The Future of Double Consciousness: Epistemic Virtue, Identity, and Structural Anti-Blackness

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This paper considers two conceptual expansions of Du Boisian double consciousness—white double consciousness (Alcoff 2015) and kaleidoscopic consciousness (Medina 2013)—both of which aim to articulate the moral-epistemic potential of cultivating double consciousness from racially dominant or other socially privileged positions. We analyze these concepts and challenge them on the grounds that they lack continuity with their Du Boisian predecessor and face problems of practical feasibility. As we show, these expansions obscure structural barriers that make white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness unlikely antidotes to the kind of racial domination that double consciousness was introduced to illuminate. We conclude that while more intersectional and pluralistic accounts of double consciousness may be desirable, the project of expansion has moral limits. Identifying these limitations, we outline ways in which double consciousness—as a tool for conceptualizing the genealogy of structural anti-Blackness—remains valuable in the absence of ever-expanding revision.

1. Introduction

Introduced by Du Bois in 1903 to describe a quality of lived contradiction attendant to the Black struggle in post-emancipation America, double consciousness has since come to signify a range of epistemic, social, psychic, and phenomenological dimensions of multiplicity. While such deployments gener-

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ally retain the spirit of Du Bois's focus on dominated or oppressed peoples, recent scholarship has aimed to explore the application of the concept to positions of racial and other social privilege. This paper considers two such expansions of double consciousness—white double consciousness (Alcoff 2015) and kaleidoscopic consciousness (Medina 2013)—both of which aim to articulate the potential of double consciousness for white and other privileged subjects. While the former characterizes double consciousness as a capacity for racial self-awareness, the latter characterizes double consciousness as a kind of epistemic or intellectual virtue.

We explicate these concepts and challenge them on the grounds that they lack continuity with their Du Boisian precursor and face problems of practical feasibility.[2] We argue that while various forms of racial self-awareness and lucidity are attainable from positions of privilege, these experiences cannot be conceptualized coherently in terms of experiences of oppression. As we show, such attempts obscure structural barriers that make white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness unlikely antidotes to the kind of racial domination that double consciousness was introduced to illuminate.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we examine Linda Alcoff's (2015) account of white double consciousness, which describes white double consciousness as a process through which white people internalize the perspectives of non-whites to produce a split or bifurcated racial self-awareness. We critically assess this account of white double consciousness and identify two asymmetries between white double consciousness and the double consciousness of racially dominated peoples: the access asymmetry and the escape asymmetry. As we show, these asymmetries elide the spatial, interpersonal, and psychic barriers to remaking whiteness in a society in which the preservation of whiteness is structurally dominant.

In Section 3, we turn to José Medina's (2013) account of kaleidoscopic consciousness, a normative concept which aims to extend and expand the moral-

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2. Both Alcoff and Medina take Du Boisian double consciousness as their conceptual starting point. Accordingly, our focus in this paper is Du Bois's articulation of double consciousness as it appears in *The Souls of Black Folk* (and its earlier publication in an 1897 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*). The idea of a split or bifurcated consciousness has a long and varied history in romanticism, transcendentalism, and idealism, as well as in 19th and early 20th century psychology, and the influence of these traditions on Du Bois has been heavily debated. For discussion concerning the influence of Emerson and Goethe, see Bruce (1992) and Allen (1997). For discussion concerning the influence of Hegel see Gooding-Williams (1987), Williamson (1978), and Adell (1994). For discussion concerning connections with Kulpe, Freud, and James, see Rampersad (1976) and Bruce (1992). For discussion which situates Du Bois alongside Black nationalist thinkers, including Blyden and Crummell, see Moses (1978). Despite an abundance of interpretive comparisons and connections, we follow Allen in thinking that "in no ways might Du Boisian double consciousness be reduced to the content of any of its predecessors" (2002: 7). See also, Reed (1997) who challenges attempts to establish Du Boisian double consciousness as an "artifact" in a linear scholarly tradition.

epistemic potential of double consciousness through greater pluralization. We identify two interpretive moves necessary to produce this conceptual revision: prescriptivism and purification. We argue that this progressive re-interpretation effaces environmental features of double consciousness that are central to its functioning as a source of epistemic lucidity.

In Section 4, we consider several objections to our view. In responding to these objections, we turn our attention to the question of whether the idea of double consciousness continues to have value in a racially changing future. In this vein, we ask whether or not double consciousness has a conceptual future and to what extent this future requires that the concept and its application be continuously expanded. We conclude that while more intersectional and plural-istic accounts of double consciousness may be desirable, the project of expansion has moral limits. Identifying these limitations, we outline ways in which double consciousness—as a tool for conceptualizing the genealogy of structural anti-Blackness—remains valuable in the absence of ever-expanding revision.

2. Remaking Whiteness: White Double Consciousness?

Highlighting the rapidly changing racial demographics of the United States, in which white European Americans are predicted to lose their majority status by 2050, Alcoff (2015) raises the following question: what will become of whiteness? To explore the uncertain future of whiteness, Alcoff identifies—and rejects—two forms of white exceptionalism: racist white exceptionalism and anti-racist white exceptionalism. While racist forms of white exceptionalism maintain that white-ness is exceptional because whites are racially superior, anti-racist forms of white exceptionalism view whiteness as "qualitatively distinct" (2015: 101) in virtue of its exceptional historical connection to white supremacy. As Alcoff argues, both forms preclude the possibility of racial pluralism and a future in which white-ness is not inextricably linked with racism. Though Alcoff does not presume to know the future of whiteness, her account considers the possibility of a future that discards the fatalistic assumption that whiteness will always be entangled with racism: "[if] we hold that white identity is essentially racist, we are surely circumscribing its future and generating distrust and antipathy toward all who so self-describe" (2015: 108).

Rejecting white exceptionalism in both its forms, Alcoff adopts an anti-essen-tialist, embodied account of whiteness, according to which whiteness emerges not as an objective concept or biological reality, but as a diversity of lived experi-ences and collective historical practices. Indeed, she states, "white social identity is not simply an objective thing, completely outside of human agency" (2015: 112). An understanding of whiteness as variously lived and historically contin-

gent discloses the possibility of thinking of whiteness as open-ended, prompting a future in which whiteness can be re-imagined, re-conceptualized, and re-inhabited. Indeed, Alcoff states, "to take the future of white identity to be open is to leave unanswered the question of how whites will face living in the very different kind of society that will ensue" (2015: 24). It is in this context that the idea of white double consciousness is introduced.

Alcoff's brief, but striking, discussion of white double consciousness is modeled on Du Boisian double consciousness, understood by Alcoff as a capacity through which Black subjects see themselves both from their own perspective as well as through the "eyes" of the white American world. By way of analogy, Alcoff argues that double consciousness, when experienced by white subjects, "involves coming to see themselves through both the dominant and non-dominant lens, and recognizing the latter as a critical corrective truth" (2015: 140).[3] To illuminate the phenomenon of white double consciousness, Alcoff cites Simone de Beauvoir's experience in Harlem in 1947. Recounting her visit, Beauvoir states (1950/1999: 36, our emphasis):

> Harlem weighs on the conscience of whites. . . . Among men of his own race, the [white] American embraces a dream of good humor, benevolence and friendship. He even puts his virtues into practice. But they die on the borders of Harlem. The average American, so concerned with being in harmony with the world and himself, knows that beyond these borders he takes on the hated face of the oppressor, the enemy. It's this face that frightens him. *He feels hated; he knows he is hateful.* This thorn in his conciliatory heart is more intolerable than a specific external danger. . . . And all whites who do not have the courage to desire brotherhood try to deny this rupture in the heart of their own city; they try to deny Harlem, to forget it. It's not a threat to the future; it's a wound in the present, a cursed city, the city where they are cursed. . . . *And because I'm white, whatever I think and say or do, this curse weighs on me as well.*

Honing in on the significance of Beauvoir's embodied experience of psychic discomfort, prompted by the feeling and perception of being both "hated" and "hateful," Alcoff concludes that "we have the beginnings of a conception of white double consciousness" (2015: 140).

