeeds in perceiving what an ordinary man will never have the opportunity to reach. And if the primary or sole role of Emerson’s scholar is “to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them

¹⁴ - Gwen S. Bergner, *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis* (U.S.A.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. xv-xvi.

¹⁵ - Bernard W. Bell, *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches*, p. 19.

¹⁶ - Winfried Fluck, *Pragmatism and Literary Studies. Volume 15 of the REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* (Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), p. 37.

¹⁷ - Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 99-100.

¹⁸ - Quoted in: *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Ed. Jonathan Flatley (U.S.A.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 230.

¹⁹ - Percy Bysshe Shelly, *A Defence of Poetry: an Essay* (ReadHowYouWant. com, 2006), p. 53.

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facts amid appearances,”²⁰ the ultimate role of the ‘talented tenth’ is to “seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must help in the solution of problems of race contact and co-operation. And finally, beyond all this, it must develop men” (*Souls*, p.107).

In fact, the insistence on the role that this category of people should play has become a recurrent theme in Du Bois’ writings. For example, “among the central themes in ‘The Conservation of Races’ is Du Bois’ effort to exhort his fellow Negroes, especially his American Negroes to act in concert to cultivate and bring to fruition the Negro’s message for humanity.”²¹ Thus, the conferment of the name of prophet on Du Bois by Cornel West is justified on these grounds, because Du Bois, as a representative of the ‘talented tenth’ among African-Americans, could perceive, like a sensible poet in the Romantic tradition, what others could not. It becomes clear, then, why,

Like Emerson, Du Bois always viewed himself as a poet in the broad nineteenth-century sense; that is one who creates new visions and vocabularies for the moral enhancement of humanity... Du Bois attempts to turn the Emersonian theodicy inside out by not simply affirming the capacity of human powers to overcome problems but, more important, raising the question “How does it feel to be a problem?”²²

Not only does the above passage inform us about the similarity between Emerson and Du Bois, but it reinforces as well the originality of the latter, vindicating him, in this way, from the allegations that his views are but mere reproductions of western white philosophies. Because he is always actively turning the other philosophies inside out to find an original, peculiar formulation that is in total harmony with the situation of the African-American, Du Bois always brings something new. A close look at the use of the phrase double-consciousness in Emerson’s writings and in Du Bois’ will, undoubtedly, reveal the differences between the two. In his Essay on Fate, Emerson says,

One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom and foreknowledge, exists, the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one, and the other foot on the back of the other. So when a man is the victim of his fate, has sciatica in his loins, and cramp in his mind; a club-foot, and a club in his wit; a sour face, and a selfish temper; a strut in his gait, and a conceit in his affection; or is ground to a powder by the vice of his race; he is to rally on his relation to the Universe, which his ruin benefits. Leaving the daemon who suffers, he is to take sides with the Deity who secures universal benefit by his pain.²³

In another context, Emerson mentions double-consciousness, always with the emphasis on the disparity between the two selves that constitute this double-consciousness; the possibility of their reconciliation, Emerson insists, is not possible because they are of antagonistic natures, and can exist only alternately:

The worst feature of this double consciousness is, that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, show very little relation to each other: never meet and measure each other; one prevails now, all buzz and din; the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves.²⁴

As explicitly stated in the two above passages, it is the alternating characteristic of Emerson’s two selves that distinguishes his double-consciousness from Du Bois’. Double-consciousness for Emerson is expressed as the problematic gap between the ideal and the real; and the idea of alternation as a panacea to this dilemma is stressed through

²⁰ - This excerpt is taken from “The American Scholar,” a speech given by Ralph Waldo Emerson on August 31, 1837 to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Harvard.

²¹ - Bernard R. Boxill, *Race and Racism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 446.

²² - Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (U.S.A.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 142.

²³ - Ralph Waldo Emerson, *et. al.*, *The Collected Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Conduct of Life* (U.S.A.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 64.

²⁴ - Ralph Waldo Emerson, Larzer Ziff, *Nature and Selected Essays* (U.S.A.: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 254.

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the image of equestrians in the circus, an alternation which would not be found in Du Bois' double-consciousness, because the core of the problematic of the African-American resides in the very systematic simultaneous co-existence of the two opposing selves.

