

A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking: Pragmatism, Radical Empiricism, and Epistemology in  
W.E.B. Du Bois's "Of the Sorrow Songs"

Abstract

When William James published *Pragmatism*, he gave it a subtitle: *A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. In this article, I argue that pragmatism is an epistemological method for articulating success in, and between, a plurality of practices, and that this method helped James develop radical empiricism. I contend that this pluralistic philosophical methodology is evident in James's approach to philosophy of religion, and that this method is also exemplified in the work of one of James's most famous students, W.E.B. Du Bois, specifically in the closing chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of the Sorrow Songs." I argue that "Sorrow Songs" can be read as an epistemological text, and that once one identifies the epistemic standards of pragmatism and radical empiricism in the text, it's possible to identify an implicit case for moderate fideism in "Sorrow Songs." I contend that this case illuminates the pluralistic philosophical methodology James worked throughout his career to develop, and that the James-Du Bois approach to philosophy may even help locate the epistemic value of other religious practices, beyond the singing of hymns, and identify terrain mainstream philosophy has long neglected.

Introduction

*"Our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time"* - William James,

*Pragmatism*, 83

*"My soul wants something that's new, that's new"* – Negro spiritual

Few philosophers deserve to be described as eclectic more than William James. Unfortunately, James's diverse interests, talents, and projects have presented something of a puzzle to commentators. Richard Gale has suggested that there is simply nothing coherent about James's general worldview, and that James's work is best understood as a series of failed attempts to navigate disparate, competing, and

ultimately inconsistent tendencies.<sup>1</sup> Others have suggested that James's views simply developed, that he modified and abandoned some of his earlier commitments as his career progressed. David Hollinger (2004), for example, locates *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in a transitional methodological period, one that witnesses James jettison a protective strategy that treated scientific and religious claims in different spheres for the empirical approach of *Pragmatism*, which advances theism as a hypothesis. Kitcher (2004) has posited a less radical break and advanced an interpretation of *Varieties* that takes it to fall under the apologetics James developed in *The Will to Believe*. Wesley Cooper's (2000) two-level approach offers an even more sympathetic interpretation, one which has James involved in concentric projects with a metaphysical level circumscribing a more guarded, positivistic, empirical level. My view is a sympathetic one, near in spirit to Cooper's.<sup>2</sup> In my view, James is not confused and ultimately incoherent, and while James certainly changed his mind, abandoned some notions, and developed various ideas, I don't posit the epistemological break Hollinger does. James's unfinished text *Some Problems of Philosophy*, contains one of the most direct expressions of his metaphysical outlook, and yet it includes an essay on "Faith and the Right to Believe." So, James cannot just have abandoned the apologetics of fideism for a straightforward empirical, and/or metaphysical, project. But to get a better grasp of how James can weave fideist apologetics into an empirically informed metaphysics, one must first understand what James took pragmatism, *qua* theory of truth, to have established, and how this accomplishment helped James develop radical empiricism.

I believe that once we get a handle on James's pluralistic methodology, and once we properly situate fideism, pragmatism, and radical empiricism with respect to one another, we can establish a unity, or coherence, amongst James's disparate commitments and tendencies, and construct sympathetic compelling interpretations of much of James's corpus. However, my primary interest in this article is not to construct this interpretation and apply it to James's primary texts. My interest in this article is mostly

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gale (1991) and (1999).

<sup>2</sup> It's also quite compatible with the view developed by Levinson (1981), Klein (2015), and others.

propaedeutic to that task. Instead, I want to focus on developing the claim that this pluralistic philosophical methodology is exemplified in the work of one James's most famous students, W.E.B. Du Bois, particularly in the final chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of the Sorrow Songs." This chapter is not often appreciated for its philosophical value. It can easily be read as a piece of literature, autobiography, history, or sociology. And, in my view, it is each of these things. But I will argue that if we look closely, we can also see commitments to pragmatism, radical empiricism, and moderate fideism in the text. Thus, I contend that "Sorrow Songs" can also be read as an epistemological text and a paradigmatic example of the pluralistic philosophical method James was developing. I also suggest that once we have this stance in view, we can open up the philosophical landscape, and use the James-Du Bois approach to identify the epistemic value of many practices, or what I will call forms of participatory consciousness that involve perceptual and behavioral coupling with other subjects and/or entities, as is found in the religious practices of singing hymns, receiving eucharist, and so on.