Drawing from Beauvoir's experience, Alcoff suggests that "like Beauvoir, whites may come to realize the social meanings of whiteness . . . once they begin to intuit how they are viewed by nonwhite others" (2015: 170). As with Du Boi-

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3. See also, Black, who argues independently from Alcoff for a white double consciousness through which whites "learn to evaluate their outlooks and identities from the perspectives of colonized or racially subjugated peoples" (2007: 399).

sian double consciousness, this process of "intuiting" the perspective of others produces in whites a "split consciousness between the way they see themselves and the way they are seen by nonwhite others" (2015: 170). Through this experience of psychic and epistemic incoherence, white double consciousness is purported to ground the potential for enhanced racial understanding, and from this greater awareness, the possibility of remaking the racialized self.[4]

Beauvoir articulates a profound experience. However, we question the plausibility of understanding these and related experiences as analogues to Du Bois's double consciousness. Indeed, observing one critical dissimilarity between the two, Alcoff notes that "whites who experience a split consciousness between the way they see themselves and the way they are seen by nonwhite others are not thereby oppressed by a racist gaze from racial *others*" (2015: 170). Though this crucial difference is acknowledged by Alcoff, we argue that the significance of this difference is not thoroughly appreciated. To show this, we identify two interconnected asymmetries between double consciousness and white double consciousness: the access asymmetry and the escape asymmetry. Together, these asymmetries challenge the conceptual and practical plausibility of a notion of white double consciousness.

2.1. The Access Asymmetry

The access asymmetry challenges an assumption on which the present formulation of white double consciousness rests, namely, that whites in the United States can reliably intuit the perspectives of non-dominant racial others. At its core, double consciousness involves entertaining or embodying dual perspectives. Du Boisian double consciousness emerges within a structure of racial domination

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4. In 2006, Alcoff briefly developed the idea of white double consciousness in a manner which is fairly different from the account considered here. Unlike the 2015 account, in which white double consciousness involves whites "coming to see themselves through both the dominant and non-dominant lens, and recognizing the latter as a critical corrective truth" (2015: 140), Alcoff (2006) writes that white double consciousness "would not involve the move between white and black subjectivities or black and American perspectives, as Du Bois and Fanon developed the notion. Instead, for whites, double consciousness requires an ever-present acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community" (2006: 223). These are fundamentally different proposals, the earlier of which proposes a white double consciousness that is largely internal to whiteness and white history itself and requires dual engagement with both white racist and white antiracist histories. Shannon Sullivan develops Alcoff's earlier idea of white double consciousness in which whites "acknowledges not just the negative, but also the positive aspects of white history" (2014: 81) including, for Sullivan, a critical "embrace of white slaveholders" (2014: 80). While we lack the space to consider these proposals, we do question the value of appropriating the framework of "double consciousness" in describing such practices.

in which white perspectives are *publicly available and coercively promoted*—that is, white perspectives are widely disseminated and maintained through explicit and subtle political, social, educational, legal, economic, and linguistic practices. It is through these practices that white perspectives are reliably *made known* to whites and non-whites alike. This structural asymmetry raises a related question of channels of access through which the perspectives of Black people and other racial minorities are reliably made known to white people.

If such "knowing" is constitutive of the experience of double consciousness, we must ask how it is possible that Beauvoir comes to "know" what the residents of Harlem think of her or of whites generally. In describing her visit to Harlem, Beauvoir discloses her desire to visit Harlem because of its cultural and historical significance. She recounts the history of racial segregation in New York; how apartment buildings in Harlem were originally built for whites, but insufficient transportation made it difficult to acquire white tenants. Because of this, Black people began to rent these apartments. Beauvoir notes that whites who lived in Harlem did not see the influx of Black tenants as problematic at first, but over time, white flight subsequently led to the designation of Harlem as a Black space.

Against this backdrop, Beauvoir confesses that "if I don't feel entirely secure, it's because of that fear in the hearts of people who are the same color as I am" (1950/1999: 36). Beauvoir recounts three warnings, offered to her by white French people, about visiting Harlem. One person tells her to not go to Harlem by foot. Another tells her to avoid side streets and to seek shelter in the subway, should she to get in trouble. Another person warns her that white people had been found in the gutter in the morning with their throats slit. Beauvoir acknowledges the racism in these warnings and decides to go to Harlem by foot.

Beauvoir observes that there is nothing scary and frightening about Harlem, even noting that "no one seems to pay attention to me" (1950/1999: 35). However, Beauvoir is unable to shake the irrational fear bestowed upon her *by other white people* and her attendant embarrassment at being a member of a race in which, as she puts it, "the color of my eyes signifies injustice, arrogance, and hatred" (1950/1999: 36). It is this discomfort which prompts Beauvoir to remark upon her relief at the idea of being escorted by Richard Wright later that evening. Indeed, it is with a "light heart" that she characterizes Wright's companionship as providing "a kind of absolution" (1950/1999: 37).

Affects like shame and guilt are integral to understanding the psychic experiences of white people who enter non-white spaces or who confront the realities and histories of racism. Yet these affects, while responsive to a particular awareness of the implications of inhabiting a white racial identity, need not involve any real contact or engagement with the perspectives of a non-dominant other. If one takes a closer look at Beauvoir's experience in Harlem, the idea that Beauvoir sees herself through a non-dominant perspective—that is, as Black people

see her—is rendered dubious. Yet it is precisely this idea that is supposedly indicative of white double consciousness.

While Beauvoir's visit is predicated on her desire to "get to know Harlem" (1950/1999: 33) what she comes to "know" is gleaned through inference based on observation and imaginative projection. The role of projection is first seen in the warnings the French gave to Beauvoir, warnings which provided content for negative preconceptions and stereotypes about Black people. These warnings lead her to grapple with the dual anticipation of (white) fear and (black) hatred—perceptions that Beauvoir confronts as a result of how *white* people feel towards Blacks in Harlem and how they imagine Harlem residents feel toward them. In describing this peculiar sensation of fear, she writes that it is (1950/1999: 34):

> [n]ot mine but that of others—the fear of all those whites who never take the risk of going to Harlem, who feel the presence of a vast, mysterious, and forbidden zone . . . where they are transformed into the enemy.

If a split consciousness is experienced, it does not find its origin in a conflict between how Beauvoir sees herself and how she is seen by non-white others; rather it is found in the conflict between how white people portrayed these residents to her and how she portrays these residents to herself. Thus, her psychic alienation and discomfort arise from the tension between these two *imagined white perspectives* rather than from any actual interaction with a Black countervailing perspective.

Thus, while Beauvoir sees herself from a perspective attributed to Blacks by whites, there is no evidence in her description of real engagement with a Black perspective during her visit to Harlem. The closest that Beauvoir comes to engaging with a Black perspective is in her observation that Black residents of Harlem did not pay attention to her. But if this is the case, how does Beauvoir know how Black residents feel about her? In what sense does Beauvoir see things from the perspective of the racially oppressed and marginalized? While this experience is identified as a sort of white double consciousness, it involves no dual embodiment of white and Black perspectives. No real knowledge of their interplay is entertained. Thus, it is not analogous to the notion of double consciousness outlined by Du Bois.

2.2. The Escape Asymmetry

There is a second and related problem, however, with an interpretation of this experience as an analogue to double consciousness. Unlike with double consciousness, the socio-spatial conditions in which white double consciousness

might arise are not fostered by dominant institutions and social structures; rather, dominant social structures generally promote the acceptance of white perspectives and protect the free movement of white people. This structural asymmetry is illustrated through Beauvoir's observations of the physical white exodus that resulted in Harlem becoming a Black-occupied space and of the attendant "denial" of Harlem by other New York residents, who "do not have the courage to desire brotherhood" (1950/1999: 36). These dual modes of escape—a physical white flight and a parallel psychic flight—create both the geographic conditions for racial segregation in New York City and the social disavowal (e.g., rationalized by fear, shame, lack of courage, etc.) of white complicity in the creation and maintenance of this segregated landscape.

Against this backdrop, the kinds of cross-racial interactions that could conceivably give rise to white double consciousness are, by and large, fleeting, and the propensity to experience white double consciousness is, for many white people, a matter of voluntary choice. Because the experience of white double consciousness must be intentionally sought and actively pursued, the parameters of the experience remain largely under the agent's own control. The attendant physical discomfort of white double consciousness can be attenuated by taking oneself out of and away from its source. Likewise, the cognitive and affective dimensions of white double consciousness are easily escaped through rationalization and other acts of psychic refusal.

As illustrated in Beauvoir's personal experience, the experience of white double consciousness is both optional and transitory. With the exception of the other Black neighborhoods she references, there are relatively few places in which Beauvoir would feasibly experience the discomfiting affects associated with her visit. Indeed, highlighting the atypical nature of her experience walking through Harlem, Beauvoir remarks that her "footsteps are not quite as carefree as usual; this isn't just a walk but a kind of adventure" (1950/1999: 34). Thus, while Beauvoir opts to ignore the racist warnings given to her, it is centrally important to our understanding of her experience that we recognize her decision to enter (as opposed to avoid, to deny, etc.) Harlem as a *free choice*: the parameters of her experience there are entirely of her choosing. Beauvoir can alleviate the burden of her experience by exiting Harlem and never stepping foot there again. As soon as she decides to leave, her racial "adventure" comes to an end.