In his treatment of double-consciousness, Emerson distinguishes, from the start, between two opposing poles, attributing to the one qualities and to the other vices, so a clear line of demarcation is already boldly drawn between the two, to reflect the negative aspect of this double-consciousness. But Du Bois deliberately and strategically leaves the reader at a loss through his ambivalent use of the concept; the establishment of Du Bois' double-consciousness as a liability or as an asset is not totally settled among critics, let alone the differentiation between its two sides. And if double-consciousness in Du Bois' use is ambivalent, it is because Du Bois refuses to provide "ready-made compartmentalizations," to borrow John Dewey's phrase.

Du Bois' ambivalent use of the concept has contributed largely to its perennialization. Lewis R. Gordon provides one instance of Du Bois' elusiveness, which is a shared characteristic of almost all his works, by asserting that "[i]n both *The Souls of Black Folk* and 'Conservation of Races' he spoke of 'Negro Strivings' and 'Negro Ideals' which, even in his most analytically grounded passage, he failed to define."²⁵ Related to this is the critique leveled by many critics at Du Bois for his sustaining ambivalence. Indeed, Du Bois did not fail to define his terminology, for his ambivalence is intentional and functional; his ambivalent use of the concept of double-consciousness is conscious and deliberate so as to convey the intended meaning by matching the subject to an appropriate method. Du Bois' elusiveness, as if speaking from behind a veil, makes of his use of double-consciousness a special use no less peculiar than the experience of the African-American; his double-consciousness differs largely from Emerson's in the same scale as it differs from other thinkers'.

From another perspective, for Emerson double-consciousness has religious connotations; the tearing of the self exposed by Emerson is centered on the opposition between two widely distinct poles: the inner and outer self, the sacred and the mundane, and the earthly and the heavenly; it is, in a sense, a hesitation, a vacillation, a see-saw movement between two opposing ways that lead to two different extremes. Ernest Allen, Jr., sheds more light on the meanings Emerson attaches to double-consciousness which, if minutely scrutinized, prove to be widely different from Du Bois' use of the same concept:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, employed "double consciousness" in a multitude of ways: to signify a felt tensions [sic] between the individual and society as well as between the oppositional pulls of fate and liberty (or necessity and freedom) and in a more elevated sense, to signify the division between the moral and immoral selves of the individual.²⁶

Compared to Emerson's use of the same concept, Du Bois' use of the concept of double-consciousness is more problematized because, firstly, the conflict concerning the African-American self is indelibly internalized and not only motivated or dictated by two opposing alien factors as in the case of Emerson's view. Secondly, there is no choice provided to the African-American, who is doomed to live with the two selves at once, a situation that is hard to disentangle, in a Manichean way, as simply positive or negative. Some critics have drawn an analogy between Emerson's double-consciousness as a struggle between the spiritual and the earthly and Du Bois' double-consciousness as a struggle between the African and the American selves. In this respect, Dickson D. Bruce "declares that Du Bois used double-consciousness strategically to describe the conflict between African spirituality and American materialism set forth in *The Souls of Black Folk*."²⁷ But drawing such a clear-cut distinction between two antagonistic poles, one purely materialistic related to the American self, and the other purely spiritual, connected with the African self, diminishes the subtle construction of the African-American psyche which admits no possible division, this psyche being, as it is, the sum total of both inseparable opposites. Besides its reductionist effect, such a parallel would make of Du Bois, at his best, just a reminder of a theme as old as humanity itself, a theme that opposes idealism to materialism. This parallel would freeze and "unstiffen," to use a Jamesian verb, the important pivotal characteristic of Du Bois' depiction of the consciousness of the African-American self and its ubiquitous ambivalence due to the intermingling of two inseparable, though warring, selves.

²⁵ - Lewis Ricardo Gordon, *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 50.

²⁶ - Ernest Allen, Jr., "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking Du Boisian 'Double Consciousness,'" p. 51.

²⁷ - Dorothy J. Hale, "Bakhtin in African American Literary Theory," *English Literary History*, Vol. 6, Issue 2 (Jul. 1, 1994): 461.