This article therefore involves quite a few moving parts, perhaps even too many, but this is to be expected when discussing a philosophical tradition that takes success to consist in the adequate handling of a diversity of practices and commitments. In "Monistic Idealism," James (1977) complained of philosophers' tendency to clean "up the litter with which the world is apparently filled" (26). And in "Pragmatism and Common Sense," James (1975) says that "profusion, not economy, may after all be reality's key-note" (93). Thus, James (1979) says in "Philosophy and Its Critics" that philosophy must ultimately construct "a single body of wisdom" that synthesizes the truth "in different kinds of question[s]" (20). Of course, James says that "this hope is far from its fulfilment," and he offers *Some Problems of Philosophy* as a form of philosophy in "the modern sense" of "metaphysics" "contrasted with the sciences" (19-20). But my interpretation has it that this need for an expansive methodology that adequately handles a diversity of parts, questions, realms, and lines of inquiry is something James was grasping for throughout his career. There are times when James brackets this search, as he does for most (but not all) of *Some Problems*, but I believe a sympathetic, and accurate, interpretation of James will

have James approaching this goal. If I am right, and “Sorrow Songs” exemplifies this pluralistic method, this should increase our confidence in the interpretative claim that this was James’s goal, that even his students recognized this, and that, in the case of at least W.E.B. Du Bois, perhaps it might even be said that, at least once, the pupil surpassed the teacher.

If these connections seem spurious, contrived, or implausible, it’s worth noting that W.E.B. Du Bois (1968) himself claimed that he “became a devoted follower of James at the time he was developing his pragmatic philosophy” (133). According to Du Bois, it was William James who “candidly” told him that “there is ‘not much chance for anyone earning a living as a philosopher,’” advice that helped Du Bois conceive “the idea of applying philosophy to an historical interpretation of race relations” (148).<sup>3</sup> Shamoon Zamir (1995) has argued that interpreters should not take these “autobiographical statements too uncritically” (11). But, as Paul Taylor (2004) has recognized, a pragmatic reading of Du Bois elucidates much of Du Bois’s research program and need not therefore rest solely on these claims. My concern, however, is not to develop any overall interpretation of Du Bois’s career trajectory or worldview.<sup>4</sup> It’s clear to me that Du Bois’s ideas developed in directions that James might not have accepted, for better or for worse. But I do want to suggest that Jonathon Kahn (2009) is not far from the truth when he says that Du Bois “seems to have a more powerful grasp on Jamesian thought than James did” and that he thus “stands as an exemplar of pragmatic excellence that James never achieved” (29).<sup>5</sup> But my view is that the matter is a bit more dynamical than this suggests. Many of James’s most explicit statements of pragmatism and radical empiricism appear after *Souls* was first published (1903), which was one year after *Varieties* (1902). With respect to *Varieties*, *Souls* is, in my view, a more consistent, arguably better example of pragmatism (and, I will argue, radical empiricism). But I think *Souls* helped

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<sup>3</sup> See also Lettering Lewis (1994).

<sup>4</sup> See Blum (2007), Marable (1985), and Posnock (2009) for work in this direction.

<sup>5</sup> Kahn (2009) describes Du Bois and James, along with Dewey and Santayana, as pragmatic religious naturalists (24). I think this is a better description of Dewey and Santayana than James, and while I think Kahn’s reading of Du Bois is quite compelling, the account I am developing here suggests that, at least in *Souls*, Du Bois develops a strategy that might be taken as a defense of a position that perhaps challenges the limits of what might be, helpfully or unhelpfully, called naturalism.