Compounding the safety afforded by the possibility of physical escape, Beauvoir's narrative also illustrates the availability of a psychic form of escape as well, when she remarks that she is able to allay the existential discomfort she experiences by fixing her thoughts to Richard Wright's accompaniment. By cognitively attending to the thought of Wright's presence, Beauvoir experiences a form of

existential relief that feels, in her words, as "a kind of absolution" (1950/1999: 37). These dimensions of white double consciousness—as voluntary, transitory, and accompanied by the possibility of escape—further distinguish it from double consciousness—imminent and unchosen—as articulated by Du Bois.

One might argue that these asymmetries become less troubling if one distinguishes between two forms of white double consciousness: regressive white double consciousness and progressive white double consciousness. Articulating this distinction, Alcoff states the following (2015: 168):

> Contemporary white anxiety is manifestly in a quest for a resolution to its troubled form of double consciousness, but this can take both regressive and progressive forms. The regressive versions aim for a comforting escape hatch, while the truly progressive version seeks a morally responsible way to acknowledge and learn from the horrific history of white vanguardism without foreclosing the possibility of playing a role in future positive change.

Thus, one might think that attention to this distinction can mitigate the significance of the asymmetries we have highlighted. In this vein, one might argue that Beauvoir's experience is perhaps best understood as a borderline case between regressive and progressive white double consciousness, and that more regressive forms of white double consciousness understandably bear less and less in common with double consciousness as articulated by Du Bois.

While it is true that the regressive version of white double consciousness *actively aims* towards an escape, the possibility of escape nonetheless accompanies white double consciousness in both its regressive and progressive forms. Indeed, though the progressive form is notably marked by an absence of the intention to make use of an escape hatch, both forms of white double consciousness remain eminently *escapable*. While the progressive version appears more morally venerable, in that escape is not embraced, white double consciousness in both forms is accompanied by the physical and psychic security associated with the awareness that one *could* escape, should one need to.

In this way, white double consciousness lacks both a structural and phenomenological symmetry with double consciousness of the racially oppressed. For the experiences of racial alienation and discomfort associated with the latter are not a matter of choice, and the conditions and constraints of those experiences are not constructed by the alienated subject herself. These asymmetries challenge the authenticity and practical feasibility of a progressive form of white double consciousness. To consider the implications of this challenge, however, we examine an account of white double consciousness in its more progressive form.

3. Virtuous White Double Consciousness

In this section, we consider José Medina's account of kaleidoscopic consciousness. Like Alcoff, Medina argues for the possibility—and moral desirability—of a white double consciousness, through which "privileged white subjects also bifurcate their cognitive and perceptual habits, attitudes, and structures by internalizing underprivileged perspectives" (2013: 199). For Medina, the value of such a double consciousness lies not only in a sensation of psychic and phenomenological incongruence from which to restructure or remake identity, but more pointedly, in its potential for the cultivation of epistemic virtue.

On Medina's account, double consciousness is an achievement; indeed, he states, "double or multiplicitous consciousness appears to be a cognitive (and affective) accomplishment of oppressed subjects" (2013: 206). But while double consciousness is characterized by Medina as an achievement, only double consciousness with a "balanced internal epistemic friction" (2013: 198) can be said to be *virtuous*. Virtuous double consciousness is double consciousness which produces meta-lucidity, that is, the meta-attitude "of being always on the lookout for more, forever more, which is based on the *experience that there can be more than what is seen*" (2013: 192). For Medina, double consciousness is virtuous if it is exercised in accordance with two principles—the principle of acknowledgement and engagement and the principle of epistemic equilibrium—which together produce meta-lucidity. In this way, the insights associated with meta-lucidity are not automatic; through virtuous double consciousness, alternative perspectives are not merely acknowledged, but actively co-interrogated toward the end of achieving a balance between them.

Explaining the connection between double consciousness and meta-lucidity, Medina argues that meta-lucidity is "triggered" by double consciousness which "involves the capacity to entertain two perspectives, two ways of thinking and two ways of looking at the world" (2013: 192). While privileged and oppressed persons alike may benefit from the cognitive resources of meta-lucidity, the experience of double consciousness is traditionally associated with the oppressed. Indeed, says Medina, "not being seen can produce the painful experience of cognitive conflict between two ways of seeing" (2013: 192). While the oppressed must navigate a social world governed by dominant ideologies, they may retain access to or develop alternative (i.e., non-dominant) perspectives as well. Developed within the inner subjectivities and community spaces inhabited by the oppressed, these perspectives engender resources—knowledge, evidence, sensibilities—which do not conform to those developed and deployed by the dominant. Indeed, it is through engagement with these alternative resources that those who are the "target of racist oppression are capable of seeing what others do not see: their own degradation and the mechanism of oppression and

social distortions that produce them" (2013: 196). As a result, Medina observes, "[o]ppressed subjects are in a better position to achieve these insights because they are the very embodiment of those cognitive limitations" (2013: 192).

The etiology just described might seem to preclude the possibility of a double consciousness achieved by racially privileged subjects. Yet, Medina raises the parallel possibility of a white double consciousness (2013: 206–7):

> Now, why should we assume that white people do not have a similar—or at least analogous, even if very different—experience of their racial embodiment as perceived in the second person by those who are racially different? And even if this does not happen spontaneously, couldn't an analogous experience be created, even if it has to be artificially manufactured, so that racialization is no longer a blind spot for white subjectivities?

Answering this question in the affirmative, Medina endorses "the possibility of creating—even if by a sort of social engineering that involves exerting great amounts of epistemic friction—a male, a heterosexual, a Western (or First World), a class-privileged double consciousness, as well as other possible ones" (2013: 199). A central task of Medina's project, then, is thus to outline the conceptual groundwork of a progressive form of double consciousness, one sufficiently broadened to attend to the multiplicity of perspectives in a pluralistic society.

Indeed, he concludes, "what is needed is a *kaleidoscopic consciousness* that remains forever open to being expanded, that is, a subjectivity that is always open to acknowledge and engage new perspectives, and always open to strive towards a better balance among possible perspectives" (2013: 200). While admitting that the metaphor of kaleidoscopic consciousness is "not perfect," he maintains that it is "an improvement over the metaphor of *double* consciousness" (2013: 201). In this way, kaleidoscopic consciousness purports to improve upon double consciousness by articulating a subjectivity which is achievable *from* all social positions and which remains open *to* all social positions.

In what follows, we argue that this transformation, through which double consciousness becomes kaleidoscopic consciousness, is too contrived. To show this, we identify two interpretive choices—prescriptivism and purification—which help to facilitate this re-conceptualization. By examining each in turn, we raise questions concerning the purported logical connection between double consciousness, on the one hand, and white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness, on the other. While we do not deny that these latter concepts outline a virtuous epistemic subjectivity (at least in certain contexts), it seems to us that such a subjectivity is more fruitfully theorized in terms of open-mindedness, rather than as an analogue to double consciousness or as an extension or improvement of that concept. As we show, this re-interpretation obscures, by

abstracting away from, features of double consciousness that would be central to its purported functioning as a source of meta-lucidity. In doing so, it promotes an unrealistic representation of the possibilities for achieving meta-lucidity from positions of privilege.

3.1. Problem of Prescriptivism

For Medina, kaleidoscopic consciousness identifies a subjective perspectival orientation, that is, a capacity that can be cultivated and adopted by individual persons. More importantly, however, it picks out a morally and epistemically *good* perspectival orientation—that is, it is theorized as a capacity that individual persons *should* cultivate. In this way, kaleidoscopic consciousness functions as a prescriptive concept (i.e., outlining the way something ought to be), rather than as a descriptive concept (i.e., outlining the way something is).

In support of this characterization of kaleidoscopic consciousness, Medina offers a prescriptive reading of Du Bois's original account of double consciousness. Medina states (2013: 193):

> Du Bois remarks that the history of the American Negro is the history of the internal struggle of this two-ness. The goal of this struggle, according to Du Bois, should not be to eliminate the two-ness—the multi-dimensionality of the Negro consciousness—but rather, to learn to live with it and to learn from each of the component parts in tension. Du Bois talks about "merging" . . . but he quickly points out that this is not a unification that betrays the differences and distinctiveness of each component part. He insists that American Negroes should not allow any of the component parts of their twoness to win the struggle and to become dominant: the path to the resolution of the internal struggle of the American Negro will not be to "bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism" or to "Africanize America." The challenge is *balance*: to achieve the harmonious mutual coexistence of two perspectives, to maintain a healthy bifurcated consciousness in which the two component parts are in communication and they enrich each other.

