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On Paragraph Four of “The Conservation of Races”

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For Robert Bernasconi

IN AN IMPLICIT YET PROFOUND SENSE THAT WOULD ARTICULATE AN ENTIRE ontology, the thought of the concept of race is that a certain order of essence will determine the status and character of difference or the organization of differences among that order or form of being called human.¹

It can thus be said that the concept of race as it develops in European and American thought—precisely during the time of the elaboration of the critical thought of the transcendental—produces and maintains a naive or precritical understanding of the problem of the sign or the *phänomenon* as that which organizes the very possibility of its premises. In an abstract sense it would portend to name within the form of the human an order of pure being—a pure essence that would show forth as a form of being. In a practical sense (and the

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other face of the abstract) it would insist in a dogmatic fashion on the status of a form of human being understood under the heading of "European," or subsequently "white," as a unique and primordial dispensation within an entire system of metaphysics. And, derivatively, it would concatenate a distribution of other figures of the human in a categorical and hence hierarchical order.

I. A FIRST PROBLEMATIZATION

It is the organization of this conceptualization that W. E. B. Du Bois engages in the opening stage of his essay "The Conservation of Races," most precisely the fourth paragraph, in the form in which it was operative within the sciences of the human—natural and social—at the end of the nineteenth century. And he will question the very principle by which it has determined the concept, and thus the object, of its inquiry.²

When we thus come to inquire into the essential difference of races we find it hard to come at once to any definite conclusion. Many criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language. And manifestly, in each of these respects, human beings differ widely. They vary in color, for instance, from the marble-like pallor of the Scandinavian to the rich, dark brown of the Zulu, passing by the creamy Slav, the yellow Chinese, the light brown Sicilian and the brown Egyptian. Men vary, too, in the texture of hair from the obstinately straight hair of the Chinese to the obstinately tufted and frizzled hair of the Bushman. In measurement of heads, again, men vary; from the broad-headed Tartar to the medium-headed European and the narrow-headed Hottentot; or, again in language, from the highly-inflected Roman tongue to the monosyllabic Chinese. All these physical characteristics are patent enough, and if they agreed with each other it would be very easy to classify mankind. Unfortunately for scientists, however, these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled. Color does not agree with texture of hair, for many of the dark races have straight hair; nor does color agree with the breadth of the head, for the yellow Tartar has a broader head than the German; nor, again, has the science of language as yet succeeded in clearing up the relative authority of these various and contradictory criteria.

The final word of science, so far, is that we have at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings—the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race. That other races have arisen from the intermingling of the blood of these two. This broad division of the world's races which men like [Thomas Henry] Huxley and [Friedrich] Ratzel have introduced as more nearly true than the old five-race scheme of [Johann Friedrich] Blumenbach, is nothing more than an acknowledgment that, so far as purely physical characteristics are concerned, the differences between men do not explain all the differences of their history. It declares, as [Charles] Darwin himself said, that great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood.³

If the question that names the epistemic horizon of the essay “The Conservation of Races” as a whole and in terms of that order of thought that can properly be understood as historical and concerned with the ontological is “the origins and destinies of races” (CR 1897, 5, para. 1; CR 2015, 51, para. 1), then the matter that names the order of attention in paragraph four, specifically, focused as it is on the *concept* of race in an epistemic sense on the order of thought that is theoretical, is the question of the determination of “the essential differences of races” (CR 1897, 6, para. 4; CR 2015, 52, para. 4). At this juncture, Du Bois's concern is more specific than the general *idea* of race. It is now tuned to the question of the *concept* as it has been operated in science—natural science in particular.

In this sense, from the outset of his discussion, Du Bois will enact the reduction of a naive ontology. And, over the subsequent paragraphs, it might be said, he will propose, even if in a schematic and (necessarily) unstable discourse, a return to an active constitution of sense and value, to the activity of a historical organization of being as becoming. In such a thought, ideals of truth and value, if there is such, would be rendered as a form of the organization of life and living as relation—relation to the other, most simply.

However, the realization of this intervention was not and could not be a definitive one, and this was for essential reasons. This is to say, we cannot expect that Du Bois's efforts in his engagement with this problematic could accede to a perspective and position that would be wholly without (apparent) contradiction.

II. THE RE-INSCRIPTION OF A PROBLEMATIZATION

It is, in only an apparent paradox, at precisely this juncture that the example of Du Bois as a thinker—as a thinker in practice, as a thinker of practice—and the texture of his discourse—as practical epistemic statements of concept-metaphor, theoretical proposition, and methodical intervention—becomes apposite for contemporary fundamental critical discourse of any kind that would address the domain of lived and historical difference in the orders of existence.

It is thus that we now attempt, simply, a passage of reception marking our incipit according to the letter of the text at hand.

Perhaps one notices on first reflex that the idea and concept of race that Du Bois proposes to address is not given an explicit general formulation at the outset of this paragraph. And it is not simply decidable as to why Du Bois foregoes the attempt at such. We can note, however, an essential complication that would arise from proposing such a statement. Although he must precomprehend the idea and concept that he would question to establish it as an objectivity of which he would give an account, Du Bois precisely does not wish to suggest at the outset of his inquiry—or, indeed, at any moment of this essay—that there is already given—as *a finally accomplished existent* even as idea—a thing called race. The struggle to sustain a thought of this difference of the given as limit and the given as possibility is the scene of a rhetorical torsion that is of the essence of the epistemic question that is at stake here. It runs throughout the entire essay.

And then in the background of this precomprehension is another, the necessary precomprehension of the precomprehension. This is the question, "What is (the) human?" Who, or what, is the human, the human being? Who, or what, are those beings gathered under the name human? What is the essential unity of the form of being called human? It is then that the specific question that we propose to follow in Du Bois's discourse announces itself. If there is the appearance of difference within such, the human as a form of being, what is its status? What is the sameness, the essence, across the apparent differences among all of the groups that are called human? What is it that makes them belong to the same order of beings? Is it only or primarily a

“physical” substrate? Is it otherwise than the “physical” as a determining necessity? With regard to sameness or difference, physical or otherwise, what is the meaning of their apparitional differences?

Here, then, it can be proposed that the question of the differences among humans on the order of a thought of the whole of humankind as a unity arises within the unfolding of this latter thought and is part and parcel of its possibility. Thus, as Du Bois must begin with a precomprehension of the concept of race, in the same gesture he must precomprehend the idea or thought of the human. While manifesting a certain limitation of his questioning, in both cases it can now be said, it is yet the questions “What is race?” and “What is the human?” that are in fact on the table. In this sense, both questions take shape under the interrogative force of the occasion and the practical theoretical guide of Du Bois’s labor of thought in this essay, the question “who, or what, is the Negro?” Specifically, “who, or what, is the ‘American Negro?’” Then, is the Negro a race? In what sense does the human include them—especially, in its devolution as the historial?

Simply remarking these inexplicit questions that stand at the edge of the incipit of the letter of the text, we can now read that the titular inquiry is a question about “the essential differences of races.”

The issue might be translated as the question of whether there are divisions within the unity called the human that should be understood as essential—of or pertaining to an essence? And, if there are such differences, what are they?