James pin down what he wanted out of the doctrines of pragmatism and radical empiricism, and that this is apparent in his later philosophical writings. In the end, I think it might even be appropriate to talk about the James and Du Bois approach, or the James-Du Bois view.<sup>6</sup> At least, this much is what I want to contend, though not much will hang on the title, which, to be sure, can only serve to obscure, if not obfuscate, the influences Jane Addams, John Dewey, and so many others had on these two men's views as well.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, one obstacle to my reading of "Sorrow Songs" and account of the dynamic influence between James and Du Bois comes from the simple fact that James never extensively commented on *Souls* or made any explicit statement that he recognized pragmatism and radical empiricism in the text. And yet, I think there exists a clue that he did in fact recognize this. In a June 6, 1903 letter to his brother, Henry Jr., James included a copy of *Souls*, which he describes as a "decidedly moving book." He says almost nothing else about the book except that Henry should read "Chapters VII to XI for local color, etc." (Du Bois, 1999, 227). This might seem like a philosophically irrelevant comment, but my interpretation takes it as revealing. In "Philosophy and Its Critics," the opening chapter to *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James raises the objection that philosophy "is out of touch with real life" (19). This, he says, is a "historically valid" objection, but that "in the end philosophers may get into as close contact as realistic novelists with the facts of life" (19). *Some Problems of Philosophy* is, after all, a "fragmentary and unrevised" warning of the philosophical dangers of taking our philosophical concepts to be more real, or more accurate, than the perceptual flux from which we break them out (5). So, James's praise of *Souls* as providing "local color, etc." is not epistemically vacuous praise. If my interpretation is correct, this brief comment is an implicit recognition of the philosophical commitments at work in *Souls*. James is

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<sup>6</sup> Glaude (2007) has argued that the "insertion" of Du Bois and Alain Locke "into the pantheon of American pragmatism is much like the use of gender-specific pronouns to draw attention to feminist concerns" it "is too often an illusion" (2). By drawing attention to the influence of Du Bois on James, as well as the influence of James on Du Bois, I hope to offer something more substantive than lip-service or an illusion.

<sup>7</sup> In the Hibbert Lectures that became *A Pluralistic Universe* given in 1908 James references the "rising tide of social democratic ideals" a likely allusion to Addams' *Democracy and Social Ethics* (first published in 1902) and the general sentiments of pragmatic progressivism that probably, in James's mind, included Du Bois and his work (1977, 18).

suggesting that Du Bois has properly accounted for the facts. Of course, it's striking that James failed to mention "Sorrow Songs," which is Chapter XIV of *Souls*, in his letter to Henry, but my interpretation has it that this is simply because James is recommending the text to Henry, and his brother's interests are not specifically epistemological.

So, ultimately, I aim to advance three main claims in this article, with an eye towards more general, and perhaps more important, conclusions. The first claim is that "Of the Sorrow Songs" can also be read as an epistemological text. I do not intend to deny that "Sorrow Songs" is a piece of sociohistorical analysis. Du Bois is definitely interested in the sociohistorical development of the spirituals that constitute the subject matter of "Sorrow Songs." But Du Bois also asks an odd question in the chapter that is in tension with a purely sociohistorical reading of the text. He asks, "Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?" (162). This query, I will argue, is not just a rhetorical device. After posing this question, Du Bois immediately attacks the meritocratic thesis that social inequalities are due to real inferiority between groups. This is sociohistorical analysis, to be sure, but once he's established the implausibility of this meritocratic thesis, Du Bois pivots to a discussion of "the hope sang in the songs of my fathers" (163). He quotes "Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler" and includes a plea to "God," the "Gentle One" to in "Thy good time...turn the tangle straight" and render "these crooked marks on a fragile leaf...not indeed" (164). I argue that a pure sociohistorical account of these claims is implausible because these claims are projective, and out of step with sociohistorical analysis. My second claim is that an epistemological analysis of "Sorrow Songs" can identify Du Bois's implicit commitments to, and use of, Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning, James's pragmatic theory of truth, and James's still to be explicitly formulated doctrine of radical empiricism. I argue that Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning helps Du Bois locate the meaning of the music and lyrics of the spirituals and that James's pragmatic theory of truth and doctrine of radical empiricism help Du Bois identify the epistemological relevance of this meaning. My third claim is that the epistemological relevance of the spirituals Du Bois identifies helps him construct a case for moderate fideism, for morally constrained epistemically acceptable "leaps of

faith.”<sup>8</sup> This case licenses the claim that the “Sorrow Songs” “sing true” (162). Here, Du Bois carefully articulates the facts, including the facts of sociohistorical analysis and what we would now call religious experience, and implicitly suggests that one may justifiably put their trust in the kind of experiences that motivate the “sorrow songs” insofar as that trust is not ruled out by any of the extant facts and results in morally acceptable, aesthetically pleasing, and practically useful behavior.

