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# **W. E. B. Du Bois's Forgotten Sociology of Morality: Contesting the Foundations and Informing the Future of the Sociology of Morality**

## **Abstract**

Du Bois's work, especially his early work, was explicitly concerned with morality, including dedicated studies into the moral lives of black Americans and their perceived moral standing in American society. His wider oeuvre was also regularly concerned with the role of stratified moral status and power-laden judgement as instruments of oppression. Yet, the long-overdue revival of Du Bois's contribution to sociology has given little credence to his work on morality. Likewise, the resurgent sociology of morality has scarcely engaged with Du Bois's work at all. The primary intention of this paper is thus to introduce and explore Du Bois's work on morality. In so doing, the paper sets out the aims of Du Bois's work on morality, explores his empirical investigations into the topic, and argues that recognition of Du Bois's ongoing concern for the relationship between racialisation and moral status allows the moral content of his more familiar writings and concepts to come to the fore. Throughout, it is argued that Du Bois's work on morality anticipates many of the features of contemporary sociologies of morality in its emphasis on moral contestation and power, in its focus on practices and care, and in its intention to use the study of morality for the purpose of social reform. But his work also goes beyond current approaches in its recognition of the significance of moral judgement to processes of racialisation. How Du Bois's work contributes to the future of current sociologies of morality is the focus of the conclusion.

## **Introduction**

Du Bois's work, especially his early work, had a strong and explicit concern with morality. As well as publishing in the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1904 (reprinted in 2013), *The Negro Church* carried an extensive section on the moral status of black people in America, which Du Bois felt was so in need of further exploration that he developed a subsequent research project into the topic, published in 1914 as *Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans*. Alongside these works with a systematic focus on morality, Du Bois's concern with morality is evident in his broader body of work, which carries regular discussions of the morally

degrading effects of slavery and persistent racism, and offers discernments of the moral agency, sexual moralities and family values of black Americans (Bobo, 2007; Du Bois, 1898, 1899[2007], 1928). His most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1903[2018], p.2, p.150) discusses the experience of being an object of moralised judgement, encapsulated in his famous opening phrase ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’, and in his conceptualisation of double-consciousness, whilst later passages build on this to explore the ‘ethical life of the people’ of whom he writes.

However, while the recent and long overdue revival of Du Bois’s contribution to sociology has coincided with a resurgence in sociological interest in morality, this revival has so far given little credence to his work on morality. Likewise, the resurgent sociology of morality has scarcely engaged with Du Bois’s work at all (Appiah, 2007; Rawls, 2000; and Wortham, 2009 provide some exception to this). The primary intention of this paper is thus to introduce and explore Du Bois’s work on morality. It does so in section one by situating Du Bois’s work in relation to existing paradigms that have been used to encapsulate the direction that contemporary sociologies of morality have taken, and should take. Where Du Bois’s moral thought fits in with—and exceeds—these existing paradigms is explored via an exposition of what Du Bois’s specifically moral writings sought to achieve (discussed in section two in relation to Du Bois’s theoretical paper *The Development of a People* and in section three in relation to his empirical studies of morality). As with his early work in general, Du Bois’s moral thought was concerned with using sociological argument and research to undermine racial prejudice and to promote social reform and improvement. The emphasis Du Bois puts on morality, as is argued throughout, illuminates his recognition of moral behaviours and judgements as integral pillars of racialisation. Building on this last point, the fourth section argues, in relation to Rawls’s (2000) ethnomethodological exposition of Du Bois’s work, that centring Du Bois’s moral thought allows the moral content of his more familiar concept of double-consciousness to be highlighted. Combined, I argue that Du Bois’s emphasis on the relationship between racialisation and moral judgement provides fertile ground for setting out the ongoing contribution that Du Bois’s work can make to contemporary sociologies of morality, which is the focus of the conclusion.

## Du Bois and the 'New' Sociology of Morality

The sociology of morality has re-emerged as a distinct sub-discipline in sociology mostly since the turn of the twenty-first century (Abbott, 2020). In several popular conceptions, distinctions between 'Durkheimian' and 'Weberian' paradigms have been used to compare the 'new' sociology of morality of today with the sociology of morality when it was previously in ascendancy, around the first half of the twentieth century (Abend, 2008; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). However, assessments of the relative value of each paradigm for informing the direction that contemporary sociologies of morality should take vary. For example, Hitlin and Vaisey's (2013, p.53-54) famous coining of the 'new' and the 'old' sociology of morality declares positively that: 'If the old sociology of morality was Durkheimian—seeing morality as a property of entire societies and binding its members together—then the new sociology of morality is more Weberian'. This is because contemporary sociologies tend to conceptualise

[m]orality [as] belong[ing] more to cross-cutting groups and less to society as a whole.[...] Moral sharing exists, but at many cross-cutting and competing levels.[...] Morality can bind groups together but it can also be the subject of negotiation, contestation, and exclusion. The new sociology of morality looks beyond just norms and values, casting a broader net that includes narratives, identities, [and] symbolic boundaries

Hitlin and Vaisey (2013) draw the distinction between Durkheimian and Weberian approaches to morality based on the extent to which they facilitate interpretations of moral variation and contestation *within* societies. Hitlin and Vaisey's arguments replicate common critiques of the perceived binding moral consensus of Durkheimian-inspired structural-functionalism. The diagnosis this delivers against Durkheim has been challenged by Lukes (2020 n.p.), who argues that while '[i]t is obviously true that Durkheim's focus was on morality as belonging to "society as a whole" and "binding its members together"', and on 'morality as a set of obligations', the equation of Durkheim's work with the 'old' sociology of morality looks past how

contemporary sociologies of morality are, and should continue to be, informed by Durkheim's *science de la morale*<sup>1</sup>.