And how might we come to recognize or know them? Specifically, in what way can science as a form of understanding that would claim the status of knowledge—not revelation or simple intuition, but a certain rational use of reason to apprehend something of the organization of existence to gain access to such essence—be certain of its apprehension? Is such possible? The question might then be specified further and more exactly: in what way has scientific inquiry approached this question?

This is already to suggest that to ask about the concept of race, Du Bois, along with and following the discourses of race or the sciences of the human, must have a precomprehension of the idea of race in general. This necessarily means that he (and we along with him, if we follow his discourse) in asking about it must place it within a certain precomprehension of the ontological, of presence as a form. The

question is "what is . . . ?"—the question of presumptive essence, a possible first question if you will, one that is of the very inaugural gesture of science. This is the classical gesture. Du Bois, as he must do and seems to wish to do, in a sense, will respect it here. The question of essence can only be ignored; it cannot be simply avoided. This is a difficulty that Du Bois's discourse must negotiate. However, one can complicate the necessity with which it is carried or maintained in a discourse and a practice. As we shall see, Du Bois will indeed attempt to displace its position or appurtenance within a gesture of knowledge and practical understanding. He will question the naive or willful presumption of access to the simply given *real or reality* (i.e., nature as an order of necessity that determines in an absolute sense the appearance of something, here the form of the human), specifying that such—if anything—is only by way of the reflexive practice of the human as a form of being (whether we call it the sign, the phenomenon, or, in his oft-used contemporary term, "ideals"), and reconstrue the ground of the production of appearance or the mark, proposing thereby a different way or form of science to accede to its presumed truth.

So, what is this idea of race, of the forms of difference among humans? Perhaps it can be said that there is a whole theoretical disposition sedimented here. It would propose that there is an order of sensible mark ascribable to the human as a body, ostensibly given in the formal organization of the body, that can stand as a reliable (in principle, certain) basis for an act of judgment that would demarcate and recognize for science discrete groups among humans. Further, it would maintain that such order of mark is expressive of an essential order of the possibility and being of such groups (ontological possibility). Such groups would comprise so-called "races" among humans. The lexical term "race," it should be simply noted here, is from general natural history of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and developed specifically with regard to the human within the philosophical discourses of the late eighteenth century and the biological discourses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The idea is that such an order of mark may serve as a criterion for the apprehension of this essential order. Methodologically, it proposes to operationalize this theory, to render the object, by recognizing within the order of the criterion separate and distinct elements or attributes of the (human) body as a mark. These would—in pluralization—be "criteria."

Then, this thought would attempt to coordinate those elements distinguished, or an ensemble of such, with a category or type of human, that is to coordinate them according to a certain sense of relative whole. The operative inquiry of science is to gather facts and information about “criteria” that would provide a basis for judgments about the existence and character of supposed race groups. It is thus that we would stand within the opening of Du Bois’s discourse in paragraph four.

Such an approach would be presumptive in its determination of the ontological status of the supposed “criteria.” As a lexical figure this English word in its etymology carries us back into the Greek to *kritérion*, which entails both *kritēs*, “to judge,” and *krīnein*, “to separate.” The word “criteria” in its semantic layers as understood in English can be thought to name an already constituted order of being and as such to serve as the basis for a claim of predication or an act of judgment. In a theoretical projection it would stand as a reference point—whether as principle, condition, standard, or rule—against which some other matter or organization of such can be evaluated. Examples of practical synonymic linguistic markers for criteria here would be standards, measures, or tests of some kind. The logic here is of the sort of presumption that would maintain a theory of the absolute integrity of the monogram, the overlapping or combining of two or more graphemes to form another that is then understood as a symbol. The sciences of race of Du Bois’s time of writing presuppose an existential predicate for the concept of race, then propose to find expressions (or indications) of it, and then further to make assertorial statements about the same that would thereby and in turn (re)subsume them under the heading of a general claim about the order of human being. A reckoning with the genealogical production of the so-called monogram and the fictions that would be maintained in its name, so to speak, such as the “criteria” for specifying “the essential difference of races,” for its ontological and existential presumption to be maintained as simply given in an order of necessity, must be forestalled or preemptively concluded.

Yet, to engage the discourses of science, whose general authority he would affirm over and against revelation and simple intuition, Du Bois must begin with their presumption. In the past, the various sciences—natural or social—that would address this question have proposed “many criteria of race differ-

ences." Du Bois lists four such "criteria." They are "color, hair, cranial measurements, and language." His account throughout the fourth paragraph follows these four simply and precisely as the examples of that order that would ostensibly provide a criterion of some kind by which to recognize difference of race among humans. Following, thus, the order of attention of the sciences, to attend to the given form of the object, its "manifest" character, Du Bois accepts, in an initial sense, the fact of patterns of sensible difference among human groups. "And manifestly, in each of these respects, human beings differ widely . . . All these physical characteristics are patent enough." So, there is an apparent order of difference among humans. There is variation within the supposed unity of this kind of being. Du Bois generally describes these differences by way of a notation of extremes and the gradations between them (at first explicit, but subsequently implicit): for example, of "color" he writes that such variation goes "from the marble-like pallor of the Scandinavian to the rich, dark brown of the Zulu, passing by the creamy Slav, the yellow Chinese, the light brown Sicilian and the brown Egyptian." After his acceptance and emphasis of the apparent fact of variation, it is this logical organization of the description that I would mark in relief in the context of our discussion, rather than the specific nominal entities or their specific characterization. This rhetorical organization constitutes a theoretical suggestion: that there are types of human and such might be susceptible to a systematic description.

And, likewise, he must cross the terrain of the presumptive logic by which such manifest criteria are understood to render a basis for judgment. This is the theory of agreement of which Du Bois, with such apparent brevity, speaks: "All these physical characteristics are patent enough, and if they agreed with each other it would be very easy to classify mankind." In theory, the elements or attributes recognized therein should be readable and interpretable as specifying a discrete physical type that is a certain recurrent concatenation of elements. And then further, such types have a specific place in an entire ontological schema. Such status is then understood as organized within an entire metaphysical presumption in which a punctually given or available essence is apprehended and comprehended by science. Ostensible attribute would stand as the mark of an entire interlinked chain of more or less explicit

and more or less formal presumption: that the natural organization of the physical, here given in bodily character, announces already the organization of *historial* character, the former standing as resolute indication of the latter. The latter would be understood as the (apparently) transparent expression of the former. The relation of the physical and historial would thus be of an ontological order, the *historical* bespeaking thus such order of determination. Such historical character would then name the status of the human group as historial being within an entire metaphysics. And, in a manner that references especially the European and American eighteenth century, there would be the scientific yield of a classification, a fixed order, of the groups of the so-called human. And, it must be said, in a reference especially to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it would propose to affirm an existing historical and social ordination of power, authority, and privilege. That is to say, that at its limit it would affirm the military and economic implication of the devolution of modern imperialism on a global scale.