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It seems that Du Bois pursued indefatigably, in an eclectic but highly selective manner, all that is dichotomized and may evoke in his writings and speeches the condition of the African-American. Critics who consider Du Bois an idle disciple who reproduced Hegel's, James's, Emerson's, or others' concepts and applied them on the African-American dilemma give the impression that they have glossed over the fact that the split of personality, precisely as it is peculiarly depicted by Du Bois' concept, is too broad, complicated, and problematized to be reduced to a pure imitation of one source, be it Hegelian, Jamesian, Emersonian, or another. Relying on Ross Posnock's argument, Wilson Jeremiah Moses refutes, categorically, any DuBoisian unimaginable imitation whose advocates seek to gloss over Du Bois' originality and denigrate his achievement. In this sense, Jeremiah declares,

From this, one might easily assume that the most important issue in Du Bois scholarship is a controversy between those who consider him a disciple of William James and those who would make him a Hegelian. To his credit [and to ours], Posnock recognizes that Du Bois is not the unimaginable disciple of either.²⁸

In other words, Du Bois reworked artistically and exploited imaginatively the heritage of his predecessors, moulding it in a peculiarly special way so as to suit the peculiar state of African-Americans. Surely, Du Bois did not take the philosophies of his predecessors as stock-in-trade. Rather, he scrutinized, revised, and reconsidered them to make them comply with his purposes. This fact is insisted upon by Ernest Allen who opines that "we also should emphasize that in no ways might DuBoisian double-consciousness be reduced to the content of any of its predecessors."²⁹ The concept is, in concise terms, typically DuBoisian, even if bearing similarities to previous concepts.

As far as the similarity between Du Bois and Emerson is concerned, one cannot, in any way, deny the striking resemblances of the views of the two thinkers, a resemblance deriving from their deep conviction of, and belief in, the celebration of the inner force of the individual, capable of defying all the hindrances set forth by tradition or by dogma. Emerson's insistence on a democracy that considers the individuals regardless of their age, sex, and especially their race could but attract Du Bois' project which is harmonious with Emerson's ideals. Numerous are the statements made by Du Bois which are, in a way, variations with a special imprint of Emerson's statements, but remain typically DuBoisian. What follows is an outstanding example confirming this assertion. In *Essays and Lectures*, Emerson states that

[o]ur age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of in-sight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs . . . , why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flux in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.³⁰

Emerson's iconoclastic view of the Universe resembles, strikingly, Du Bois' view reflected in the following passage in which Du Bois emphasizes the individual's freedom to act and behave unfettered by tradition or dogma:

Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centres of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. Such souls aforesaid have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine-gold, they shall again. (*Souls*, p. 107)

²⁸ - Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey*, p. 13.

²⁹ - Ernest Allen, Jr., "Du Boisian Double Consciousness: The Unsustainable Argument," *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 43, N° 2 (Summer, 2002), p. 223.

³⁰ - Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*. Ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 7.

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In their profundity, both passages criticize imitation in favor of logic, and encourage the banishment of preconceived ideas that enslave the mind and hinder its free thinking. The passages, also, celebrate meritocracy; the individual should be judged according to his worth, putting aside all the other blindly inherited considerations, especially those related to conventions. For both scholars, the tradition of copying blindly the legacy of the past without scrutinizing and revising it is a hindrance to the individual's will and potentialities; it is put to serve a minority which has devised some fixed criteria and patterns to serve its bigotry. Because the privileged minority's prerogatives are threatened once they are put under objective examination, this minority struggles to keep the status quo, and imposes its doxa, to use Roland Barthes' term. This situation applies to the condition of the African-American who has always been the victim of his pigmentation. Simply because he is a man of color, he is systematically denied the possibility to contribute to the making of history, when - surprisingly and paradoxically enough - history was made out of the sweat of his brow. This black man's marginalization was dictated not by objective motivations but by prejudicial, racial and unmotivated creeds, a behavior that has always been denounced by Du Bois and his intellectual coterie.

In fact, what most attracted Du Bois to Emerson was his revolutionary and critical thinking that has never accepted any belief blindly; no belief, even labeled as sacred, was admitted unless it was weighed accurately. This method complied with Du Bois' line of thought, because, for him, what really destroyed human relationships and led them to the wrong way, were preconceived ideas that were not scientifically and logically established. This Emersonian method, whose tenets completely appealed to Du Bois, is present in all of Emerson's thinking, a fact laid bare in the following passage:

Emerson attempted to 'pluck the strings of tension' in men by contrasting their habitual state of consciousness with a truly human state. In place of that original relation to the universe to which everyman is called, there was a blind and ignorant following of custom, and a squalid contentment with conventions, and 'satires at the name of philosophy and religion.'³¹

Emerson's indictment of the blind adoption of customs that are submitted to no logic was one of the views Du Bois found defending, indirectly, the African-American's case. Here is stressed the condition of the black African who was victim of preconceived ideas that made of him a citizen minus citizenship. In Emerson, Du Bois discovered a revolutionary voice that would contribute to the destabilization of blindly inherited customs.