On Medina's reading, then, double consciousness picks out a prescriptive, subjective ideal that illustrates the importance of cultivating an internal epistemic capacity that aims at "the harmonious mutual coexistence of two perspectives" (2013: 193). Indeed, Medina concludes that "Du Bois himself saw that striving toward balance *should guide the journey of the Negro's double consciousness*" (2013: 195, our emphasis). As an extension of double consciousness, then, kaleidoscopic

consciousness captures the cognitive benefit of an individual subject's capacity to engage—and balance—more than two perspectives, and it promotes the broader cultivation of this capacity in privileged and oppressed persons alike. Thus, kaleidoscopic consciousness is positioned as a natural improvement upon the original metaphor, in that it aims to further extend and pluralize this normative epistemic capacity for maximal benefit.

While Du Bois's metaphor of double consciousness is undoubtedly infused with ambiguity and admits of no single, obvious interpretation, we think there is good reason to reject an individualistic and prescriptive reading of it. In his 1903 text, Du Bois's discussion of double consciousness is narrative and observational, largely descriptive in its content. Du Bois begins by recounting a memory from his own childhood, in which he realized his racial difference and its exclusionary significance among whites. He characterizes this moment as his awakening to the existence of a "vast veil" through which Black Americans are shut out from "their [the white] world" (1903/2015: 3). This observation thus describes the structural conflict—the forcible maintenance of two unjustly separated "worlds"—concerning which the metaphor of double consciousness is then introduced to illuminate. Indeed, introducing the metaphor, Du Bois writes (1903/2015: 5, our emphasis):

> 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 twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. *The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife.*

As the last sentence reveals, the metaphor of double consciousness ultimately functions to identify and describe a *sociohistorical subject*.[5] For Du Bois, the internal strife and striving of double consciousness is representative of the collective political struggle of Black Americans, produced through their orientation in a

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5. It should be noted that this italicized sentence (i.e., the last sentence in the quoted passage) is actually the first sentence of the subsequent paragraph in Du Bois's text. Because this sentence is stylistically separated from the preceding sentences by a paragraph break, interpreters often fail to read this sentence alongside the sentences which directly precede it, and likewise fail to read the preceding sentences as culminating in this sentence. While this sentence serves as an introductory sentence to the subsequent paragraph, it also quite literally serves as a transition between the two paragraphs, and thus connects the two ideas developed in each: namely, the psychic and socio-structural dimensions of double consciousness. Without reading these two paragraphs *together*, readers cannot understand what the metaphor of (psychic) double consciousness is a metaphor *for* (the history of particular social struggle).

particular racio-historical conflict. While the "two-ness" to which Du Bois first gestures is introduced as a characteristic of the sensing, feeling, thinking individual, this bifurcation cannot (and should not) be understood in the absence of those historical structures of American society which serve as its sociogenesis and provide its content.

Using the figurative language of "the" Negro and "his" consciousness, Du Bois thus illuminates of the actual subject of his analysis—namely, the *history* of the struggle of Blacks in America. Double consciousness no more signifies a subjective capacity or internal conflict of individual Black persons than it does a historical conflict marked by social, political, and economic exclusion.[6] This conflict is characterized through a bifurcation between, on the one hand, America's divestment in the life prospects of Black people and, on the other, a Black struggle for autonomy and the desire for place and national identity. The subject of double consciousness is thus a plural one—that of the Black American struggle; there is no double consciousness in the absence of this collective strife.

One reason to avoid a prescriptive reading of double consciousness, then, is that Du Bois himself avoids using prescriptive terms in discussing it.[7] To see this, let us re-consider Du Bois's own articulation in the passage summarized by Medina in the opening of this section. Du Bois states (1903/2015: 5, our emphasis):

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a mes-

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6. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois references more explicitly his use of this rhetorical strategy—through which autobiographical, individual, or person-level descriptions serve as illustrative and provocative entry points into a larger social phenomenon. For example, in one instance he writes that, "The concept of race lacks something in personal interest, but personal interest in my case has always depended primarily upon this race concept" (1940/2007: 49). Later, he writes "My discussions of the concept of race, and of the white and colored worlds, are not to be regarded as digressions from the history of my life; rather my autobiography is a digressive illustration and exemplification of what race has meant in the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is for this reason that I have named and tried to make this book an autobiography of race rather than merely a personal reminiscence, with the idea that peculiar racial situation and problems could best be explained in the life history of one who has lived them. My living gains its importance from the problems and not the problems from me" (1940/2007: 111).

7. While our argument here focusses narrowly on the descriptive aim of the metaphor of double consciousness, Rogers (2012) offers a reading of *Souls* more broadly, which he characterizes as both descriptive and aspirational in its aims. Specifically, Rogers argues that *Souls* operates as democratic propaganda, through which Du Bois strategically uses rhetoric to elicit within his (white) audiences both sympathy and shame in an effort to "enlarge[n] America's political and ethical imagination regarding the status of African-Americans" (2012: 188).

sage for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. *This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.*

Here, Du Bois articulates a "longing" and "striving" constitutive of double consciousness and identifies the ends towards which it aims. Yet in doing so, Du Bois does not use the terms "ought" or "should" at all. Rather than utilizing prescriptive language that would codify certain ends as morally required, Du Bois employs the term "would," thereby attributing to those ends a quality of being habitually desired or characteristically aspired towards. Thus, Du Bois does not identify ends towards which the struggle *should* aim; rather, he identifies those ends towards which the struggle, in his estimation, does (and has) characteristically aim(ed). If the practical goals of double consciousness identified by Du Bois are the ends towards which the collective strife of double consciousness *in fact* aims, then double consciousness serves to bear witness to a purposive socio-historical process, not to outline the prescriptive contours of an individual or person-level virtue.

This reading has several implications for Medina's account. First, double consciousness does not identify a subjective moral capability that could be selectively cultivated by an individual person in the absence of a particular kind of socio-historical conflict. The point of the metaphor is to illuminate something about this historical and collective struggle *in terms of* an internal psychic struggle, not to advocate for internal psychic struggle as a goal or as a moral end in itself. To treat double consciousness as an internal psychic capacity is to confuse the metaphor's vehicle for its tenor.[8]

Second, while certain forms of cognitive and epistemic lucidity are plausibly identified as desirable and useful resources developed and deployed through-

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8. Metaphor functions as a two-part comparative relation, with one concept or idea (i.e., the tenor) being explained or described, figuratively, in terms of another concept or idea (i.e., the vehicle). For Du Bois, the two parts of the metaphor are revealed in this line: "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife." As this line illuminates, "this strife" (psychic double consciousness) is the vehicle through which we are to understand the *actual* subject, the tenor, namely, *the history of Black struggle in segregated America.* Thus, to interpret double consciousness literally, as an internal psychic capacity, is to confuse the metaphor's vehicle (that which represents) for its tenor (the thing represented). To draw an analogy, a similar mistake would be to interpret Emily Dickinson's "'hope' is the thing with feathers" as a commentary literally about birds, or Van Gogh's "Conscience is a man's compass" as a literal statement about geographic navigation. The subjects (the tenors) of each are, respectively, hope and conscience, not birds and compasses (the vehicles). See Richards (1964) for an analysis of metaphor in terms of its functional parts.

out a collective resistance struggle, they are not identified by Du Bois *as the ends towards which this struggle should aim.* In fact, the specific aims that Du Bois does acknowledge—to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape death and isolation, to use one's best powers and latent genius—are in tension with Medina's characterization, which identifies the cognitive and epistemic goals of balance and harmonious mutual coexistence between two conflicting perspectives as an end in itself. But if one of two conflicting perspectives is predicated on the logic of death and isolation, then the epistemic goal of seeking balance and mutual coexistence between them cannot be coherently pursued.

Of course, one might locate the source of this tension in Du Bois's own writing.[9] We agree that this tension may be present in Du Bois's text. But while a prescriptive reading tempts us to (perhaps superficially) resolve these and other tensions in an effort to codify colorful political rhetoric into normative instruction, a descriptive reading does not.

3.2. The Problem of Purification

The adoption of a prescriptive reading works in tandem with a second interpretive framework, namely, purification. When double consciousness is interpretively "purified," the positive and desirable aspects of double consciousness are extracted from the undesirable aspects, such as the threatening socio-structural context from which it was hypothesized to arise. Indeed, Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that although Du Bois "transposed this concept from the realm of the psyche to the social predicament of the American Negro," he retained the idea that double consciousness was "essentially an affliction" (Gates 2007: xiv).