Yet, a claim about the objective articulation of objectivity, the conceptualization of race here proposes more than simply that there is a manifestation of bodily form that should be noted. It implies most precisely the simultaneous claim that there is an order of the common-in-difference (or difference-in-common) in terms of which the putative manifest differences among humans can be rendered meaningful. Thus, although it is nothing different than the recognition of differences that we have just remarked above, it should be understood in the order of discourse and critical reflection according to a whole additional level of epistemic implication. It pertains to the unstable possibility of appearance as such, we might say.

This is because difference, if you will, cannot be understood as such under the category of a thing. Differences, in fact, are thus properly speaking a mark or value of distinction that can be recognized, if at all, only by way of an intentional act (even if such is not a sovereign act with regard to its possibility) whether of understanding in general or of a (more or less formal) project of knowledge. The movement in which differences appear cannot be named in the order of the existent as a form of presence. Differences named within science are the always already encoded forms of mark. In the terms of classical metaphysics, they are a sign. Or, that is also to say, with reference to modern

European critical thought, they are phenomenal. It is thus that for science as Du Bois engages it, no matter the ontological status it might propose for them, it must propose a whole theory of the operation of the sign in its apprehension of "differences of race." The idea of "agreement," in reference to the term that Du Bois uses here, is the epistemic touchstone of that theory. Thus, for science or knowledge, only as signs can the study of bodily form or character be apprehended as of the order of essence that supposedly divides the human into races.

Let us turn again to the letter of Du Bois's text as he negotiates this terrain

We approach here the first and most decisive gesture by which he will attempt to question the whole dominant epistemic determination of the concept of race at the end of the nineteenth century or, better, to question what is at stake for him in the form of problem for thought that is situated under its heading. He will propose that there is a radical indetermination between the order of the natural and the conventional.

Unfortunately for scientists, however, these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled. Color does not agree with texture of hair, for many of the dark races have straight hair; nor does color agree with the breadth of the head, for the yellow Tartar has a broader head than the German; nor, again, has the science of language as yet succeeded in clearing up the relative authority of these various and contradictory criteria. (CR 1897, 6, para. 4; CR 2015, 52, para. 4)

Du Bois herein declares that the theory of "agreement" operated by the sciences of race is contradicted by the possible articulation of physical characteristics among humankind. The same "criteria" may show within or among more than one group. Indeed, the distribution of ostensible physical attributes or forms of mark may cross the boundaries between too many of the supposed types of race to function as reliable evidence of the order of difference in question. By way of an account of the logical implication of the empirical understood as an order of possibility, Du Bois will declare a theoretical disjunction of the supposed categorical or given structure of reference of physical attribute and a supposed referential object, a certain implied essence of race. In the passage at hand then, he declares that the concatenation of characteristics or "criteria," the form of mark that science would

propose be recognized as an element for knowledge, does not “agree” or coordinate in such a way as to confirm (that is, function as purported physical evidence for) a claim that there are categorical distinctions within humankind as a whole. That is to say, there is no categorical or simple relation of the supposed physical mark apprehended by science and any supposed referent. A given mark may refer to an indefinite number of referents. He disjoins the supposed primordial and determining bond of the physical or natural in the production of the historical appearance of differences among humans. For Du Bois, there is no physical necessity to such a theorized relationship. And on its deeper registers the real complication is that such apparently heterogeneous “criteria” could manifest within any given ostensible group. That is to say, a given group is not itself of only one form of bodily organization or concatenation of physical attribute.

In the epistemic context of the discourses of race in which Du Bois is operating during the last years of the nineteenth century, this amounts to a nascent countertheory of the status of physical mark, if you will. It is an opening gesture in the enunciation of a theory of radical “intermingling” on the order of the physical in the making of the human.

This figure, “intermingling,” appearing here in the fourth paragraph in a determined locus and with a specific rhetorical and discursive function, should nonetheless be most profoundly understood as the general figure of Du Bois’s entire theoretical production in this essay. A thought of the terms of “intermingling” operates at every decisive stage of the essay. The most fundamental theoretical contribution of the essay is the proposition of “intermingling” as the very organization of historicity and historical eventuality.

While he does not state explicitly his understanding of the way in which the sciences of race current in the 1890s have proposed to resolve the question of “the relative authority of these various and contradictory criteria,” he does offer a brief summary account of the outcome of their engagement. First, he simply remarks that they have failed to account for it on their own terms. It might be reasonable here, then, to propose that if so, it may well be that such profusion of “intermingling” and variation could not be simply and finally comprehended by science and knowledge. There would be no principle by which this effusion could be determined in its status and regulated for understanding within science. Second, he states that the sciences have been led thus

to propose a certain minimal reformulation of the theory: that instead of five races as proposed in the eighteenth century, at the end of the nineteenth century, “the final word of science, so far, is that we have at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings.” Perhaps we can elaborate Du Bois’s summary statement of this new theory of the science of his day in a manner that renders his assessment of it continuous with his own emergent proposition of a thought of “intermingling,” a thought that we have already begun to adduce.

This “final word so far” of science is the revision of a concept of race that had become traditional during the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States. It was proposed, Du Bois says, by Thomas Henry Huxley and Friedrich Ratzel, among others perhaps, in the wake of Charles Darwin’s revolutionary proposition of a principle of natural selection, or descent with modification, as the basis for a theory of evolution. It replaced, according to Du Bois, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s theory that had itself been proposed in the wake of Immanuel Kant’s thought—elaborated during the last quarter of the eighteenth century—of teleological principle in understanding organic form.

The conjunction of “final” with “so far” might be understood to name the general form of the historicity of science. In a certain sense, the movement of science in its historical unfolding is such that rather than understanding its itinerary as taking the form of an approach to a simple finality in a banal or vulgar concept of science or even to an *idea* in Kant’s more refined, and now traditionalized, critical sense, it might be more profoundly understood as on the way to another form of problem or a problem for thought, another inhabitation of problematization. The organization of its movement should be understood as the always renewed reformulation of a problematization. The realization of truth is then most fundamentally the realization of another organization of problematization for thought. It is in this sense that we might say, with regard to science and historicity, that a project of science always addresses itself to the futural form of its possible origin. The “word” of science as Du Bois names it here might then be understood as the *truth* given or stated as science—with all of the instability of its historicity at stake within such a claim. Its truth, then, is its form of problematization.

Du Bois is speaking, in the last passages of paragraph four, in the wake of actually existing science, purportedly according to its terms. The rhetorical

status of this formulation as a theoretical statement is dynamic and heterogeneous: it is reportage, a constative statement, a representation of a form of epistemic statement, a report of a claim of a certain truth; however, it becomes, or is also, a vocative declaration, a performative statement, a would-be originary epistemological formulation that would announce a truth in its presentation, a claim that is itself a statement of truth. Du Bois's discourse here, thus, has a double register. He will in fact shortly append this "final word of science, so far" to the motif of "intermingling" that he has adduced in the middle stages of the paragraph. In so doing, he will have begun to propose a reformulation of the traditionalized theory of race that stood at the incipit of his discourse.