This point is explored by Abend (2008) who, unlike Hitlin and Vaisey, draws the distinction between Weberian and Durkheimian paradigms of morality along the lines of the extent to which they claim to be value-free and the extent to which they see moral truth and the making of moral claims as something within the sociological purview. Abend (2008, p.89) argues that the 'Weberian paradigm' that dominates most sociological accounts of morality—namely that sociologists firstly cannot or should not pass normative judgement on moral perspectives, values, and behaviours, and secondly that they should study moralities without being influenced by their values—is a misguided project, which should just be abandoned'. Abend (2008) thus argues, alongside Lukes, for a more Durkheimian perspective to be adopted, which sees it to be the case that the sociology of morality, via its methods and theories, can arrive at moral judgements. Indeed, Abend argues with Durkheim that this is an imperative that derives from studying morality sociologically, 'for at the same time as it teaches us to respect moral reality it affords us the means of improving it' (Durkheim, 1893[1984], p.xxviii–xxix, cited in Abend, 2008, p.101).

I will argue that Du Bois—a contemporary of Weber and Durkheim whose place as a fellow founding figure of sociology has only recently been rightfully re-established—provides a middle ground between these two perspectives, which coheres more directly with, and can do a lot to inform, contemporary sociological approaches to morality. Although not formalised as an extensive "theory of morality" such as that undertaken by Durkheim<sup>2</sup>, Du Bois's work on morality embodies the various positive, while avoiding the various negative, castings of the Weberian and Durkheimian paradigms. As with the Weberian virtues that Hitlin and Vaisey identify with the 'new' sociology of morality, Du Bois's approach centres morality as being fundamentally contested and variable within a society, as being embroiled

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<sup>1</sup> Lukes (2020) also notes how 'Durkheim's thinking about morality did, to some extent, evolve beyond the account just outlined' in later works. Furthermore, the general image presented by Hitlin and Vaisey seems to apply more to Parsons than to Durkheim.

<sup>2</sup>It can be noted that despite being designated as providing a paradigm within which modern sociologies of morality fit, Weber himself did not formulate an extensive theory of morality (Powell, 2013).

in power and exclusion, whilst accenting the moral significance of 'everyday' practices, habits, and instances of care. Yet, in line with the positive aspects of Durkheim's *science de la morale* that Abend implores modern sociologists of morality to follow, Du Bois's approach is centred on studying moral reality 'scientifically' with the aim of improving it. This was encapsulated in the aims of Du Bois's studies of morality, which sought to use empirical evidence to challenge racist perceptions of the moral status of black people and establish how further progress in the moral lives and social status of this group could be achieved. I argue it is in this regard that Du Bois's distinct contribution to the sociology of morality is made. Much more so than Weberian and Durkheimian frameworks, Du Bois understood morality as a racialised phenomenon, whereby stratified moral status and power-laden moral judgements operate as instruments of oppression.

### **Reliable Interpretation and Moral Uplift: The Aims Of Du Bois's Works on Morality**

In many respects, Du Bois's work on morality aligns with Abend's argument about why sociological approaches to morality should be Durkheimian: namely Du Bois seeks to study morality scientifically to engender a morally better world. Indeed, this seems to be the primary aim of his works on morality, which mirrors the overall intention of his early sociological work (Morris, 2015). This is evident in Du Bois's (1904[2013]) *International Journal of Ethics* paper, entitled *The Development of a People*. This provides his first sustained engagement with his contention that assessments of the moral lives of black people were used as instruments through which their social status and development was judged, thus allowing Du Bois (1898, p.8) to build on his earlier remarks that negatively framed 'questions of social morality' among black people, themselves the consequences of histories of 'poverty, ignorance and social degradation', had become central features of debates about so-called 'Negro problems'.

Du Bois (2013, p.292) argues from the outset of *Development* that if we are to 'grapple intelligently with the greater problems of human development in society, we must sit and study and learn', because it is not enough to have an 'aimless desire to do good'. Instead, it is necessary to establish 'real facts and clear thinking' about the historical conditions in which

the development of black populations has occurred if 'clear judgement and rational advance' in this domain is to be achieved (Du Bois, 2013, pp.292-293). In Du Bois's (2013, p.294) view, and that of many of his contemporaries, the development of a people is as much about the 'general advance in moral habits and sound character' as it is about the 'accumulating of wealth'. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Du Bois (2013, p.294-5) argued that the criteria from which 'we may judge the condition, development, and needs of the group before us' must be situated historically to avoid 'inapt comparisons' that necessarily cast or relegate black populations as inferior.

Du Bois argued that the racial determinism common amongst his contemporaries overlooked the lasting effects of the social degradation engendered by slavery on the moral lives of black people after emancipation. The moral standards of white people continued to be mostly unattainable to black people as the degraded conditions they inherited resigned them to destitute living standards, to lack access to education, income, and aspiration, to be unacquainted with conduct in the (white) public sphere, and to lack moral 'training' in 'family groups [still] struggling to recover from the debauchery of slavery' (Du Bois, 2013, p.308).