John Pittman (2016) notes a tendency of theorists to focus on the cognitive, spiritual, and affective benefits of double consciousness, often ignoring the dangerous environmental conditions that give rise to it. Pittman identifies this environmental etiology as the "social and political regime grounded in oppression and the maintenance of vastly unequal and segregated living conditions of social groups ideologically and culturally identified as racially distinct and unequal" (2016: 19). On one side of the color line, the development of epistemic resources within Black communities were fostered, as separation maintained by Jim Crow segregation meant that whites rarely appeared within Black places of worship, work, leisure, and family living. In these spaces, autonomous and oppositional knowledge practices grounded in Black life were generated in relative absence of white participation. On the other side of the color line, white dominance was

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9. For discussion, see Gooding-Williams (2009).

actively promoted in social, political, economic, and legal institutions, and the dissemination of such racial hierarchies pervaded both public and private domains.

Despite this rigid segregation, many Blacks sustained direct, interpersonal contact with whites—as teachers, law enforcement, employers, business persons, landlords, and so on—where such interactions were governed by relations of inequality. These various forms of interracial contact rendered Blacks invisible (e.g., through domestic service employment; forced use of separate facilities; etc.) and hypervisible (e.g., through employer, state, and vigilante surveillance; sexual exploitation). While invisibility often granted unique epistemic access to the lives of whites, hypervisibility—and its associated threats—provided motivation to understand the logic of the white world. Under these conditions, understanding white supremacy and the implications of racism on Black life was a matter of practical necessity and survival. The gift of second sight, like other "gifts" attained by Black Americans, was not a gift "rendered freely" (Gates 2007: xxi).

Thus, while one might characterize such epistemic resources in terms of cognitive achievement, these achievements cannot be conceptualized in isolation from their environmental sociogenesis. This is because the structural dualism of state-sanctioned segregation supplies the content of and impetus for double consciousness. The sociogenic etiology of double consciousness constitutes the conditions through which these cognitive achievements—and their attendant epistemic benefits—are theorized to emerge.

Medina acknowledges the significance of this etiology, stating: "The experience of being excluded and silenced is the fertile soil for the development of a special *sensitivity to insensitivity*" (2013: 204). Yet, he remains optimistic that sufficiently fertile soil can be likewise cultivated for privileged subjects aspiring towards meta-lucidity, should they practice "seeking others with significantly different experiences and engaging with their heterogeneous perspectives" (2013: 204). Referring to this practice as an "openness to difference," Medina identifies it as the "key to sufficient degrees of lucidity, sensitivity, and epistemic responsibility" (2013: 204). But as we have been arguing, double consciousness is not accurately described as an "openness to difference"—not when the forced inhabiting of a subordinate position within unequal power structures is at least partially responsible for the generation of lucidity. It is not the mere interaction with diverse others which promotes lucidity via double consciousness: one cannot eliminate the causal role of the socio-historical conditions through which such lucidity is actually purported to emerge.

Because this structural context has been purified, the experiences associated with double consciousness reflect a similar purification in their phenomenological quality. Indeed, Medina says "[l]et's remind ourselves of the mundane ways in which double consciousness is generated, according to the classic accounts

in race theory" (2013: 206). Here, Medina cites Frantz Fanon's racialization on a train as one example in which double consciousness can be seen as "emerging from everyday social experiences of one's embodiment" (2013: 206). Identifying the salient features of Fanon's experience, Medina writes that Fanon's "bodily schema started to feel differently, to become bifurcated, when he [Fanon] experienced the shock of being perceived as a rarity—perhaps even a monstrosity—by the seemingly innocent—but already arrogant—white gaze of a child who yelled 'Look a Negro!'" (2013: 206).

Here, Medina takes double consciousness to emerge in common bodily experiences—experiences of difference, bifurcation, discomfort, shock. If double consciousness is located *in the body*, the potential for producing analogous experiences in a wider range of bodies increases. Indeed, it is with regard to these common experiences that Alcoff likewise observes that "more and more whites are experiencing a similar disequilibrium, as they come to perceive the racial parameters that structure whiteness differently in different communities—white and nonwhite—and may find that none of these can be made coherent with their own preferred body or postural image" (2006: 187). Drawing on this parallel, Medina concludes that (2013: 222):

> the kind of racial self-consciousness required by white double consciousness will be different from the racial awareness of black double consciousness in crucial respects, but both forms of double consciousness must coincide in the following: they require a kind of shattering of a bodily schema produced by the internalization of the gaze of differently racialized others toward oneself, which can only happen in *actual bodily encounters with racial others* that disrupt the normal operation of one's racialized transitional habits and produces a vivid racial awareness, a new way of seeing oneself.

To open up space for the possibility of white double consciousness, then, the quality of the phenomenological experience of double consciousness is rendered common, thereby making it more widely accessible.

Yet, this characterization of the phenomenological experience of white double consciousness—and of kaleidoscopic consciousness beyond it—is derived from a purified account of the kind of racialized self-awareness described by Black subjects. To see this, consider again Fanon's description of his experience. "*Maman*, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" (1952/2008: 91) writes Fanon, as he recounts that moment on the train. Highlighting his own sensation of physical threat, Fanon speaks of his body as if it is no longer his own: "Now they were beginning to be scared of me. I wanted to kill myself laughing, but laughter had become out of the question" (1952/2008: 91). Indeed, he reports that once his

body was "returned" to him from the gaze of the Other, it was given back to him "spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter day. *The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly*" (1952/2008: 93, emphasis added).

As Tendayi Sithole eloquently puts it, "Fanon here clearly shows how the [white] gaze has a crushing effect on the Black subject who is reduced to the level of the body. The Black body not only belongs to itself but is also the property of the racist gaze" (2016: 28). Fanon's experience of the white gaze is described in terms of a violent and dehumanizing form of theft. But the crushing nature of this experience is hardly recognizable in Medina's summary, according to which "Fanon describes how uncomfortably—almost painfully—he became aware of his body simultaneously in the first and in the second person under the gaze of white people on a train" (2013: 206). As Sithole reminds us, however, there is nothing "almost" painful about Fanon's description.

Despite the centrality of the body in Fanon's description, his account (as with Du Bois's) resists the temptation to locate a racialized consciousness exclusively in the momentary experience of a single, embodied individual.[10] "I was responsible not only for my body," he writes, "but also for my race and my ancestors" (1952/2008: 92). Describing the relationship between his phenomenological experience and its historical sociogenesis, Fanon writes that "beneath the body schema I had created a historical-racial schema" (1952/2008: 91):

> The data I used were provided not by 'remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature' but by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories.

The historical-racial schema described is one that emerges when the world is structured through racism. This ontological problem reconfigures the Black subject against a presumed universal whiteness that is meant to negate their very existence as human. In other words, it is because whiteness occupies a dominant

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10. Though there are obvious geographic, historical, and existential differences between the colonized subjects of Martinique and Algeria when compared to Blacks in the United States, the underlying logic and function of white supremacy that Fanon references parallels the racial caste system in the United States, in virtue of a shared history of slavery and anti-Blackness. Fanon's psychological analysis is at once grounded in his lived-experience and in his work as a psychiatrist, on which basis he sought to develop a phenomenological understanding of the psychic consequences of colonial racism. While Fanon did not speak overtly of double consciousness, his approach in exploring the nature of colonial racism and its psychological and existential consequences on Black subjects bears some resemblance to Du Bois' characterization of double consciousness. For further discussion exploring the conceptual connections between Fanon and Du Bois in terms of double consciousness, see Black (2007), Moore (2005), Henry (2005), and Gordon (2015).

status of universality that Black subjects may experience their existence in reference to this ontological framework. Fanon called this the *zone-of-non-being*, and Lewis Gordon describes it, in Du Boisian terms, as the "consciousness of a frozen 'outside,' of a being as seen by others, in the face of the lived-experience from an 'inside,' from a being who is able to see that he or she is seen as a being without a point of view, which amounts to not being seen as a human being" (2015: 20). Highlighting the conceptual affinity between Du Bois and Fanon here, Gordon notes that "such interplay of ironic dimensions of sight and thought of double doubling, are critical hallmarks to Fanon's thought" (2015: 20).

As Fanon's analysis makes clear, his racial self-awareness emerges against a backdrop in which particular modes of being—for example, whiteness—are already presupposed. Thus, while the experience of being racialized in a public place is likely widely shared or could be made to be widely shared through artificial machinations, the particular socio-racial-historical schema which *governs the content* (i.e., the interpretive framework) of experiences in the case of double consciousness for Black persons, is an experience that, were it to be widely shared, would require a different socio-historical-racial history. A purified account of double consciousness thus abstracts those "mundane" experiences of embodied racial *awareness* (e.g., being racialized on a train) from the historical and racial *causal conditions* through which such experiences arise and through which they are interpreted.