In this retheorization, as it is announced here, the concept is reduced to the minimal form of the logic implied in a distinction on the order of essence or being as *of* existence. The claim is about existence: "that we have," as in the statement "there is," one that is on the cusp of the ontic and the ontological. Du Bois, or the theory current at the time of his inscription, begins with the ostensible fact of such, a phenomenal fact, we might say. The statement is that we have "great families of human beings." The logic of the minimal comes here. It is the logical form of a minimal statement of difference. We have "at least two." This would be the logical minimum for a definition of the concept. The "at least" says something like "for sure." In the form of a statement on the epistemological level at which a concept acquires its organization, it joins a logical necessity, almost a hidden form of premise, to a claim about actual existence. The concept of race must—in principle we might say—operate such a minimal distinction to render an objectivity that would be engaged by science.

However, then, a crucial qualification appears: "perhaps three." The "perhaps" of the qualification "perhaps three" suggests that theoretically the nominal determination of races, the number of such, is not and cannot be fixed in any ultimate sense. This "perhaps" should, perhaps, be understood as the theoretical reappearance of the thought of intermingling already announced on the epistemological horizon by Du Bois, for he will declare directly that any further elaboration of difference beyond the minimal difference of the two is by way of "intermingling." What then is the status of this "perhaps" that apparently arrives in the wake of the claim of the "two"?

We can now explore the logic of this statement of Du Bois's at the end of paragraph four somewhat more closely. Ostensibly, as Du Bois recalls the theory, it could appear to claim simply that there are two categorically distinct—primordially oppositional—forms of race within the human as an order of being.

But the term "perhaps" can be understood to have a dynamic and performative status here. That is to say, this statement of science is in the process of being re-inscribed here in Du Bois's own theoretical production. The word "perhaps" marks at the lexical level of the discourse the status of race(s) for Du Bois: it (or they, whatever such would be) is phenomenal, with respect to consciousness in general and for science in particular; it (or they, whatever is understood) is conventional with regard to practice in general and for the inhabitation of morals as such. This is to say, races are—if there is such—otherwise than an appearance in itself, not only for folk perception but also for the modes of apprehension of the scientist. On the basis of this lexical appearance, the word "perhaps," it can be proposed that a whole discourse is showing forth in a nodal sense and that it can be shown to run—in all truth—throughout the whole of the essay "The Conservation of Races." The word "perhaps" names an entire dimension of rhetorical practice in the essay that maintains a theoretical caution with regard to the determination of the status of that which is named under the heading of the concept of race. It is properly the unstable discursive register of a critical theoretical point of view. It should lead us, in turn, to hesitate before ascribing to the "two" races named as the first rhetorical claim here near the end of the fourth paragraph the status of pure ontological entities or forms thereof. Or, at the very least, we should not too quickly ascribe the status of the pure—either transcendental or ontological—to the ground of their possibility. Perhaps we might then be lead to adduce another order of logic inscribed with the theoretical discourse of Du Bois's subsequent statements.

Thus, while these forms of race might appear as "the two," "the two most extreme," matters might well be more complicated than are given in such an initial apparition. In the course of his assessment, Du Bois will disavow the supposed ultimate pertinence of the opposition that would ostensibly organize this schema. If they were in their essence the genetic maintenance of closed, fixed, or primordial, stems, there would in theory and principle be no

“perhaps,” or such would have standing only according to the ineptitude or mechanical limits of science in actual practice. There is a more deeply sedimented question and paradoxical logic implied in the thought that Du Bois announces here. On what basis could the intermingling that Du Bois represents as a declaration of this theory occur at all? Du Bois writes: “perhaps three” and then, the “other races have arisen from the intermingling of the blood of these two.” A certain logic of the reciprocal, but asymmetrical, organization of necessity and freedom in the promulgation of sameness and difference is implied therein.

Perhaps the problematization that is here given rhetorical form as a production of Du Bois’s discourse can sustain greater interest and elaboration within critical thought in our own time. How might its radicality be rendered?

If there is manifestly a concatenation of differences among humans, yet originally there were only two great physical groups of humans, then the current plethora of physical types means that there must have been a process of intermingling and intermixing of physical character in the evolution of such groups. Could the thought of this possibility, “intermingling,” have led Du Bois to question the idea of the pure, of the simple, of pure being, implied in this statement of the new truth of science as given in his summary of it? Perhaps. If so, one could think with Du Bois that if there is not some absolute or absolutely given ground and categorical determination of the physical as an apparition of being, then, as the possibility of this difference, there will always have been an essential opening in or as the infrastructure of the order in question, nature (as it issues from “the constitution of the world” or is given as pure being). That is to say, there is an essential opening of the play of chance or freedom in the infrastructural organization of the order and form of being in question, here that which is understood as nature, as an order of necessity, and the human body understood as a form of such. Such an order would be historical, even evolutionary, but otherwise than a simple form of repetition. It implies a concept of nature such that a principle of freedom must be recognized as operating therein, if “principle” as a way of thought retains any status in this radical domain. There must be or will always have been an essential opening within the physical, or nature, itself (if there is such) of that which cannot be simply determined. Nature is understood to maintain within the

core of its determinations an essentially open structure. Nature is historical. Yet not only that; not only of factuality. It will have always been historical, *of* possibility. There is, perhaps, in this thought, an idea of a radical freedom operating within the devolution of natural history. Natural law would then be conceived as simultaneously a name for necessity and as announcing the form of an essentially open structure of possibility. Rather than the thought of a categorical duality exhibiting an inexorable logic of absolute predetermination, it is a thought of this opening and the possibilities that could be understood to unfold according to its movement that begins to emerge into thematic relief, if not full propositional configuration, in this closing stage of the fourth paragraph. As a theoretical proposition, it can be placed under the heading of "intermingling." And the logic of this nodal thought will be borne out later in the essay, in the tenth paragraph, when Du Bois adduces a capsule speculative narrative of the historical process by which human difference unfolds: one of the two major motifs of that narrative is a process that Du Bois describes as the "breaking down of physical barriers" between human groups (CR 1897, 9, para. 10; CR 2015, 55, para. 10). The critical or desedimentative logic of this intervention has already been produced by Du Bois in the middle stages of this paragraph, the fourth, in his questioning of the logic of the traditional theory of race. The logical disjoining of the physical mark and the scientific attribution of its meaning opens a conceptual space for a rethinking of the possibility of the physical mark itself. Here, in the last lines of the paragraph, we are in the midst of the affirmative construal of the implication of that negative demonstration. If, with regard to linguistic distinction, some have spoken of the confusion of tongues as a result of the loss of divine ordination, then with regard to the play of that mark of physical difference among the human called racial by nineteenth-century science, Du Bois describes a confusion of marks and the play of differences as its root or essential structure. The possibility of this confusion points us toward the next theoretical implication of Du Bois's thought of "intermingling."

That is to say, if such question, the possibility of intermingling as proposing the thought of a radical freedom in the order of necessity supposed in traditional theories of race, is one track by which Du Bois's discourse shows its theoretical perspicacity, that very same possibility points to another dimen-

sion of the logic of sameness and difference, by which those traditional theories are undone here. For the effusion and confusion of differences yielded by way of intermingling also suggests, paradoxically perhaps, the thought of a dimension of the common or the same that would stand as an unconditional condition of the different, indeed of difference, on the order of human being. And yet that common may well be the radical order of possibility that is here named “intermingling” in Du Bois’s discourse. Thus, having adduced a root possibility of the effusion of the difference of the phenomenal mark, of “criteria,” that would be the apparition of race within the order of the physical, Du Bois will now begin to adduce from the same order of radical possibility a dimension of the common among humankind.