While it is undeniably true that the problem of the split of the psyche is almost as old as Man himself, it is also true that Du Bois' treatment of the split of the African-American psyche is special because renewed with him, which singularizes Du Bois' use of the concept and makes him specifically associated with the concept of double-consciousness in a special way. Many thinkers belonging to different cultures and different fields of research made use of the image of the torn personality even before Du Bois, but the particularity with which Du Bois imbued the concept made his all the more everlasting. What follows are some instances in which the concept of double-consciousness is used. And although these instances evoke Du Bois' use, they are not as polemicized and problematized as Du Bois'.

Specifically, we have the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's clear and direct use of the split of personality in his play entitled *Faust* in a way not all dissimilar to Du Bois' use, and, seemingly, the nearest to him:

Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast,
And each will wrestle for the mastery there,
The one has passion's craving crude for love,
And hugs a world where sweet the senses rage;
The other longs for pastures fair above,
Leaving the murk for lofty heritage.³²

First of all, notice the use of the word souls which was current at that time and not exclusively Hegelian, as Joel Williamson advances. Thus, one should not take the similarity in the use of a register or a cluster of words as an irrefutable justification of influence or borrowing. Goethe used the words "souls, wrestle, and mastery," which belong to

³¹ - Arthur S. Lothstein, Michael Brodrick, *New Morning: Emerson in Twentieth-First Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 17.

³² - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust Part One*. Translated by P. Wayne (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 67.

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the same cluster of words used by Hegel and Du Bois. Often, these words were taken as a justification for Du Bois' imitation of Hegel; but this claim can be refuted easily as the very words were customarily used by others who bear no relation one to the other.

From the above verses, it is made crystal clear that the reader is in front of a personality torn between two antagonistic, opposing forces, namely the Heavens and the physical mundane world, that tear the persona apart. It is also apparent that the persona has two unreconciled selves. It is a Shakespearean, or, broadly speaking, an Elizabethan theme *per excellence* in which the soul and the body, Earth and Heaven are opposed. A review of Elizabethan drama will show that this theme pervades all the literature of the epoch. But again, the struggle within Faustian doubleness, like all of Du Bois' predecessors, attempts to exclude one self in order to attain equilibrium, and not, like Du Bois, to "merge," and to cohabite with, the two souls. Besides, the line of demarcation between the two choices is clear in Faustus's case, even if it is a hard choice; but the dilemma exposed by Du Bois is far more complicated, because there is no escape from the antagonistic powers tearing the African-American psyche apart except by merging them. However, the reconciliation of the black man's two selves is not as easy as it may seem, the two selves being fundamentally irreconcilable.

From his writings as well as from his private life, as Wilson Jeremiah Moses says, "we know that Du Bois' life and works are filled with permanent irreconcilables, both ideological and 'pragmatic.'"³³ As an unquestionable pragmatist, Du Bois tends to often completely change his ideas and positions to be able to act in compliance with the new conditions concerning the destiny of his race, for the simple reason that African-Americans do not enjoy a stable position, and the instability of their psychic equilibrium is but the outcome of the fragile social and economical conditions surrounding them.

In an attempt to describe the unstable condition of the African-American, Alexander Kojève mentions that "[t]here is nothing fixed in him. He is ready for change; in his very being, he is change, transcendence, transformation, 'education'; he is historical becoming at his origin, in essence, in his very existence."³⁴ In fact, "major thinkers" among African-Americans, and Du Bois is surely one of them,

often display this trait of ambivalence, and their greatness often derives from their ability to recognize intellectual problems and emotional difficulties which lesser minds have the luxury of ignoring.³⁵

The passage above explains why Du Bois never engaged in a one-dimensional position, a monocular vision like Afrocentrist thinkers such as Molefi K. Asante, Maulana Karenga, and Holloway, or even the 1920s Back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey. His commitment to cultural pluralism explains not only his refusal to stick to one definite theory to the exclusion of others, but also his consideration of those theories on equal footing, prior to their revision and the choice of those theories that best suit his concern.