Let us summarize the problem. As Medina acknowledges, the relevant conditions for double consciousness do not obtain for persons who occupy socially privileged positions in society; that is why such conditions must be artificially manufactured. Yet, this asymmetry introduces a paradox. One cannot artificially manufacture conditions that are relevantly similar to those theorized by Du Bois and Fanon, nor could one reasonably think that artificially generated conditions could produce reliably similar effects. To resolve the paradox, one must either abandon the idea of white double or kaleidoscopic consciousness, in that one could not effectively (or ethically) re-engineer society so as to reliably produce it, *or*, one must instead re-cast the meaning, context, and qualitative experience of double consciousness so that it *is* achievable from privileged social positions. This re-casting occurs via purification, through which the benefits of double consciousness (e.g., epistemic lucidity, racial self-awareness, etc.) are separated from the social conditions through which they are attained. Through purification, double consciousness—once indicative of a structurally imposed social affliction—gives way to a virtuous character trait which aims towards cognitive equilibrium and balance between multiple perspectives.

The virtues associated with such a consciousness are theorized to promote the kind of meta-lucidity that aims at the creation of a more just society. As Medina rightly states (2013: 206):

The scope of the lucidity that subjects achieve with respect to their cog-nitive-affective structures is crucially dependent on the particular gene-sis of that lucidity, on how it was attained and, in particular, on whether its genesis revolved around experiences of privilege or experiences of oppression.

We agree with Medina (and Alcoff) that varying degrees of lucidity will remain achievable from all subject positions. Yet we have challenged the extent to which such experiences—given their divergent genesis and aims—can plausibly be analyzed in relation to one another. It is only through purification that white double consciousness and its radically pluralized descendant, kaleidoscopic con-sciousness, can be said to have their origins in double consciousness. Through this transformation, double consciousness is forever expanded to maximize the potential for psychic and cognitive benefit, both in terms of the range of social positions from which it can be experienced and the plurality of perspectives which can be entertained and balanced. But such a consciousness—artificially manufactured, freely undertaken, and virtuously pursued—is less clearly an analogue, extension, or improvement of double consciousness than it is a differ-ent concept entirely.

4. The Future of Double Consciousness

As we have been arguing, experiences of racialized whiteness—and the gener-ation of lucidity promoted by such experiences—cannot be conceptually predi-cated on the experiences of the racially oppressed, or on the theoretical tools that have been used to analyze their oppression and to promote their libera-tion. We have offered reasons to think that the figurative and descriptive nature of double consciousness is poorly suited to the task of prescriptive theorizing, and that the ways in which double consciousness must shift, via purification, to accommodate its cultivation from positions of privilege promotes impracti-cal pathways to racial justice. In this section, we consider several objections to our view.

    First, one might worry that the problems we have identified with kaleido-scopic consciousness and white double consciousness lie only in their proposed execution, and that the underlying motivation behind such expansions is none-theless valuable. From this perspective, to pluralize double consciousness so that it can account for a greater variety of subject positions is to produce a better theoretical tool. Accordingly, the conceptual utility of double consciousness can and should be enhanced by expanding the range of experiences to which it can be applied. If such a proposal is correct, then perhaps concepts like white dou-

ble consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness are, in fact, worth pursuing; we'd just need to figure out how best to bring them to fruition.

In our view, the motivation to produce expanded or pluralized forms of double consciousness is two-fold, following from a schema on which double consciousness is rendered both "needed" and "needing improvement."[11] To say that double consciousness is "needed," is to maintain that it plays an indispensable role in our theorizing about the future of racial justice. Indeed, both Alcoff and Medina appear to embrace the idea that a racially just future requires white people to develop a special kind of racial self-awareness. As Alcoff states, "The question of the future meaning of whiteness should not be an attempt to predict so much as it is to argue, normatively, about what should be done" (2015: 117). This normative project, however, is full of gaps and holes. "What we lack," says Alcoff, "is a new imaginary or narrative that can make sense of the white participation in these new racially conscious counter-publics" (2015: 128–29). This normative inquiry thus provides the context in which double consciousness emerges *as needed*. Double consciousness serves as a familiar template that can be slotted into the hole where new kinds of narratives and imaginaries ought to be, but which are, as of yet, lacking.

But if double consciousness is "needed," it is still characterized as "needing improvement." That is, the concept is understood to require revision so as to better accommodate this work. The idea that double consciousness needs revision is not new. Summarizing this idea, Gates states (2007: xv):

> Today the ideal of wholeness has largely been retired. And cultural multiplicity is no longer seen as the problem, but as a solution—a solution to the confines of identity itself. Double consciousness, once a disorder, is now the cure. Indeed, the only complaint we moderns have is that Du Bois was too cautious in his accounting. He'd conjured "two souls, two thoughts two unreconciled strivings." Just two, Dr. Du Bois, we are forced to ask today? Keep counting.

By highlighting the significance of ever-expanding multiplicity, such revisions take seriously the idea that the future of double consciousness requires us to "keep counting." This project might naturally lead to the genesis of white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness from the too-narrow double consciousness. But does double consciousness become a better theoretical tool when it is refashioned to enjoy wider utility, perhaps even a utility that

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11. This is similar to the schema articulated by Sirma Bilge in her analysis of scholarship on intersectionality, in which many scholars regard intersectionality as both "hailed" and "failed," such that "some elements of intersectionality are taken into account, but only to be declared lapsed or obsolete, to be set aside for something better" (2013: 407). For discussion, also see Cooper (2015).

extends beyond the borders of marginality to accommodate experiences of privilege? As we will argue in the remainder of the paper, we think this supposition is misguided.

In arguing that white and kaleidoscopic consciousness are unjustified extensions of its scope, however, we are not arguing that double consciousness admits of no opportunities for revision, expansion, and improvement. That is, we are not claiming that the concept of double consciousness *can never* be re-conceptualized, expanded, or improved. To show this, we consider two limitations of double consciousness: that it is masculinist and that it perpetuates a reductionistic racial binary.[12] We conclude that while more intersectional and pluralistic accounts of double consciousness are desirable, the project of expansion has limits. As we argue, making double consciousness more inclusive does not mean making it as inclusive as possible. The demands for greater inclusivity and intersectionality do not require "universal utility" (Cooper 2015: 404).

4.1. What Intersectionality Requires

In his analysis of the veil, Du Bois describes the Black subject who longs to "attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" as he aspires to the "doors of Opportunity" (1903/2015: 5). Here, Du Boisian double consciousness articulates a political aspiration. Yet the masculinist framing of this aspiration prompts Shatema Threadcraft to ask, "must Black women become men, then, raising only masculine concerns, in order to participate in public life?" (2016: 89). Reminding us that Du Bois does not receive universal praise from Black feminists on this point, Threadcraft recalls Hazel V. Carby's observation that for Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* "was a project to write Blacks into

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12. To be clear, these are not the only possible limitations of the concept. For example, many have argued that Du Boisian double consciousness is classist or that it does not apply uniformly to all Black Americans. For discussion on these points, see Asante (1993), Allen (2002), and James (2013). These criticisms typically rely on a more literal interpretation of Du Boisian double consciousness, such that Du Bois is taken to either mistakenly attribute a shared, psychic sensation to (all) Black people in America or, more restrictively, to the Talented Tenth alone. On the former reading, Du Bois is overly permissive in his extension of shared sensations, on the latter, he is too restrictive and elitist in his conception of the Black American experience. In our view, rejecting an overly literal reading of Du Bois's text can make some progress in responding to this worry. Still, the strength of the metaphor depends, in part, on the strength of the figurative imagery Du Bois invokes, and this imagery may be rejected for reasons raised above (a problem regarding which Du Bois himself later makes some admission). It is not, however, our aim in this paper to consider all potential interpretive shortcomings of Du Boisian double consciousness, of which there are surely many. In arguing against the legitimacy of white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness, we are not arguing that Du Bois's original account of double consciousness is above critical reproach.

the American nation but that it was, at base, a masculine place he sought" (2016: 92). As Threadcraft and Carby caution, Du Bois's masculinist vision of political leadership and belonging risks conceptualizing "citizenship as manhood" (Threadcraft 2016: 89).