But more significant still for Du Bois was that black Americans lived in absence of a firm cultural heritage. Slavery tore a people 'from all its traditions of the past in every realm of life', the consequences of which Du Bois (2013, p.307) argues cannot be underestimated:

No matter how crude or imperfect that past may be, with all its defects, it is the foundation upon which generations to come must build. Beauty and finish and architectural detail are not required of it, but the massive weight of centuries of customs and traditions it must have.

A point often commented on, which will be returned to later, is that Du Bois regularly exhibited no small measure of elitism, which both sometimes reinforced threads of racialised prejudices and assumed the superiority of Western culture (Mullen, 2016). This is clear in his argument that, as a result of this cultural dislocation, the black community leader must become 'the interpreter of the civilization of the twentieth century to the minds and hearts of people who, from sheer necessity, can but dimly comprehend it' (Du Bois, 2013, p.307). It also seems that at these early stages, and continued into *Morals and Manners*, Du Bois took

the moral superiority of 'the higher culture' of white America (Du Bois, 2013, p.309) and the correctness of its 'rules of modern morality' (Du Bois and Dill, 1914[2010], p.30) for granted as providing the standards which black Americans should attain. Hence, in *Development*, Du Bois (2013, p.309) aims to facilitate further increases in 'the number of efficient, law-abiding and morally upright black people' in this regard, which he saw as being already 'far larger than it ever was before, and is daily growing'. Thus, what Du Bois builds towards is an argument of how a people, whose forced cultural dislocation has been so great, and who have been kept so separate from participation in orders and organisations of modern social life, 'may be actually helped' to achieve the standards against which they are judged. Du Bois (2013, p.309)

conceive[s] that such help may take any one of four forms: 1.Among a people deprived of guiding traditions, they may be furnished trained guidance in matters of civilization and ideals of living. 2.A people whose family life is not strongly established must have put before them and brought home to them the morals of sane and sanitary living. 3.The mass of Negro children must have the keys of knowledge put into their hands by good elementary schools. 4.The Negro youth must have the opportunity to learn the technical skill of modern industry.

What is telling for this article is how Du Bois (2013, p.310) describes the first two 'avenues of aid':

I named them first because to my mind they are even of more importance than popular education. I mean the moral uplift of a people. Now moral uplift comes not primarily from schools, but from strong home life and high social ideals.[...] Here, then, is a chance for help, but how?

Firstly, Du Bois (2013, p.310) addresses the minimal obligation that slave-driving nations owe to the children of enslaved populations in order to ensure their continued moral advancement: 'a race, ruthlessly torn from its traditions and trained for centuries awry, should receive back[...] some of the riches of the great system of culture into which it has been thrust', which if unavailable at 'hearthside because the parents themselves are untaught' then must be made available by access to 'the teaching of higher institutions of learning and the agency of thoroughly educated men' (Du Bois, 2013, p.311). But secondly,



this moral uplift needs to be achieved 'by group leadership' from 'black men with ideals of life and thrift and civilization, such as must in time filter through the masses and set examples of moral living' and impart their wisdom of 'the demands and meaning of modern culture'.

Although Du Bois went on to become increasingly critical of the role of black leaders, especially in the Church, in achieving this moral uplift (Wortham, 2009), *Development* registers early insight into Du Bois's (2013) dual aim of countering prejudice by establishing a reasoned explanation of the moral circumstances of black people in America and ensuring their continued moral uplift, a theme that continued into his empirical research into morality. That Du Bois's arguments align with a 'Durkheimian' stance towards the establishment of moral truth is evident in his historiography of the legacies of slavery and ongoing oppression on the moral lives of black people in post-emancipation America, which represents for Du Bois (2013, p.294) a 'reliable interpretation of the real facts'. It is also already clear in *Development* that Du Bois's moral work aligns with a Durkheimian perspective in its willingness to use sociological research and argument to establish moral assessments and inform moral change.

However, Du Bois's own sociological perspective affords him greater freedom than Durkheim in moving between the delineation of moral facts and the pursuit of change. For while Durkheim certainly purported the capacity for sociological knowledge of morality to bring about normative change, several have noted that his conceptual framework produces an almost 'paradoxical' relationship between his descriptive science of morality and his arguments for using sociological knowledge to engender normative improvement (Karsenti, 2012, p.20, Lukes, 2020). As with Du Bois, Durkheim (1893, p.xxv) is clear that 'morality develops over the course of history and is dominated by historical causes'. However, where Durkheim (1893, p.xxv-xxvi) differs from Du Bois, and where his argument becomes hard to reconcile with his normative sociology, is in his argument that if a society's morality

is as it is at any given moment, it is because the conditions in which men are living at that time do not permit it to be otherwise. The proof of this is that it changes when these conditions change, and only in that eventuality.

Du Bois's sociological perspective similarly maintained that moral lives in the present are conditioned by the past. Yet, central to Du Bois's broader sociological stance was that chance and human agency draw the conditions of the present in tandem with historic and 'structural' factors. As England and Warner (2013, p.963) put it, for Du Bois, '[h]istorical processes must be taken into account in understanding the present, but the future is the result of the interaction of the past with present willed endeavours'. Because the conditions of people's lives are seen as the product of conditions that have been moulded to a substantial extent by human action, rather than by the shape of society, present moral conditions are and can be redirected by human action, such as those of moral leaders in the black community. As such, from a Du Boisian perspective, sociologists should not just see the world as neutral observers, but rather should consider how their evidence can instigate and guide moral and social change (England & Warner, 2013).