Accordingly, Du Bois never borrowed ready-made theories of his predecessors. Rather, he reconsidered them and enriched them by seeing their far-reaching implications and their bearing on the situation of the African-American. By this act, he has left his indelible mark on the concept of double-consciousness, and colored it with specificities without which it would not have probably become perennial. As an intellectual figure, Du Bois fulfilled the two aims intended by the advent of African-American literature. First, he unveiled and exposed the many atrocities of the white man, known only by those who experienced them. Second, he refuted the fallacious idea that reigned then and which alleged that, because of their pigmentation seen as malediction from God, black people were predestined to slavery and physical labour, and, hence, excluded from the intellectual realm.

³³ - Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey*, p. 26.

³⁴ - Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Translated by James H. Nichols. Ed. A. Bloom (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 22.

³⁵ - Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois*, p. 26.

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Du Bois furnished vivid examples of the accomplishment of these two tasks. He made the situation of the black man known worldwide and still serves as a counter example to the idea that the black man is unimaginative. The tremendous efforts deployed by Du Bois in his various attempts to rationalize a chaotic world by correcting many fallacious ideas on race earned him the acknowledgment of a man of such a caliber as Martin Luther King, Jr. who wrote that

History cannot ignore W.E.B. Du Bois because history has to reflect truth and Dr. Du Bois was a tireless explorer and a gifted discoverer of social truths. His singular greatness lay in his quest for truth about his own people. There are very few scholars who concerned themselves with honest study of the black man and he sought to fill this immense void. The degree to which he succeeded disclosed the great dimensions of the man.³⁶

The use of the word ‘truth’ in Luther King’s statement in the plural form connotes that Du Bois, as relativist and pragmatist, never stuck fanatically to one single monistic truth, but - like the transcendentalists - adopted a relativistic pluralist method, convinced, as he was, that there were many truths that he had to seek everywhere, excluding neither of them, with the ultimate rationale of exposing, analyzing, and finally bringing sound and convincing correctives to the fallacious beliefs about race and race relations. This method, coupled with reason, was the core of Du Bois’ thinking, a fact backed up by Du Bois himself when he says,

We cannot escape the clear fact that what is going to win in this world is reason if this ever becomes a reasonable world. The careful reasoning of the human mind backed by the facts of science is the one salvation of man. The world, if it resumes its march towards civilization, cannot ignore reason.³⁷

As in the democratic vision of the transcendentalists, for Du Bois a man has to be judged by his inner qualities and the contributions he advances to serve humanity. And exactly "[l]ike Emerson and other pragmatists, Du Bois posits culture making as the prime instance of history making....In good Emersonian fashion, Du Bois's democratic mores are grounded in the detection of human creative powers at the level of everyday life."³⁸ In his attempts to hunt these creative powers, Du Bois first embraces them all, and then proceeds to the necessary eliminations, adopting a scientific method.

But Du Bois’ sources of inspiration, though multifarious and heterogeneous, are organized in such a manner so as to suit his project. His interest in phenomenology as a philosophical current never prevented him from delving into other philosophical fields such as psychology, which explains his continuous shifts from one domain of research to another in perpetual search for any method that would successfully reflect the condition of the men of his race, characterized by complexity. In Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, double-consciousness has become an important concept upon which many subsequent critics have hinged their new theories. Many of these theories – if well scrutinized – will prove to bear a relationship to the concept of double-consciousness. Particularly are meant here the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. It should be signaled, also, that Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness constitutes the seeds of multiculturalism; Du Bois is, unarguably, the forerunner of this field. If multiculturalism concerned, in its burgeoning, the field of education and all the possible measures to generalize education and to efface the frontiers between cultures regardless of their origins, was not Du Bois the first thinker who tirelessly struggled for the idea of the generalization of education and the integration of Black figures in schools and universities curricula as well as for the effacement of frontiers between races and cultures?

Finally, Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness, unlike many other concepts, has not remained throughout the ages a sterile theoretical concept depicting the peculiar situation of African-Americans in a limited theoretical scope. Rather – and because of its overriding importance in the African-American life and art – the concept has served as a motif and catalyst for many African-American narratives in which the concept is being more and more dramatized.

³⁶ - Martin Luther King, Jr., “Honoring Dr. Du Bois,” in: *W.E.B. Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn: Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. vii-xvii.

³⁷ - W.E.B. Du Bois, “Behold the Land, N° 1, 1964,” in: *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country*. Ed. Esther Cooper Jackson (U.S.A., U.K.: Basic Books, 2001), p. 9.

³⁸ - West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, p. 144.

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