The success of these claims has some important implications. The first concerns the interpretative issues I raised above regarding James’s diverse tendencies. If I am right, Du Bois weaves three of James’s important commitments, to Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning, to his own theory of truth, and to radical empiricism, into something like an empirically grounded metaphysically plausible apologetics. This suggests a way of unifying James’s diverse commitments in a pluralistic methodology near in spirit to Cooper’s sympathetic interpretation. James is not hopelessly confused, or bifurcated, and he did not abandon fideism in favor of pragmatism or a straightforward empiricism. James struggled endlessly to accommodate a diversity of ways of engaging with reality. For James, pragmatism was a way of articulating what success amounts to in these disparate modes of engagement. He subtitled *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* because he wanted to draw attention to this *plurality* and to the fact that our knowledge is not confined to what we can know through distant-observational learning, as we might adopt when we ask what was really happening in a particular episode of our conscious lives. James is not averse to that kind of question. He asks that question several times in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He is aware that religious episodes might not be veridical. But he is wary of enshrining the distant-observational mode of inquiry that allows us to pose the question.<sup>9</sup> It’s enough for him that this mode not rule out the veridicality of the experiences and knowledge gained in other modes of engagement. In this sense, James adopts an attitude towards various modes of engagement with reality, or practices, that takes them to be partly autonomous. Each mode has its internal sets of rules, as the more

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Bishop (2007) and Diller (2007).

<sup>9</sup> For James, there is no single, solitary, unified “transcript of reality” (1975, 33).

extreme Wittgensteinian fideists acknowledge in their language games,<sup>10</sup> but each mode also has to be minimally consistent with other forms of knowledge, in the sense that its commitments are not ruled out by another mode, judged according to that mode's internal rules. This raises the second general philosophical implication of the preceding. If the James- Du Bois project is plausible, or even successful, then many practices other than, but including, the singing of hymns, may have epistemological relevance. If so, a James- Du Bois approach to philosophy helps open up philosophical territory and locate the epistemological value of much of what philosophers may have previously taken to be epistemologically vacuous, if not bankrupt. Philosophy may, as James once said, "keep the door and windows open" (1979, 55).

Let Us Cheer: Traveling the Epistemological Road "Of the Sorrow Songs"

I walk through the churchyard

To lay this body down;

I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;

I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the starlight;

I'll lie in the grave and stretch out my arms,

I'll go to judgment in the evening of the day

And my soul and thy soul shall meet that day,

When I lay this body down.

NEGRO SONG.

Before each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois includes a piece of music and lyrics like the preceding, "a haunting echo of...weird old songs" (154-5). "They that walked in darkness sang songs

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Phillips (1970) and Malcolm (1977).



in the olden days,” songs like the preceding, which Du Bois calls “Sorrow Songs” “for they were weary at heart” (154). For Du Bois, these songs are “the sole American music,” “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas” (155). “Ever since I was a child,” Du Bois says, “these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine” (155). The songs have been “neglected,” even “half-despised,” but “above all” they have “been persistently mistaken and misunderstood” (155). It’s this understanding that Du Bois’s chapter is intended to correct. According to Du Bois, the songs represent “the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people” (155). But this much has almost always been missed.

Here, Du Bois is concerned, in part, with rescuing these songs from obscurity, from caricature “on the ‘minstrel’ stage” which conceals and obfuscates the “source” of the music and lyrics (155). Du Bois says that when “war-time came” “for the first time the North met the Southern slave face to face” and first heard the “singing” that “stirred men with a mighty power” (155). Still, Du Bois says that “the world listened only half credulously” to the songs “until the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang the slave songs so deeply into the world’s heart that it can never wholly forget them again” (155-6). Du Bois tells the story of “a blacksmith’s son” who “helped defend Cincinnati from Kirby Smith” and later “formed a Sunday-school class of black children” whom he “taught...to sing” (156). The group would come to inspire “George L. White” to found the Jubilee Singers whom he took on a “pilgrimage” in 1871 “to let those Negroes sing to the world” (156). Du Bois tells of their stop “at Wilberforce, the oldest of Negro schools,” their performance at “the Congregational Council at Oberlin,” their visit to “New York,” and their pilgrimage “across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser, in Scotland and Ireland, Holland and Switzerland” (156). For “seven years they sang and brought back a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found Fisk University” (156).