From the searing critiques of the legacies of destitution engendered by slavery and racism, to the elucidation of how leadership in black communities can be used to ensure continued 'moral uplift' for black people, it is clear that Du Bois (2013, p.311) goes beyond the value-free Weberian hegemony of contemporary sociologies of morality that Abend (2008) condemns. Yet, in more firmly centring the potentially transformative power of human agency in his sociological perspective, Du Bois transitions more seamlessly from a descriptive sociology of morality to a normative moral sociology than Durkheim's framework allows him to do. But underlying this is something deeper, which takes him beyond both Durkheimian and Weberian paradigms. As will be explored further in the next section, Du Bois's concern with investigating the moral lives of black people at the turn of the twentieth century reflects his recognition of the social power of moral judgement as a pillar of racialisation and as a means of continuing oppression, a point that permeates his empirical research on morality.

### **Du Bois's Empirical Studies of Morality**

The dual aim of Du Bois's sociological work on morality of using reasoned and evidenced argument to undermine racist prejudices and to ensure further moral progress amongst black populations is continued in his empirical research into morality. However, here we see how

his own perspective moves into an approach that aligns also with what Hitlin and Vaisey identify as the virtuously Weberian aspects of the new sociology of morality, and also how Du Bois's work exceeds the Weberian and Durkheim paradigms on morality in how he articulates the relationship between morality and racialised power.

Du Bois's first sustained empirical focus on morality came in *The Negro Church* (Du Bois, 1903b[2003]), one of several studies he led at Atlanta University (Wortham, 2009). Here, Du Bois not only explored the role of the black Church as the moral centre of the community, but also interrogated how effectively the Church was fulfilling this role, and the perceptions that laymen held towards the moral standing of ministers. Respondents are asked, for example, 'Are the ministers usually good men? If not, what are their chief faults?' 'Is their influence, on the whole, toward pure, honest, upright living on the part of the members?', and 'Of the ministers whom you know, how many are notoriously immoral?' (Du Bois, 1903b, p.154-156). Notably, the publication carries an extended section entitled *The Moral Status of Negroes*. This sought to assess the extent to which the harsh evaluation of the moral standing of black people exhibited in W. H. Thomas's book *The American Negro* aligned with perceptions of black people held by the general public. This was asked of 'teachers, preachers, lawyers, physicians and businessmen, both white and colored', who work with black people and therefore 'whose opinion touching their moral condition would carry most weight' (Du Bois, 1903b, p.176). Du Bois identified this section as 'a large field for inquiry' that was worthy of developing into a full study (Du Bois & Dill, 1914, p.34). This was undertaken in the research programme upon which the 1913 Atlanta Conference was based, and from which *Morals and Manners* was co-edited and published by Du Bois and Augustus Dill<sup>3</sup> (Wortham, 2010).

The study's concern with the effects of racially prejudiced moral judgement in the demarcation of black people as being a 'problem' for white America is apparent from the preface of *Morals and Manners*:

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<sup>3</sup>With Du Bois co-founding the NAACP and assuming the editorship of *The Crisis* in 1910, between 1910 to 1913 Du Bois shared the responsibilities of editorship of the volumes produced out the Atlanta studies with Augustus Dill, the brilliant black scholar who succeeded Du Bois as Head of the Department of Sociology at Atlanta (Brooks & Wright, 2021).

There is without a doubt a deep-seated feeling in the minds of many that the Negro problem is primarily a matter of morals and manners and that the real basis of color prejudice in America is the fact that the Negroes as a race are rude and thoughtless in manners and altogether quite hopeless in sexual morals, in regard for property rights and in reverence for truth. (p.28)

Although Du Bois's faith in empirical evidence alone to undo racism had already somewhat waned (Morris, 2015), the scientific study of moral facts for the ends of moral improvement continues to be central in *Morals and Manners*, which opens by affirming that

There is only one sure basis of social reform and that is Truth—a careful, detailed knowledge of the essential facts of each social problem. Without this there is no logical starting place for reform and uplift. (p.28)

Du Bois and Dill continue that this is particularly true of the perceived inadequacy of the morals and manners of black people:

This accusation is the more easily made because manners and morals lend themselves but seldom to exact measurement. Consequently, general impressions, limited observations and wild gossip supply the usual data; and these make it extremely difficult to weigh the evidence and to answer the charge. (p.28)

In line with previous Atlanta studies, attempts were made to combine qualitative research with quantitative data (Morris, 2015). Asking 'How can such an inquiry be made scientifically?', Du Bois & Dill (p.34) propose that the 'chief sources which suggest themselves for such an inquiry are birth statistics, crime statistics, and statistics of religious bodies'. In addition to these quantitative sources, 'the only, and in some respects the best, available material for the use of this investigation seemed to be the opinions of trustworthy persons in various parts of the United States who ought to know of the morals and manners of Negro Americans' (p.35). The study thus distributed the 'National Survey of Morals and Manners' qualitative questionnaire to a targeted audience of around 4000 African Americans working in areas seemingly deemed by the researchers to be suitable professions to pass sound

judgement (divided into categories of Preachers, Teachers, Social Workers, Artisans, Professionals). The return rate was low, garnering 385 responses (Wortham, 2010).