Du Bois then, in these last sentences of paragraph four, construes the general epistemological implication of this new formulation of a theory of race. It is indeed an “acknowledgment” within the current mainstream theories of race that difference in the physical appearance of humans does not explain the historical apparition of human groups. Du Bois recognizes it as naming a distancing of the supposed link of an order of unconditional necessity and an order of institution, this latter comprising the historical as conventional. It affirms a thought of the disjunction of the physical and the metaphysical on the plane of historicity—as the appearances of “the differences of their history” among humans—for science. And, it “declares”—although we might say in our critical re-inscription that in all actuality it only implies, while for Du Bois in the midst of his theoretical performance it is a declaration—that the “purely” physical “likenesses” of men are greater than their physical “unlikeness.” This is to say that even at the level of the physical, here in the context of a theory of the genetic possibility of the noumenon by way of the logic of the appearance of the phenomenon—the order of the common “is” the more fundamental order in a conception of the human in general in the domain of the nineteenth-century discourses of race. Without this essential infrastructure of the same or the common on the order of the “purely physical,” the differentiation that would be supposed as among or within the so-called human and called by the name race would have no status for science and could not appear as such. An order of the common would be essential on the level of the “purely physical” for “intermingling” in Du Bois’s

terms to be possible. Yet this essence of the common, here, can only be, perhaps paradoxically, the general possibility of "intermingling" (interbreeding or the production of fertile offspring in the languages of eighteenth-century sciences of race in Europe and the Americas). Which is to say, if there would be a common on the order of the human as a form of being, of the natural order of such, then a movement of "intermingling" will always have been its general condition of possibility. This thought of the common structure of differential articulation can thus be understood as a premise of the logic that guides Du Bois's twofold theoretical statement here: first, that physical differences among humans are intermingled such that they cannot be coherently understood by science to explain historical difference, and second, that physical sameness across supposed race differences is greater than physical difference across that same order of differences.

It must be underscored here that it is the rhetorically secondary formulation that is indeed the affirmative one of this twofold statement. And, in an epistemic sense, the whole enunciation proposes an ontological statement and not simply a logical or statistical one. Despite Darwin's own ambivalent statements in this domain, that of a debate about the "origins and destinies of races" among humans, Du Bois invokes his authority: "It declares as Darwin himself said, that great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of man, their likenesses are greater" (CR 1897, 6, para. 4; CR 2015, 53, para. 4). Du Bois proclaims the unity of the human on a basis that would be different than the kind typically claimed by the African American intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century. Epistemically, his basis is philosophical (and scientific and secular) instead of theological (and religious and sacred). This would be a distinction, for example, that would mark the epistemic space defining the relation of Du Bois's discourse to that of Alexander Crummell, perhaps the most respected of the auditors of this address on the occasion of its delivery (Moss 1981, 46–51). Theoretically, it is a certain thought of "intermingling," the differential concatenation of sameness and difference within the order of the "purely physical" in which a certain sameness is announced paradoxically only as the yield of an order in which a radical disarticulation of the pure will always have been its mark. Or, alternatively stated, the thought of a certain sameness among the order of being called the human is, in turn, rooted in the

general possibility of “intermingling.” It is the appearance of the common in the form of the order of being called human as an organization of the radical possibility of difference. Upon this possibility of intermingling, perhaps paradoxically, science can name likeness. Du Bois, then, summarizes this thought as an ideological or truthful presentation of science: “upon this,” this paradoxical thought of sameness, “rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood.”

III. ANOTHER PROBLEMATIZATION

If the ultimate theoretical concern, as announced on an epistemic level, is to adduce an answer to the question of what constitutes the apparent historical differences among humans, then under the impress of the critique of its logic that Du Bois gives in the fourth paragraph, the traditional concept of race has been exposed as incoherent and incapable of naming a constitutive order of determination. Du Bois has proposed that if there is such as that which has been called race in the traditional sense of the science of his day, it would be otherwise than physical. Or perhaps it can be put in more general theoretical and epistemological terms: that which is named under the concept of race in the traditional sense, in the sense given by science, specifically the science of nature, is nothing in itself. That which is asked about in this question, in a certain sense, thus escapes the pertinence of the traditional sense of the question of essence, “What is . . . ?” What is at issue under the heading of the concept of race cannot answer to that question—at least not in any immediate sense, not with an already given, or precomprehended, determination. This is perhaps the most sedimented dimension of the epistemic horizon in which the problem that Du Bois is addressing is situated.

Yet Du Bois proposes that there is nonetheless an order of organization of difference among humans that can and should be recognized by science. For him, such an order can still be understood (at least in the register of his formulation that is first apparent) as constitutive of historical differences among humans. And it still should be placed under the conceptual (and lexical) heading of race.

Yet the status of the presumption of essence within the concept as proposed by Du Bois has begun to shift from a presupposed stable theoretical position, from a constitutive premise, to take on another organization, as a form of question, the form of another problematization for thought. If in the traditional conceptualization, race is a thing in itself that can be apprehended by the senses and understood by science, then after Du Bois's critique in the fourth paragraph, if it is anything at all, it should certainly be understood as nothing *in itself*. If one would be able to recognize an order of being that would constitute historical differences among humans, then its status would yet be that of something that can be apprehended as an existent only in its appearance according to the forms of historicity that can be adduced within the norms of a performative practice of knowledge—that is, a science that is a practice of interpretation, in its inception and in its ultimate implication. In the language of critical philosophy, if there is race it is at best a phenomenon. The problematization then becomes, How does one recognize such difference within science, how does one conceptualize it? According to what "criteria" might a certain kind of knowledge still demarcate and recognize a specific form of historical entity among humans that one might call race?

In the epistemic space opened by his critical account of that which was called race in the science of his time, Du Bois will propose a different ground for understanding the supposed historical differences among humans. That is to say that even as he continues to use the term and concept of race, in his construal, Du Bois begins to attempt a shift of the articulation of such difference onto a different order of epistemological distinction—and, indeed, in its eventuality, to announce a different theoretical organization of this epistemic terrain. The thought of this other organization of epistemic ground in the understanding of "historical differences" among men is the most deeply sedimented theoretical movement in Du Bois's essay. And the organization and distribution of thetic force and metaphoric emplacement in its promulgation is the most unstable and the least decisive of the theoretical productions of the essay; and yet it remains a fundamental level contribution within the discourses of the Negro and the sciences of the human at the turn of the twentieth century. And, further, it remains of the greatest import for understanding the implication of Du Bois's thought in this essay for our contempo-

rary situation and perhaps for thought beyond its horizon. For it can be shown that the dilemmas and paradoxes negotiated in Du Bois's discourse at this conjuncture are of a fundamental sort, confounding modern thought from the era of the Enlightenment, at least, right down to the opening decades of the twenty-first century and perhaps beyond.

Let us turn, then, to the letter of the fifth paragraph of this essay and attempt to outline its course of problematization.