In recounting these narratives, Du Bois is engaging in straightforward sociohistorical analysis. The minstrel caricatures of the slave songs suggest, to the white mind, that neither the performer nor the

music has much of substance behind it. Du Bois's narrative defuses both of these presumptions. The pilgrimage of the Jubilee Singers, and their financial and commercial success, suggests the clear competency of the troupe. The "thrilling of hearts" and "the bursting of applause" at the performances speak to the substantive value of the songs (156). Of course, not everyone has appreciated this. "Caricature has sought again to spoil the quaint beauty of the music" (156). But, Du Bois says, "the true Negro folk-song still lives in the hearts of those who have heard them truly sung and in the hearts of the Negro people" (156). It is at this point that Du Bois asks, "what are these songs, and what do they mean?" (156). The answer, Du Bois says, is that "these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world" (156).

This is still mostly straightforward sociohistorical analysis. Du Bois says that the "songs are indeed the siftings of centuries" and that in them "we can trace here and there signs of development" (157). For example, "primitive African music... may be seen in larger form in the strange chant which heralds 'The Coming of John'" (157). And Du Bois says that there are "songs that seem... a step removed from the more primitive types" (158). Plus, there are songs which involve "a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land" (158). Thus, Du Bois does engage in a sociohistorical etiology of the songs, tracing first distinctively "African music," "second Afro-American" music and third "distinctively Negro music" with both "Negro and Caucasian" "elements" (158).

But it's here that Du Bois also begins to pivot. After asking what these songs are and what they mean, Du Bois does launch into the sociohistorical discussion I just mentioned. But before doing so, he says that the songs are "the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment," and that they also "tell of... unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways" (157). This thought is temporarily dropped as Du Bois engages in the historical analysis of the songs I just described, but he quickly picks the sentiment back up, reiterating the claim that "in these songs... the slave spoke to the world" (159). It's here that Du Bois says the songs "grope toward some unseen power and sigh for rest in the End" (159). The songs tell of "well known" "rocks" and "mountains," but of an "unknown"

“home” (160). “Through all of the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs,” Du Bois says, “there breathes a hope- a faith in the ultimate justice of things” (162). It’s here that Du Bois asks “Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?” (162).

This question moves the discussion beyond the boundaries of sociohistorical analysis. Of course, content analysis is a perfectly fine endeavor for a sociologist or a historian, and neither the sociologist nor the historian needs to claim that their work is free from normative commitments. The query “Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?” doesn’t move the discussion beyond the boundaries of sociohistorical analysis simply because it suggests Du Bois pivots from a descriptive analysis to a normative inquiry. The question moves the discussion beyond the boundaries of sociohistorical analysis because it poses a question about the content of the songs that cannot be resolved by invoking further sociohistorical considerations. To answer this question, we have to ask whether there is something like an “unseen power” that provides some “assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond” (162). We have to ask an etiological question about the experiences and perceptions that the songs allude to and evoke. This brings us to the realm of epistemology.

Of course, the question might also be rhetorical. A purely sociohistorical analysis of the chapter will surely interpret the query as little more than a moral plea to the reader to take up the cause of the freed people. And I don’t doubt that this is, in part, Du Bois’s intention. But this reading doesn’t explain Du Bois’s inclusion of “Let us Cheer the Weary Traveler” at the close of the chapter. After quoting a few measures of that song, Du Bois says “And the traveler girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning, and goes his way” (164). Here, the implication, I believe, is that the hope expressed in the Sorrow Songs is justified, that they do sing true. If “Of the Sorrow Songs” is just sociohistorical analysis, it’s hard to see how Du Bois could arrive at this conclusion. But where is the argument? How does Du Bois arrive at this conclusion? To uncover this case, we need to first identify some epistemological commitments lurking in the chapter. In the next section, I argue that “Of the Sorrow Songs” evinces commitments to Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning, James’s pragmatic theory of truth, and James’s

doctrine of radical empiricism. Once we have these commitments in view, we can reconstruct Du Bois's implicit case for the philosophical legitimacy of the faith expressed in the "Sorrow Songs."