The main part of the survey asked respondents to comment on 'the condition of coloured people whom you know in regard to the following?' 1) Good manners; 2) Sound morals; 3) Habits of cleanliness; 4) Personal honesty; 5) Home life; 6) Rearing of children; 7) Wholesome amusement for young people; 8) Caring for old people. Analysis of responses to these eight themes constitutes roughly two thirds of the pages of the study. Two additional questions asked: 'What is the Church doing along these lines?' and 'How do present conditions in these respects compare with conditions ten (or twenty) years ago?' (p.35).

How morality is conceptualised throughout the study, and how this bears on the topics surveyed, indicate important points about Du Bois's view of morality, which align him more with the Weberian perspective of contemporary sociologies of morality outlined by Hitlin and Vaisey. Indeed, *Morals and Manners* coheres closely with Hitlin and Vaisey's depiction of what the 'new' sociology of morality entails. Certainly Du Bois and Dill present morality as belonging 'more to cross-cutting groups and less to society as a whole', and as being 'the subject of negotiation, contestation, and exclusion' (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013, pp.53-54). For example, in their statement of the research problem, Du Bois and Dill (p.38) ask,

When we consider the ten million American Negroes from the standpoint of their daily conduct and personal morality, what sort of folk are they? How far have they assimilated and presumably how far are they able to assimilate modern culture of the average kind?

Du Bois and Dill 'remind[...] readers that the African American population was culturally heterogeneous' and that a 'single racial morality is a meaningless concept' (Wortham, 2010, p.8). Nevertheless, they emphasise how the particular repression experienced by black Americans has yielded tangible effects on moral experiences and outlook. This is a point that Du Bois and Dill (p.41) recognise only too clearly in these arresting passages:

The environment of the American Negro has not been in the past and is not today conducive to the development of the highest morality. There is upon him still the

heritage of two hundred and fifty years of the slave regime. Slavery fosters certain virtues like humility and obedience, but these flourish at the terrible cost of lack of self-respect

The average Negro child must be educated in poor schools, if indeed in any school at all; he must grow up in an atmosphere where he can scarcely escape humiliation, contempt and personal insult; his chances for work are narrowly restricted; as a man he lives in a world limited by law and custom in such ways that he is liable to violent punishment for acts involving no moral turpitude or to excessive punishment for peccadilloes. His general outlook on life is apt to be distorted by such surroundings

The emphasis on plurality and moral power, at least in Hitlin and Vaisey's terms, differentiates Du Bois somewhat from Durkheim. As does the way *Morals and Manners* sought to understand the lives of black Americans from 'the standpoint of their daily conduct and personal morality' (Du Bois & Dill, 1914, p.38), rather than investigating moral facts as the 'totality of ties which bind us to society' and which compose the senses of obligations of that society (Durkheim, 1893, p.398). The emphasis on something more like moral practices than moral obligations, pre-empting more recent sociological movements, is evident in the eight themes covered in the survey, which refer less to values and beliefs, and more to routine moral behaviours and instances of care.

Features of routine comportment, such as manners, personal honesty, and habits of cleanliness, are centred in the study because they are taken to be 'fundamental' signifiers through which 'opinions [about black people] are confidently expressed', and markers of the extent to which the comportment of black populations has transformed in the years since emancipation to align with the expectations of modern American life (Du Bois and Dill, 1914, p.28). Whilst Du Bois and Dill surmise from the responses 'the persistence of older habits due to slavery and poverty', they nonetheless affirm a recognition of a clear 'betterment in the habits of courtesy, cleanliness and thrift and a wider conformity to the rules of modern morality' (p.30).

Furthermore, of the eight surveyed themes used, three (evaluations of home life, the rearing of children, and care for the elderly) pertain directly to caring practices. Indeed, whereas the

preliminary discussions of each of the surveyed themes are mostly brief, the discussion of 'Home Life' is substantial. The comparatively lengthy prelude is given, it seems, firstly to contextualise the circumstances in which the moral sphere of home life was lived for black people, and secondly to illustrate how family responsibilities and the care of a household are being transformed, with the 'decided strengthening of the home life' taken to be indicative of moral progress (p.30). Similarly, the section on the Rearing of Children recognises that because 'children of the slave families did not belong to their parents[...] discipline was lax' (p.111). Yet it is concluded that social transformation in the care for children is underway, with the coming of 'new efforts and a new sense of responsibility toward the children' (p.172). The section on Caring for Old People recognises the self-establishment of old people's homes as a common feature of black communities that predates abolition, but which has continued on an upward trajectory since.

Du Bois and Dill (1914) took these features of everyday life to symbolise sound moral integrity, and they were enquired about because they were recognised as objects about which moral judgement was delivered, a point that was fully affirmed in the collected responses. That such responsibilities were taken to be indicative features of moral lives anticipates movements towards 'care ethics' that developed in the 1980s. Care ethics argues that Western thought has tended to equate morality with justice and abstract reasoning, meaning that the kind of caring practices that in fact constitute most of our moral behaviour had been overlooked or considered not to be properly moral endeavours (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). The reconceptualising of everyday practices of care in moral terms provided a notable moment in the re-establishment of the sociology of morality. This is because it allowed sociologists to understand, for example, practices of parenting, relationship maintenance, and elderly care as moral practices, thus allowing these practices to be interpreted in the moral terms through which they are frequently understood by actors themselves (May, 2008; Smart & Neale, 1999)—something that Du Bois and Dill seem to have recognised a century ago.