Although the wonderful developments of human history teach that the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone go but a short way toward explaining the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress, yet there are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive, though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups. While these subtle forces have generally followed the natural cleavage of common blood, descent and physical peculiarities, they have at other times swept across and ignored these. At all times, however, they have divided human beings into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist. (CR 1897, 6–7, para. 5; CR 2015, 53, para. 5)

The guiding theoretical question of the whole essay has been restated here, in the subordinate clause of the opening sentence: to explain “the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress.” And here, Du Bois also restates the *truth* that he has adduced in the fourth paragraph: that physical difference cannot explain historical difference in the scientific understanding of differences among humans. But the central theoretical premise of the whole essay has also been restated here, in the ordinate clause of this sentence: “yet there are differences . . . which have silently but definitely separated men into groups.” This is a restatement, here as premise, of the thesis of the second paragraph: “that human beings are divided into races” (CR 1897, 5, para. 2; CR 2015, 51, para. 2). Yet, while the epistemic terrain on which this thesis reappears remains the same in the broadest sense—we are still addressing the problematization named under the heading of race and according to its order of question—the ground in question has been reworked by a certain

labor of desedimentation in the course of the fourth paragraph such that it is not and cannot be thought as simply the same. This labor has yielded new soil, so to speak; a shifting in the organization of theoretical mark as given in a traditional concept of race has been set afoot. The status, distribution, and concatenation of premise and claim or supposition and judgment has undergone a certain shifting and sliding such that Du Bois's claim or judgment at this stage of his discourse "that there are differences" that have "definitely separated men into groups" cannot, even rhetorically, be understood in the manner by which one might first apprehend the discursive appearance of such a statement in the second paragraph of the essay (that is, unless one disavows critical reflection itself in the course of this apprehension).

However, this has simply yielded *another form of this problematization*.

If the difference among humans that has been understood under the heading of race cannot be recognized by science according to the apparition of the physical mark, and yet, if nonetheless one would maintain that "there is" such an order of difference, how then can such difference be apprehended and understood within science and knowledge in general?

The question remains that of the determination of ground. Du Bois's restatement of this problematic retains the problem of knowledge given in the tradition, but following upon the desedimentative work of the fourth paragraph, he proposes a slight but nonetheless fundamental (and perhaps) decisive redistribution of theoretical force in his attempt to determine the organization of ground for a new conceptualization of race. There are, he says, "subtle, delicate and elusive" differences that have operated "silently" in history, distinguishing groups among humankind. In these formulations he still maintains a discourse that cannot in all truth be rendered as different in the topographical organization of its semantic statements with regard to traditional discourses of race and, specifically, with regard to the Negro. Yet from the very the next sentence he begins to put a certain pressure on the sedimented lines of this continuity and its elaboration can be shown to stretch and distend the organization of traditional theoretical concatenations. Thus, a certain dynamic spacing begins to form in an epistemological sense, here of the concept of race, which sets afoot an ensemble of discrete disjunctures within the

theoretical registers of the epistemic order that would by its own determination of principle seem to decide the limits of his thought.

While “blood, descent and physical peculiarities” “*generally*” mark the lines of such supposed differences, their implication for Du Bois should not be understood as a categorical determination (emphasis mine). The letter of Du Bois’s text, both the stated and the unstated, leads us to understand “generally” here to mean precisely *not always*, for Du Bois will go on to declare: “they have at other times swept across and ignored these.” Thus, the ostensibly given of human existence that is of a natural order, what Du Bois will name as “the natural cleavage of common blood, descent and physical peculiarities,” should not be understood to be the manifest of an order of absolute determination. We can propose that while they might well be a condition of another order of differences among humans, historical difference, according to Du Bois’s discourse here, while they might well be a necessary condition (even in their indetermination), they are not a sufficient condition, for they can be “swept across and ignored” by the movements of history. A certain exorbitance to condition begins to show its affirmative theoretical face here. The natural order of things, we can now say, would itself be one comprised of objectivities whose bearing would be determined according to a more radical order of historicity. This critical delimitation maintains the same register of conceptual and theoretical hesitation that we saw Du Bois announce in the fourth paragraph, but here it begins to take on an affirmative and assertorial form.

Yet the “subtle forces” of history, the “subtle, delicate and elusive” differences “which have silently but definitely separated men into groups,” while *not always* following a pattern of physical differences among humans, has indeed for Du Bois, nonetheless, *always*, “at all times,” “divided human beings into races.”

Might not this conjunction of indeterminate determination and determinate indetermination exhibit the asymmetrical reciprocity of sameness and difference that we began to adduce in our reading of the last stages of the fourth paragraph?

This whole thought then allows us to pose a twofold question. First, what is the status in an ontological sense of the “subtle forces” or “differences” that produce the differences among humans that Du Bois still wishes to place

under the heading of the concept of race? And, second, how is knowledge of such an order of "subtle forces" and "differences" possible: this is to ask, in the discursive context at hand, what are the forms of "criteria" by which it can be apprehended by science?

With regard to the status of these "forces" or "differences," Du Bois answers almost immediately that "they perhaps transcend scientific definition." According to his statement, they are not a simply given form of existent. If these "forces" or "differences" have phenomenal status, it is not that of a simple, or simply given, object for thought. Indeed, that which he calls "forces" and "differences" in the opening sentence of the fifth paragraph, he immediately describes as "silently," rendering their effects; they would remain almost nonsensible, almost beyond objectivity, almost beyond representation. They are not themselves an existent or an order of being whose being would be simply and directly questionable. They are not a simple thing in general in any sense. In the philosophical sense of the term, ancient or modern, they are not an essence as such. They do not arise from or arrive at an order of pure essential being. In the terms of the questions of science, in the modern sense, they should not be conceived as a simple predetermined structure of necessity under the heading of nature. They are not simple or a one in any sense. For all appearances, the movement of "subtle forces" and "differences" that he proposes for thought—in all its thetic brevity—in the fifth paragraph cannot be made to answer simply and directly to the question, "What is . . . ?" even as Du Bois will attempt in the next paragraph to give a summary answer to the question, "What . . . is a race?"

If his thetic insistence upon a certain appearance, or better apparitional effects, of difference—as "differences"—is apt to lead us to think that Du Bois is attempting in the fifth paragraph to name an order of existence that is simply present and available for thought, we must nonetheless recognize that not only does he describe even such appearance as "subtle, delicate and elusive," the theoretical register of his discourse (beyond the semantic) suggests that the status of what is at issue would be something other than a present form of being.

We might then remark the respective orders of a movement of "differences" or "subtle forces," on the one hand, and the "definite" announcement of

historical “separation” or “division” within the form of being understood as human, on the other.

The former pertaining to the thought of paragraph five will be given its theoretical elaboration presently. The latter will be addressed below as the thought of paragraph six, where it is formulated in positive terms by Du Bois; for in the fifth, in all truth, only a declaration of its possibility is made.

Yet a critical recognition of these two different levels of theoretical reference in Du Bois’s discourse of the fifth and sixth paragraphs is decisive for any approach to a reading of the essay as a whole.