In a similar fashion, the experiences of Black men become a primary point of reference for Fanon in his analysis of colonial racism —"In Europe, evil is symbolized by the Black *man*" (1952/2008: 165, our emphasis). Though Fanon is not entirely imperceptive to the experiences of Black women and women of color in his books, if he is to be credited with acknowledging issues related to gender and sexuality, then one must admit that he generally subsumed such issues under the heading of race alone, often to the erasure or distortion of Black women. Indeed, one telling instance of such occlusion can be found in his discussion of sexual-developmental stages of white women and Black men in the context of colonial racism. Fanon states that those "who grant us our findings on the psychosexuality of the white woman may well ask us what we have to say about the black woman. We know nothing about her" (1952/2008: 157). Fanon's admission perhaps becomes even more ironic, having devoted an entire chapter to women of color in his book. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting writes that "any clinical observations regarding Antillean women's sexual phobias were gleaned from snatches of conversations here and there, literature, his own experiences in the Antilles, and pure speculation" (1998: 25).

These criticisms illuminate the inadequacies of a concept of double consciousness that fails to situate racial oppression amidst multiple systems of oppression. The masculine bias reflected in such studies has not precluded other thinkers from exploring multiplicity and contradiction inherent in the Black experience, or from theorizing political, psychological, or epistemological aspirations that emerge from gender conscious resistance to oppression. Before Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality, Black feminist thinkers ranging from Sojourner Truth to Claudia Jones to Frances Beale and Pauli Murray had argued that racial oppression must be analyzed through attention to intersecting systems of gender, sexuality, and class oppression.[13] These insights of Black feminism suggest that double consciousness is limited insofar as it obscures the intersections of multiple systems of oppression.

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13. For an extensive collection and discussion of Black feminist intersectional thought and activism, see Guy-Sheftall (1995). Likewise, women of color in other traditions, such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and later María Lugones (2003), have used the concept of mestiza consciousness to theorize the multiplicitous consciousness of Latina women in a context of "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization" (Anzaldúa 1987: 77). For a comparative analysis of double consciousness and mestiza consciousness which explores differences between each concept and integrates their strengths, see Sylvanna Falcón (2008).

Indeed, Medina identifies a commitment to intersectionality as part of the motivation behind kaleidoscopic consciousness, expressing an intention to (2013: 205):

> go beyond one-dimensional group experiences of oppression, to situate women and men within multiple systems of domination, and to explore the interrelations of their different social locations and standpoints, thus examining the complex relations among systems of oppression.

It is our view, however, that though the explanatory potential of double consciousness can be enhanced through greater attention to intersectionality, white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness should not be understood as theoretical constructions produced in this spirit. Expansions of double consciousness are valuable—even necessary—insofar as they identify legitimate weaknesses in the concept's ability to explain the phenomena it was developed to explain or where such expansions improve upon wrongful omissions or oversights in earlier articulations.[14] Yet, the fact that double consciousness is not outfitted to explain the experiences of racially *privileged* subjects is not a limitation of the concept, and thus, the concept itself requires no revision or expansion to accommodate this omission. This is because such an omission is not an oversight—no failure of intersectional thinking is responsible for this absence.

To understand why intersectional theorizing does not require such expansions, consider the following critique which identifies several misapplications of intersectional theory. First, Brittney Cooper notes that scholars have become increasingly "disillusioned with intersectionality's inability to fully account for all the exigencies of identity in the face of multiple and proliferating categories of social identity" (2015: 386). Yet, as Cooper argues, intersectionality—as it emerged within the history of Black feminist thought—is about "interlocking systems of power and oppression" and "is not an account of personal identity" (2015: 385). When intersectionality is deployed as an analytic tool to discuss personal identity or subjective experience, the concept is stripped of its explanatory and political power.

Nikol Alexander-Floyd theorizes this re-deployment in terms of a "universalizing tendency" according to which intersectionality is re-imagined as a theory "available to all equally" (2012: 14), a move that is undertaken to "give it greater appeal" (2012: 15). Summarizing this problem, Alexander-Floyd states that (2012: 18):

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14. Indeed, in *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois himself gestures towards the possibility that similar phenomena might arise in other contexts of subordination in "suppressed peoples or groups undergoing extraordinary experience" (1940/2007: 91).

current efforts to universalize intersectionality, to consolidate its meaning such that it is disconnected from the lived experiences of women of color and made available to larger numbers . . . can serve to colonize intersectionality and redeploy it in ways that deplete its radical potential.

Likewise, rejecting this universalizing move, Barbara Tomlinson argues that while "intersectionality sets a framework that may be used to analyze how power operates to construct specific identities," this does not imply that "all examinations will prove analytically or politically productive" (2013: 1011–12).

This critique bears relevance to our present discussion. Like the aforementioned re-deployments of intersectionality, white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness aim to re-direct the scope of double consciousness to matters of personal identity (in the case of the former) and virtuous character development (in the case of the latter). Through these reconfigurations, the explanatory potential of double consciousness is stretched beyond its application in analyzing structures of oppression to attend, more broadly, to the virtuous character traits and phenomenological racial experiences of racially privileged subjects. Like intersectionality itself, double consciousness should not be understood as a tool which operates at the level of the subjective individual, and appeals to intersectionality cannot justify this move. Attempts to make double consciousness more intersectional in *this* way—capable of accounting for more identities, more racial experiences—utilizes the concept to theorize reality at the wrong level of analysis.

4.2. Beyond the Black/White Binary

Finally, one might object that double consciousness reinforces an antiquated and binaristic racial landscape—characterized by the black/white binary—that is best left behind. Indeed, one might worry that our rejection of white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness promotes this narrow and inaccurate racial parochialism.

Both Medina and Alcoff share the view that the demands of racial justice call for forms of race-consciousness that move beyond the black/white binary. Indeed, Medina states (2013: 223–24):

It is highly distorting to dichotomize the social gazes available into two: the mainstream gaze, or the gaze of privilege, or the white perspective, on the one hand; and the marginalized, out of the mainstream, or colored perspective, on the other. Within each side of this polarization we find distinctive groups, experiences, and perspectives. If we take this social

pluralism seriously, we need a more expansive lucidity about our positionality and relationality with respect to racial differences: we need not only a double consciousness, but a *multiplicitous or kaleidoscopic consciousness* that does not reinscribe the black-and-white binary in one's racial imagination.

While Medina hopes to move beyond a racial conception rendered narrowly in "black and white," Alcoff expresses her concern with the black/white binary in terms of a desire to avoid white exceptionalism. Indeed, Alcoff states: "the black/white imaginary has stymied race analysis and the maturation of anti-racist politics" (2015: 5). For Alcoff, the black/white binary—constructed by the "image of a securely massive white population facing off against mainly a black population, with negligible numbers of other *others*" (2015: 5)—prevents us from conceptualizing, and leveraging, a future in which non-white minority groups collectively hold a political majority over whites.

Recall that on Alcoff's view, white exceptionalism takes two forms: racist white exceptionalism (viz., whiteness is superior to all other races) and anti-racist white exceptionalism (viz., whiteness is uniquely and inextricably tied to white supremacy). While Alcoff rejects both, our focus here will be on anti-racist exceptionalism. On Alcoff's view, anti-racist white exceptionalism treats whiteness as a monolithic category, blurring over and obliterating important internal distinctions such as ethnicity or varied anti-racist activities undertaken by individual whites. Second, anti-racist white exceptionalism parallels *racist* white exceptionalism in defining whiteness negatively in terms of what it is *not*—Black, brown, Indigenous, Asian, etc.—rather than by what it *is*. On both views, whiteness lacks positive content. In this vein, anti-racist white exceptionalism is profoundly pessimistic, espousing "the idea that whiteness is so distinct as a form of social identity and so problematically tied to its supremacist illusions that it cannot be redeemed" (2015: 92).

Thus, Alcoff rejects anti-racist white exceptionalism in that it leaves no room for a future in which whiteness is neither monolithic nor essentially tied to supremacy, oppression, and racism. While Alcoff acknowledges the political "potency of white dominance" (2015: 103) she remains optimistic that the future of whiteness and its meaning are responsive to the "experiential side of white subjective identity" (2015: 102). This aspect of whiteness, maintains Alcoff, is partially under the control of individual whites, and it is this space of agency that necessitates an appeal to white double consciousness. White double consciousness charts an experiential path to a future in which whiteness is lived and felt in opposition to a legacy rooted in racism. White double consciousness is thus theorized as an epistemic, phenomenological, and ethical tool outfitted to overcome the limitations of white exceptionalism.

Medina and Alcoff are right, of course, that the black/white binary offers neither an exhaustive nor mutually exclusive model for contemporary race relations in the United States. Race is negotiated within, across, and beyond a black/white binary, and there are social, epistemic, and political reasons to embrace more expansive models. Our models and theories of racial identity should aim to capture the relationships that whiteness bears to non-whiteness, the relationships that members of non-white races bear to one another, and should acknowledge the internal diversity *within* a racial category—including a white racial category—in which people possess divergent ethnic histories, social positions, levels of privilege, and relationships to anti-racism.