Although it has since expanded into a general perspective on moral action, care ethics initially developed out of feminist critiques of how the daily moral roles most often undertaken by women had consistently been cast as insufficiently impartial and reason-led to be considered as properly moral action in much of Western moral theory (Abbott, 2022; Tronto, 1994). Du

Bois and Dill, however, fervently stressed the moral role played by women in the black community (Zuckerman, 2004). Recognition of the legacies of the degradation of slavery and the necessity of black women to undertake both domestic and paid labour (unlike their white counterparts of the day) is woven together with praise for the role of black women in upholding family life, bestowing moral socialisation, ensuring educational advancement for themselves and the black community, and in assuming leading positions in bringing about social reform. Despite 'their poverty and lack of legal protection',

they are the ones who[...] have taken up definitely and successfully the inner burden of social reform. Their work takes the form of general charity, Women's Clubs, Old Folks' Homes, Orphanages, Hospitals, Christian Associations, Literary and Art Clubs, Day Nurseries, Settlements, Kindergartens and Civic Reform. It is a fact worthy of special note that much of the real work of social uplift and moral awakening today is being carried on by Negro women (Du Bois & Dill, 1914, p.99)

There are clearly a great many virtues to Du Bois's empirical work on morality. However, as England and Warner (2013, p.956) argue, properly accrediting Du Bois's work means 'moving beyond the tribute stage'. As alluded to above, Du Bois's work has been critiqued for the stern moral stance that he often assumed towards black people. As Lewis (1993, p.196) puts it, 'when it came to African-American morality, Du Bois's measure was a rigid Calvinist ruler', and it seems that this regularly inflected his research and analysis of morality. In *The Negro Church* (1903b, p.155) respondents are asked specifically to comment on the 'sexual impurity' of black ministers, and in *Morals and Manners* (p.54) 'sexual morals' are depicted as a barometer from which 'sound morals' in general can be judged, for example in relation to rates of illegitimate birth. Indeed, whilst *Morals and Manners* finds substantial improvements in this regard, it is claimed that 'great hindrances' are still posed by habits of 'sexual irregularity' (p.30).

As Evans (2007, p.274-5) argues, '[p]erhaps this is the tension one should expect to find in a sociologist and a Victorian deeply troubled by moral failings' who was 'writing at a time when social scientists inextricably linked religion and morality'. Evans reminds us too that such was the dominance of Protestantism in the US at the time that it stood as the 'ethically normative' paradigm by which morality was judged. It should perhaps then not be surprising that Du



Bois's own moral views encapsulated and embodied many of the values of Protestantism as being synonymous with the criteria of sound morality, even if his comparatively illiberal views on sexual and familial morality are somewhat jarring.

But a further point can be made here. Tronto (1994, p.91) illustrates how moral power lies in the capacities to draw and maintain distinctions of who and what is moral, with these moral boundaries becoming a medium that 'preserve[s] the positions of the powerful'. Once the moral 'centre' is established, not only are other moral positions marginalised, but the failure to attain the moral standards of the centre become a means through which exclusion is justified. The form of Du Bois's moral studies, his previously discussed critiques of slavery and its moral consequences, and his more general analysis of racialisation (discussed next), shows his acute awareness of this point. While it seems to be true that Du Bois took the dominant morality of white America to be correct, a sympathetic reading might appreciate that Du Bois's sometimes judgemental writings on morality were orientated by a profound concern for the role played by the harsh appraisal of the moral standing of black people in their continued oppression, and thereby can appreciate that the criteria through which Du Bois judged the morality of black people reflected the hegemonic power of dominant white morality through which black people were being judged and marginalised.

That Du Bois finds that much must be done to improve moral habits, along with his determination to exhibit moral progress among African Americans since abolition, is indicative of his recognition of this point of moral power. Indeed, Du Bois reinforces the social purpose of his studies into morality in the conclusion to *Morals and Manners* (p.172). He reminds us firstly that the legacies of slavery mean that for African Americans, the 'hindrances to sound moral life[...] are tremendous'. Yet, in challenge to the dominant and racist perceptions of the moral standing of black people of early twentieth century America, he asserts that 'there cannot be in the mind of the patient unprejudiced observer any doubt but that the morals, sexual and other, of the American Negro compare favorably today', and that a 'large and growing class in this respect the equal of the best in the nation'.

### **Double-Consciousness, Self, and the Racialised Moral Order**

While *Morals and Manners* continues to align with the Durkheimian paradigm in its attitudes towards truth and establishing moral judgements to inform moral change and improvement, the focus on moral practices, intersecting moralities, and moral contestation indicate a clear resonance with what Hitlin and Vaisey take to be the virtuously Weberian thrust of contemporary sociologies of morality. However, where Du Bois exceeds both Durkheim and Weberian paradigms on morality is in the centralisation of race and racism in the formation and enactment of moral lives, and in the centring of moral judgement as an instrument of racialised power.