At this juncture let us attempt to proceed a step further in our reception of Du Bois’s thought amid the middle passage of the fifth paragraph.

Du Bois proposes here the thought of a process, a movement, a dynamic infrastructure organizing an ensemblic relation of forces. The dynamic and relative character of the movement that Du Bois proposes in this theoretical statement is the most difficult and unstable determination within his intervention in this essay on the terrain of the problematic of the concept of race. At the semantic level of the word, Du Bois operates an ambiguous use of the terms “differences” and “forces.” He uses them as synonyms. As a word, the former can be understood to declare a nominal referent: *differences*, with an “s.” If so, then the thought of this word would presume what it needs to explain—whence “differences” as objectivity emerge, unfold, and function. But the rhetorical deployment of these two terms can be understood as a form of synonymia in which each gesture of thought must in turn be taken up as a stage within a discourse, an open-ended and always relative sense of whole. If that is so, then the term “differences” can be read as a figure in the operation of Du Bois’s theoretical discourse. We might then be lead to propose that Du Bois’s formulation yields a thought of the irreducible asymmetrical reciprocity of difference(s). In this sense, there will always already have been the force of differences or differences of force. There will always have been a movement of differential forces—all the way down—so to speak. It would be a movement in which differences unfold in a manner that is always already otherwise than any possible predetermination or precomprehended necessity. As such, there will always have been a certain freedom or chance in the movement of differences that Du Bois implies here, although he does not proffer a proper name

for it. (And perhaps a persisting hesitation should remain for thought toward any such naming.) For its irruptive freedom would be such that the crossing of boundaries of any kind, especially those that science has understood as natural—of nature—is an essential possibility. In this sense, "intermingling" and intermixture would be the general structure or infrastructure of this movement. Such a movement of "subtle forces" and "differences" would be almost, or perhaps, essentially, beyond given forms of objectivity. As such, they will have been essentially *otherwise* than a simple essence and *of* the movement of the historial determination of being (as existence, as historical being), a movement that might yet well remain nothing in itself. It will always have been such that "silently but definitely separated men into groups." We might understand such thought on the terms of our contemporary horizon as a radical thought of difference and relation.

From, or within, this open structure, or better dynamic infrastructure, to construe Du Bois's statements arises an asymmetrical reciprocity of sameness and difference, indeed a complex concatenation of sameness and difference. On the one hand, we can speak of the double(d) (infra)structure of *a general order of the same*, a physical structure in the ontological sense (shall we say an organized entity), in which all humans are understood as more alike than different, and *a specific level of difference*, a physical structure in the morphological sense, in which humans are always marked by patterns of a peculiar concatenation of "intermingled" attribute. On the other hand, continuing to follow the logic implied by Du Bois's formulations, we can speak of the double(d) (infra)structure of *a general order of difference*, a general historical structure, that which Du Bois will construe under the heading "differences" of history (emphasis mine), and that he will describe as "spiritual, psychical differences," differences that in his terms give the general demarcation of human forms of being as disposed into groups, and *a specific organization of the same*, a specific historical structure, a particular and peculiar promulgation of an ensemble of "ideals" announced on the level of a collectivity.

Along this pathway we shall later be able to propose that for Du Bois, what has been called race, the historical form of actual differences among groups of humans, announced by way of this movement of differences and "subtle forces," is the heading for an essentially open infrastructure in which "inter-

mingling” and intermixture is not a derivative possibility but its most radical and definitive character.

The movement of “differences” and “forces,” if there is such, *is*, perhaps, insensible. The metaphor “silent” might then be well taken as a titular figure of Du Bois’s theoretical description of this process. In itself, in a manner that confounds the thought of an “in itself” in the traditional modern sense of the term, this level of “the constitution of the world” (CR 1897, 5, para. 3; CR 2015, 52, para. 3) is not susceptible to objectivity and remains in its dynamic performativity inaccessible to representation as a form of presence.

This whole question of the operation of possibility, here as the devolution of “differences” and “subtle forces” in the making of historicity, is one of the most deep-seated and general concerns of Du Bois’s thought, certainly at the end of the nineteenth century, but in truth throughout his entire itinerary.

Yet formal or theoretical language, and perhaps language in general, must always proceed by way of the precomprehension of the copula. It raises the question of the status of limit and possibility as the configuration of theoretical discourse itself.

The other question that we have posed above, how is knowledge of such an order of “subtle forces” and “differences”—more precisely their bearing in history—possible, likewise raises a fundamental dimension of Du Bois’s thought in general. The answer given by Du Bois *assumes the critique of the status of mark* by which the differences among the human might be understood that he carried out over the course of the fourth paragraph. How, then, can the differential movement theorized in a nascent manner in the first two sentences of paragraph five be recognized and known by science or some other practice of knowledge? As something other than a punctually present form or existent, the movement in question cannot be grasped by natural science, at least not traditional natural science, not a science that would assume the practical accessibility of the natural as a given order of objectivity. And it must be recalled that it was such a science, proposed in the sciences of race of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that Du Bois confronted in these opening paragraphs of “The Conservation of Races.”

If one supposes that there is a manifestation of such, a movement of forces and differences, then its objectivity for knowledge would be both indirect and

partial. This is to say that it can be named, if at all, only by way of an epistemological judgment that would be always *both* retrospective *and* productive on the level of a theoretical claim. It would never arrive on the mark—its mark. The theoretical action must performatively gather the differential terms of reference by which a relation could be remarked announcing a whole that cannot be assumed as simply constatively given. And, paradoxically, its truth would show forth, if at all, not as the final promulgation of a statement about an ostensible given, but a theoretical form of understanding of an order of name for historical limit and possibility. In this sense a name would always be already historical. There would be only names, no name in the absolute singular, no so-called proper names. It would be a theory of the sense of the historicity of a mark or of differences within the field of the historically given.

Such an order of difference, showing forth as differences in the devolution of historicity among humans, would manifest, if at all, another order of “criteria”—criteria that would appear otherwise than the naturally given—and would require another form of knowledge. Du Bois will call the latter “the eye of the Historian and Sociologist.” While these “subtle forces” or differences escape the sciences of nature, their nonabsolute yet determinate historical effects, “races” in Du Bois’s ambivalent reformulation of the term, only critically defined so far in his essay (up to the fifth paragraph), “they . . . are clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist” (CR 1897, 6–7, para. 5; CR 2015, 53, para. 5). This is to say that Du Bois’s proposition of a certain status and form of knowledge maintains the epistemological shift that he has already proposed in his critical account of the objectivity in question. If the objectivity must be understood as other than a thing in itself, then it must be apprehended according to a mode of knowledge in which the act of knowing is an activity of a distinct kind: a theoretical judgment that would arise in the course of an interpretation. Such an act might well amount to a kind of understanding (otherwise than a sensory perception). In speaking of the “eye” by which such an activity would be carried out, Du Bois has made thematic that the objectivity is an appearance that can be recognized only according to certain forms and norms of knowledge. While it remains that Du Bois will insist that “there is” such as race, that it, we might say, is not simply reducible to the status of a phantom or a specter, it is an appearance that acquires its objectivity *for* a certain mode of knowl-

edge. The practice of knowledge in this domain would be active, productive, and even performative. To engage such an apparition one must practice a mode of knowing that would make understanding, interpretation, and judgment its *sine qua non*. These are in fact touchstone concepts in Du Bois's work of the turn of the century. And they register here the unstable line of the scientist and the advocate, even as Du Bois will thematize a certain objectivity (sometimes as impartiality) and a notion of rigor as theoretical ideals almost everywhere in his work at this stage of his itinerary.