Yet, we see two problems with the re-deployment of double consciousness, in the form of white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness, to accomplish this work. First, as we have just argued, the problem with these extensions is that double consciousness is not about subjective racial identity, but, rather, structural oppression. It is in this sense, that Charles Mills writes that "*whiteness is not a color but a set of power relations*" (1999: 127). Whiteness as an identity cannot be reconfigured in the absence of a reconfiguration of the structural power relations that give it meaning in bodies and identities. Understood this way, double consciousness cannot provide a prescriptive model for racial identity reform; rather, it provides a descriptive account of the historical effects of a particular collective struggle against systems of racial oppression bolstered by white supremacy. One risks losing this content entirely in an effort to reconfigure the concept at the level of identity or to transport it across positions of power.

Second, we follow Medina and Alcoff in rejecting frameworks that characterize racial identity and political race-relations terms of a monolithic white majority and a singular Black minority. We agree with them that white exceptionalism and the lack of racial pluralism inherent in these frameworks is distorting. Yet, there is another kind of exceptionalism illuminated by the black/white binary that should not be overlooked. In our view, the black/white binary is illuminating—not because *whiteness* is exceptional, but because anti-Blackness is.

What do we mean by saying that anti-Blackness is exceptional?[15] First, there is a general sense in which *all* forms of racialized prejudice and oppression—antisemitism, anti-Asian, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Indigenous, and so on—are exceptional, in the sense that each is *distinct*. White supremacy is upheld through the maintenance of many forms of oppression; these systems of oppression are interrelated and often mutually supporting while at the same

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15. By saying that anti-Blackness is exceptional, we do not mean to suggest that it is atypical. To the contrary, structural anti-Blackness occupies the status of a norm in the United States of America.

time particular in their histories, origins, and logics. As Cherríe Moraga writes "the danger lies in ranking the oppressions. *The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression*" (1997: 472). To understand oppressions one must attend to their specificity, the way in which each is particular—indeed, exceptional—without falling into the trap of seeing a singular oppression as all or the only kind of oppression that matters.

Understanding the specificity of anti-Blackness within the context of the United States requires attending to its unique origin, logics, history—a history marked by slavery, Jim Crow, miseducation, anti-miscegenation, political disenfranchisement, colorism, terrorism, police brutality, mass incarceration, sexual violence, redlining, economic inequality, medical racism, environmental racism, and so on. This structural, transformative history is essential to understanding the continuing, yet ever-shifting faces of anti-Blackness. As a structural phenomenon, anti-Blackness does not operate at the level of identity—it can be mobilized by members of all races (including Black people themselves), as well as through the systemic workings of institutions, collectives, and historical group processes, where the attribution of subjective racial identity to such operations of power makes little sense.

Emphasizing the difference between identities and structural positionalities, Calvin Warren writes (2018: 39):

> Identities circulate within the symbolic of humanity; they . . . provide symbolic covering for the human and differentiate his/her existence, or mode of being, from other human beings. A structural position, on the other hand, ruptures the logics of symbolic identity and constitutes function or instrumentality.

Warren traces the historical significance of this distinction to its origins in the transatlantic slave trade—through which the metaphysical transformation of the "African" into the "Black" begins.[16] Clarifying this transformation, Warren quotes Bryan Wagner, who writes (2018): 39):

> blackness is an indelibly modern condition that cannot be conceptualized apart from epochal changes in travel, trade, labor, consumption, industry, technology, taxation, warfare, finance, insurance, government, bureaucracy, communication, science, religion, and philosophy that were together made possible by the European system of colonial slavery.

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16. The quotes around the word "African" are deliberate since "African" is not a unified concept or cultural identity, and while it's conventional to associate the word "African" with "Black," it is the case that not all Africans are Black and not all Blacks are African.

These world-historical "epochal" changes, which violently expanded the knowledge and size of the globe and which undergird the rise of global capitalism and modern geopolitics, cannot be understood in the absence of structural anti-Blackness.

As a comprehensive theory of race, then, the black/white binary is undeniably incomplete. But anti-Blackness can fruitfully be understood within the context of a binary: on one side of the binary is Blackness, and on the other side, non-Blackness. Thus, it is not the case that the "other side" of the binary is occupied by an exceptional whiteness, but rather, what is exceptional is the way in which genealogies of anti-Blackness structurally configure Blackness so as to instrumentalize and separate it from all the rest.

The quest for greater complexity and multiplicity in our theories about race is a worthy and desirable goal. But white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness encourage us to move beyond double consciousness as a narrative about the historical structures of anti-Blackness to embrace double consciousness as a model for understanding the phenomenological experience, epistemological virtue, or racial self-rehabilitation of privileged subjects. Yet these conceptual evolutions do not render double consciousness as a concept about structural anti-Blackness unnecessary. Nor are they natural parallels, extensions, applications, or improvements of it. We cannot yet move beyond the historical significance of structural anti-Blackness, a history which gives rise to a present in which color continues to be a salient marker of life outcomes. If we understand double consciousness as a tool for conceptualizing the genealogy of structural anti-Blackness, it cannot plausibly engender a framework for white anti-racist identity formation or epistemic virtue.

5. Conclusion

In the second chapter of *Souls* ("Of the Dawn of Freedom"), Du Bois writes, "[t]he problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (1903/2015: 12). There are two things that can perhaps be concluded from this idea. First, the problem of the color-line is a global problem. Second, the problem of the color-line is also a problem for the 21st century. Although the world today is much different than the world in which Du Bois was living when he wrote *Souls*, it is evident that the world of the 21st century isn't in its post-racial phase. In the particular case of the United States, the myth of post-racialism was made clear when backlash to the Obama presidency manifested in the 2016 election of Trump and in the global response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. Much like the

20th century, the 21st century can be characterized by a host of local and global problems undergirded by the color-line: mass incarceration, the rise of global fascism by far-right governments and militia groups, apartheid, neo-colonialism and imperialism, anti-immigration, and multiple wars.

By focusing, as we have, on the structural nature of anti-Blackness, one can better understand the role that anti-Blackness has played in shaping the modern world. Yet understanding the particular logics of anti-Blackness does not negate our need to understand its relation to other systems of racialized oppression. Global inequalities are upheld by many systems of oppression, and dismantling one system of oppression will be incomplete if others remain. In 1940—several decades after his writing of *Souls*—Du Bois affirms this continuing, global significance. In *Dusk of Dawn*, he writes (1940/2007: 69, emphasis added):

> For long years it seemed to me that this imprisonment of a human group with chains in hands of an environing group, was a singularly unusual characteristic of the Negro in the United States in the nineteenth century. But since then it has been easy for me to realize that the majority of mankind has struggled through this inner spiritual slavery and that while a dream which we have easily and jauntily called democracy envisages a day when the environing group looses the chains and compulsion, and is willing and even eager to grant families, nations, sub-races, and races equality of opportunity among larger groups, that even this grand equality has not come; *and until it does, individual equality and the free soul is impossible.*

While the term "double consciousness" is not explicitly deployed beyond *Souls*—perhaps indicating Du Bois's desire to leave the metaphor behind[17]—the language of the relation between the inner and outer continues to be salient in Du Bois's racial theorizing. Utilizing here this language of the inner and the outer, Du Bois again situates the "inner struggle" of inequality within the context of an "environing" group. In deploying the language of inner and outer, of individual and environment, Du Bois identifies the structuring features of the environment as fundamental to and prior to the inner and the individual. As he observes, individuals and their souls cannot be reconfigured unless the structures and environments of inequality are rectified.

A structural, sociogenic reading of double consciousness thus preserves this continuous thread in Du Bois's thought. Double consciousness identifies the need to reconfigure structures of inequality—not reshape identities from within. Undoing the structures of oppression is not a matter of individual virtue, and

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17. See for example, Moses (2004).

the remaking of identities cannot occur when the structures of our environments render others unfree. While white double consciousness and kaleidoscopic consciousness are attentive to the relationship between individual and structure, they locate individuals as the primary subject of double consciousness and identify changes at the level of the virtue, individual experience, or "inner" soul work as in some sense prior to or ontologically independent from changes to structure. But as Du Bois writes, individual equality can't be attained without a shift in our environing structures. The "freedom" of souls cannot be achieved in the absence of a re-structuring of our global environments. In this sense, whiteness and white-identity cannot be "remade" or more virtuously inhabited while anti-Blackness and other forms of racialized oppression persist. Insofar as double consciousness calls upon us to interrogate the history of racialized oppression—both in its particularity and in its ongoing global significance—this value will follow us into the future.

Acknowledgements

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