This is particularly evident in Du Bois's conceptualisation of the role of racialisation in processes of selfhood and how this translates into moral experience. Indeed, Rawls (2000) argues that it is in Du Bois's conceptualisations of double-consciousness, and the veil and color line<sup>4</sup>, that Du Bois's concern for the significance of racialised moral power is most evident. Whereas the previous sections have explored Du Bois's specifically moral works, this section explores how the centring of Du Bois's concern with morality allows the moral content of his more familiar conceptualisations to be recognised and extended. This section draws specifically on Rawls's ethnomethodological exposition of Du Bois's concepts, because her arguments for the role of racialisation to moral orientations and the moral order of interactions points towards Du Bois's ongoing significance to contemporary sociologies of morality.

Du Bois (1903, p.1) famously stated at the start of *Souls* that 'the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line'. What he means by this is that centuries of colonial domination and slavery and their legacies have resulted in racialisation being a centrally organising feature of the modern world (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015). Racialisation operates institutionally, for example through inequitable access to education or racist criminal justice practices. But it also operates by structuring 'the way in which subjects situated in different sides of the veil see and experience their social world' (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015, p.235). Whereas racialising subjects recognise their own experience as normal and transparent, the

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<sup>4</sup> England and Warner (2013, p.963) take these terms to be synonymous.

experiences of racialised subjects are cast as other to both the racialising and the racialised subject. In Du Bois's depiction of the veil in the US, the experiences of black people are othered to the extent that they are perceived by white people only through a lens of racialisation, either cast as invisible or understood through 'White attributions of black moral and intellectual inferiority, [and] cultural and familial degeneracy' (England & Warner, 2013, p.966-967). As Itzigsohn and Brown (2015, p.235) describe, 'the projections of Whites onto the veil become realities that Black subjects have to process in their self-formation'.

This, Du Bois (1903, p.2) argues, has substantial consequences for the development and experience of self, as this is a

world which yields [for the black person] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness[...] two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals

The implications of Du Bois's depiction of double-consciousness are clear: because the racialised subject is made to see themselves through the eyes of the racialising other, the experience of self is divided. A central facet through which experience is doubled is through the experiencing of oneself through projections of being a 'problem', which, as discussed, Du Bois had already begun to tie to the perceptions of the moral standing of black people as early as 1898. Thus, in a world of racialisation, the consciousness of the oppressed is continually 'confronted with a hostile, invasive "critic"', which even when 'appear[ing] under the guise of the impartial spectator' projects onto the racialised subject subordination and moral inferiority (Aboulafia, 2008, p.181).

As Itzigsohn and Brown (2015, p.232) argue, this differentiates Du Bois from concurrent theories of the self developed by G. H. Mead, which have become staples of sociology in general and of theories of moral selfhood in particular. Mead's (1934, p.134, 7) theory of the self argues that the self develops through interactions which, alongside reflexive capacities, 'enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself', thereby forming the

process through which the 'structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs' (Mead, 1934, p.7). Although Mead's concept of the generalised other is more plural and complex than it is sometimes given credit for (Joas, 1997), Mead's theory is less concerned than Du Bois with how relations of power bear upon how the self develops (Itzigsohn and Brown, 2015). Indeed, as well as leading to the self expressing the behaviour of its group, Mead argues that the social emergence of the self allows the individual to 'bring[...] himself, as an objective whole, within his own experiential purview' (1934, p.309), which forms the basis for the development of an individuated ethical self-understanding (Habermas, 1995).

Du Bois (1903), however, articulates how this process is hindered under conditions of racialisation: not only does this lead to 'longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self' (p.3), but 'the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals' (p.6). Furthermore, Du Bois argues that the living by 'double-aims, the seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand[sic] people' (1903, p.4), a claim that he returns to in *Morals and Manners* (p172), where he concludes that a history of repression has yielded 'spiritual turmoil' for African American communities, whose ideals are expressed chiefly in the form of self-criticism.

Du Bois's (1903, p.150) depiction of double-consciousness thus goes beyond accounting for the development and experience of self in a racialised world and enters into what this means for the 'ethical life' of the racialised. For Du Bois, histories of enslavement and racial segregation resulted in African Americans being torn between the values of two communities, the one in which they live and the one which they are made to live by: 'Such a double-life, with double-thoughts, double-duties, and double-social classes, must give rise to double-words and double-ideals' (Du Bois, 1903, p.153). As Rawls (2000, p.244) argues, this is not simply 'a conflict between the values accorded to social roles within a single community', but rather 'a fundamental conflict between the two social forms and the resulting conflict between the values of the two communities'.

Building on this for her ethnomethodological studies, Rawls (2000, pp.246-247) adds that the veil, as a structuring feature of a racialised society that thereby moulds self-formation, is carried through into interaction, which has important outcomes for 'moral orientation' and the enactment of interactional moral orders between racialised and racialising groups in contemporary society: 'even today when [black and white Americans] do more often jointly occupy interactional space, because their communities have developed in separation and their Interaction Order practices conflict, the display of moral behavior by members of one group may well look like deviant behavior to members of the other'. As well as creating 'moral tension' in itself, Rawls's (2000, p.247) analysis of interactions between black and white Americans indicates that this has significant consequences for miscommunications and perceived violations of the interactional order between racialised and racialising subjects. Rawls argues that such moments of unintelligibility lead parties to (mis)interpret the actions of the other, with such interpretations frequently invoking, and then reinforcing, racialised stereotypical characterisations. Significantly, though, the differential experience on each side of the veil means that the social worth and validity of interactional practices is predominantly judged and orientated according to the values and expectations of the white community. What is more, whereas the interactional order to which white selves adhere is singular, black selves are accountable to two interactional orders, one of which is not just misunderstood by white society, but is frequently characterised as problematic. Thus, for Rawls (2000), Du Bois's concepts of the veil and double-consciousness add important enrichments to how the moral order of interactions is conceptualised.