So what is the implication for a concept of race and any theorization thereof by way of this thought of a movement of differential forces whose effects must be recognized and understood only in the practice of a productive labor of interpretation of the mark (the sign, the phenomenon, or the social fact)?

If the initial general theoretical task that Du Bois has posed for himself, as in the opening sentence of paragraph five, is to find or develop an explanation of "the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress," then in the opening sentence of paragraph six, Du Bois proffers his response to that question, a theory of historical eventuality in the devolution of human groups. It is, properly speaking, a speculative proposition. It is a theory of historicity that is built upon his revision of the concept of race in paragraphs four and five.

If this be true, then the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history. What, then, is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life. (CR 1897, 7, para. 6; CR 2015, 53, para. 6)

Historical differences unfold as the playing out of a dynamic movement of "differences" and "subtle forces," an order of indeterminate determinations that makes possible the concatenation of humans into groups. And Du Bois still calls such groups by the old name of "races."

While in other passages of this essay and other texts, Du Bois will on occasion operate the terms "race" and "nation" as synonyms (see also my earlier note on his nominalizations), here in paragraph six he gives them distinct theoretical determinations. The subject of history must be distinguished from two different orders—that of the "individual," as in person, and that of the "nation," as in a geopolitical entity within a worldwide horizon. The "true" subject of history within the horizon of "world history" is here for Du Bois on the level "not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races." The polemical horizon is of import. It is the "American" horizon of the United States. Du Bois is theoretically rejecting *both* its individualism *and* the idea that the Negro American is already circumscribed entirely within that state-centered (and racialized, so to speak) national horizon as given. Du Bois's concern is not so much to insist upon the discrete reduction of the Negro in America to a subnational horizon, even as it specifies a theory of the terms of relations on the level of the group itself and on the level of the national, as it is to posit the possibility of an inscription of such a group into an international, global, and comparative horizon of history.

And the problem of theoretical language that we have just annotated according to the terms of the fifth paragraph is rearticulated on the terms of the sixth, but here a more profound dimension of the difficulty can be brought into relief. In the fifth, the problematic was whether and how a theoretical discourse might be able to speak of that which is perhaps otherwise than an order of the form of the present by yet proceeding in all necessity from the constituted and, thus, whether and how it could be commensurate in its thetic gestures with the difficulty most radically afoot in the problematization that is its own specific irruption. In the sixth, the problem can be understood as arising at the same conjuncture of ontological complication but pivoted according to another theoretical orientation. There the theoretical orientation was to a movement that would be infrastructural and subindividual in all senses (a movement of "differences" and "forces"). Here the theoretical disposition is toward a sense of whole ("individuals," "nations," "races," humankind, "the world," "the history of the world," "all history," etc.).

How should we understand the thought of a whole here in Du Bois's formulation of a concept of race in the sixth paragraph? If races are groups

whose status—in origin and destiny—is exorbitant to a natural determination, then how can they be *defined* as such? If they are not a given in any simple sense, how then should we understand Du Bois's conceptualization of them here? On the one hand, Du Bois proposes an account of races in terms of a conceptualization of the ground of their possibility: he theorizes an essential indetermination in the movement by which they are constituted. On the other, he proposes a theory of the determination of their devolution, the historical order of their existence, in which he presumptively states, almost in the form of a peremptory declaration, that the eventuality of races is *telic*, organized in terms of an *idea* (even if the conditions and possibility of their realization would always remain at stake), and to that extent his discourse on history here is inscribed within a philosophical horizon: the historical is that which can be rendered meaningful. There is thus a dynamic interplay between these two theoretical gestures that remains unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, within "The Conservation of Races." And this interplay provides the text with its most pronounced theoretical syntax—a contrapuntal rhythm of rhetorical registers—in which a persisting gesture of the scholar's humility in submitting his apparent knowledge or truth to an open and perhaps ceaseless inquiry is conjoined to the theoretician-philosopher's high-minded declaration of ultimate truths.

The central paradox that we have found in Du Bois's text can be stated here: that while Du Bois proposes his discourse in "The Conservation of Races" according to a declared principle of "conservation," what he describes or theoretically produces therein is an alogical logic (a logic that goes beyond traditional logic or a logic of noncontradiction) of "intermingling" and intermixture that would always have implied an irruptive movement of chance, of play, of freedom, of possibility—that remains, or that moves beyond, any given form of limit.

If on the level that might be metaphorized as of *ground*—a movement of "differences" and "subtle forces"—Du Bois theorized an essential indetermination that yields the possibility of determination, as always different forms of such, as differences, here then, on the level that can be thought by the concept-metaphor of *horizon*, he theorizes a form of determination that is in its essence

indeterminate—a “striving”—always in the process of its becoming, never fully given as such. These two theoretical formulations—indeterminate determination and determinate indetermination—should be understood then to remark two sides of Du Bois’s thought of “the whole question of race in human philosophy” (CR 1897, 5, para. 3; CR 2015, 52, para. 3). The effusive dynamics of such infrastructure would in an essential sense remain, perhaps, illimitable.

While no discourse or practice of our era has yet found radical passage in its address of this domain or dimension of existence, a certain form of tarrying with the theoretical labor exemplified in the early work and thought of W. E. B. Du Bois—especially his theoretical projection in the fourth paragraph of “The Conservation of Races”—might offer us resource as we challenge anew, with renewed commitment and perspicacity, this perennial form of fundamental problem.

NOTES

1. This essay is an excerpt from *The Problem of Pure Being: Annotations on the Early Work of W. E. B. Du Bois and the Discourses of the Negro* (Fordham University Press n.d.). There, I adduce a noncategorical distinction between the specific projection of a concept of race within philosophy and the proclamations of science and the general idea of race, as the latter may operate within a general social and historical field of reference.
2. “The Conservation of Races” is cited in the text with the acronym CR, by year, page, and paragraph number, first from the original publication and then from the reprinted and annotated presentation given to it in *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Du Bois 1897, 2015). Thus “CR 1897, 6, para. 4; CR 2015, 52–53, para. 4” refers to page 6 and paragraph four of the original 1897 publication and pages 52–53 and paragraph four of the 2015 collection.
3. This passage comprises the whole of the fourth paragraph of “The Conservation of Races” (CR 1897, 6, para. 4; CR 2015, 52–53, para. 4). In the annotated reprint presentation of “The Conservation of Races” in *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (as cited in note 1), I note the historicity and ambiguity of the nominal terms that Du Bois operates in paragraph four and throughout the essay. Those annotations specifically remark the terms historically used by Du Bois as well as others to represent the Khoisan of southern Africa (Du Bois 2015, 62–63 nn. 1, 2).

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