### **Conclusion: What Can Du Bois Bring to the Sociology of Morality?**

Concerted efforts to undo the prejudiced marginalisation of Du Bois's contribution to sociology are underway. Despite this revival running alongside the re-establishment of sociological interest in morality, Du Bois's contribution to sociological approaches to morality remains almost entirely overlooked. In the stressing of moral contestation and the foregrounding of the relationship between power, moral status, and the force of moral judgement, to the emphasis put on care and manners as indicative features of moral behaviour, Du Bois's research into morality not only avoided the pitfalls of the 'old' sociology

of morality that Hitlin and Vaisey decry, but also pre-empt what they take to be virtuous developments in the Weberian style of the 'new' sociology of morality. Yet, the principle aims of Du Bois's work on morality mirrors a Durkheimian stance towards the scientific study of morality in order to establish moral discernments that can be used to instrument social reform. This anticipates growing calls for sociologists of morality to be more willing to use their abundance of evidence to inform normative judgements and social change (Burawoy, 2014; Vandenberghe, 2017). Indeed, Du Bois's general sociological stance is arguably more amenable to translating a science of morality into a normative moral sociology than Durkheim's own framework.

Yet, as Bhabra (2014) reminds us, the simple inclusion of Du Bois's work in contemporary sociology will remain inadequate without also considering how his unique perspective allows the discipline to be reconstructed. Du Bois's primary and overarching contribution to studies of morality, which allows his work to make a contribution to contemporary sociologies of morality that Weberian and Durkheimian frameworks do not, lies in his centralisation of the relationship between racial power, histories of oppression, and moral status. As recent post-colonial critiques have argued, while race and colonialism were implicit to the "founding fathers'" accounts of the development of (Western) modernity, 'there is little extended discussion of race in Weber's writing' (Barbalet, 2022, p.1) and 'Durkheim barely mentioned colonialism' or the effects of slavery in his social and moral theories (Bhabra & Holmwood, 2021, p.143). Just as the spectre of colonialism, at once 'intrinsic' and yet 'rendered unseen', has had consequences for how sociology in general has been formulated (Bhabra, 2007, p.21), so too has this had consequences for the sociological study of morality. As Bauman (1989, p.174) argued, the dominant accounts of morality that pervaded sociology throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly those developed in the structural-functionalist tradition, tended towards equating morality with dominant social orders, while overlooking the oppressive and 'morally silencing' role that such dominant orders play in the lives of subordinated groups. Du Bois, however, centred his own moral studies—conducted over a century ago—not just around recognition of the morally degrading effects of slavery, but also around the effects of profound racism on the moral outlooks of black people, the likelihood of black Americans being able to attain the moral standards of white America against which they were judged, and the role that racialised moral judgement plays in how a person and a people are defined.

In centring the effects of slavery, colonialism, and racist oppression, Du Bois's work on morality brings to the fore integral aspects of moral experience that have been, and continue to be, 'largely outside [the sociological] field of vision' (Bhambra, 2007, p.16).

In so doing, he illuminates the intensity of moral contention within racialised societies, and highlights the profound role played by moral power and domination as an instrument of subjugation. It is here that Du Bois's work can inform contemporary sociologies of morality directly. Whilst the significance of gender and class to moral experience have become well-established in contemporary literatures, notably via critical analyses of the role of gender and class in the experience of moral judgement and the consequences this has for moral action and the development of self (e.g. Hekman, 1995; Lamont, 1992; Sayer, 2005; Tyler, 2013), the equivalent significance of race and racialisation is much less prominent (for exceptions, Collins, 2000; Cortese, 1990).

As well as providing a basis for a general expansion of sociological consideration of the relationship between racialisation and morality, Du Bois's work yields two specific additional avenues for centring racialisation in contemporary sociologies of morality. The first is his identification of everyday features of moral worth, such as perceptions of good manners, personal honesty, and care for children and the elderly, as crucial mediums through which racialised moral judgement occurs. The second comes from his conceptualisation of double-consciousness. It has commonly been noted that Du Bois's double-consciousness provides a conceptual means to explicate how racialised subjectivity is experienced through the projection of being other and of being a problem. But centring Du Bois's emphasis on morality as a pillar of racialisation allows the moral content of his concept of double-consciousness to come into focus, as being tied to racialised moral judgement that results in a division within the subject, which has consequences for ideals and the direction of the moral lives of the racialised. The discord between moral orders of interaction that this causes has been expounded well by Rawls. But the consequences of the experience of racialisation on moral selfhood, outlooks, and actions, as well as the role of racialised moral judgements in reinforcing inequalities, remains underexplored. Centring Du Bois's moral thought and his conceptualisation of double-consciousness in sociology of morality research agendas can be used to add a lacking dimension of racialisation to investigations of morality in these respects,

taking us not just beyond Mead and the paradigms of Durkheim and Weber, but also providing the beginnings of a conceptual means for thinking through the relationship between racialisation and moral subjectivity, experience, and action.

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