#### Sing Truth: The Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism "Of the Sorrow Songs"

If the preceding is correct, "Of the Sorrow Songs" isn't just a sociohistorical exercise, but an epistemological inquiry into the philosophical acceptability of the faith expressed in the spirituals Du Bois discusses. To address this philosophical matter, it's necessary to ask about the epistemological value of the spiritual experiences the songs draw attention to. But obviously if this is going to be done, we need some method for elucidating the content, or meaning, of the spirituals. Here, I believe, we can see both Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning, and James's doctrine of radical empiricism, at work in Du Bois's handling of the sorrow songs. Once we locate this content, we can then identify the standards Du Bois employs to assess this content. Here, I will argue, we can see Du Bois employ James's pragmatic theory of truth. In the next section, I argue that this series of moves contains an implicit case for a moderate fideism, but first let's identify these various commitments in the chapter.

After he asks "what are these songs, and what do they mean?," Du Bois says that he knows "little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase," but that he knows "something of men, and knowing them," he can say that "these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world" (156). They "tell in word and music of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding" (159). Of course, it's almost tautological to say that words carry meaning, that is what words are, or what they do. But to say that music carries meaning in the sense that it can tell "of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding" is to suggest that music has a noetic quality and either contains or implies something that can be captured with propositional content. Here, I believe, Du Bois implicitly employs Peirce's pragmatic theory of meaning. James had long enlisted symbolic language in his case for his pragmatic theory of truth. In "The Function of Cognition," which he first gave to the Aristotelian Society in December 1884 and first appeared in *Mind* in 1885, James emphasized how "symbolic thought" can "intend," "speak of," or "reach conclusions about" "particular realities" "without having in our subjective consciousness any mind-stuff that resembles them

even in a remote degree” (193). But it was Peirce who in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” first elaborated the pragmatic theory of meaning. To understand how Du Bois locates the meaning of the sorrow songs we need to grapple with this pragmatic theory of meaning.

In “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” Peirce revisits the traditional philosophical insistence on “clear” and “distinct” ideas (1992, 124). For this tradition, a “distinct idea” is one “we can give a precise definition of...in abstract terms” (125). A distinct idea is “clear” when it “is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with” (124). The problem for Peirce is that this tradition “has its only true place in philosophies which have long been extinct” (125). In searching for an infallible foundation for philosophy, both Descartes and Leibniz emphasized the need to start with clear and distinct ideas. But whereas Descartes’s famous cogito concedes “that to accept propositions” is something “we cannot help doing,” Leibniz instead “sought to reduce the first principles of science to formulas which cannot be denied without contradiction” (126). Thus, for Leibniz, clear and distinct ideas became “the clear apprehension of everything contained in [a] definition” (126). The problem is that “nothing new can ever be learned by analyzing definitions” (126). The Leibniz model of reasoning omits “all mention of any higher perspicuity of thought” (126). It suggests an “order” to “intellectual economy,” and Peirce welcomes the suggestion (126). But the task is then to provide an adequate account of clear ideas.

For Peirce, the Cartesian and Leibnizian tradition suggests two grades of clearness. The first is “clearness in the sense of familiarity;” the second is clearness in “abstract definition” (136). Because this tradition is limited due to its omission “of any higher perspicuity of thought,” this tradition thus fails to identify a third grade of clearness. What can this third grade consist of? Well, the Cartesian and Leibnizian tradition failed in part because of its need to find a philosophical starting point. This was what suggested that “self-consciousness” (for Descartes) or self-evidentiality (for Leibniz) could furnish the fundamental truths and the first two grades of clearness were proposed as accounts of success in these restricted realms. So, the third grade of clearness is going to have to be found in the middle of things, or empirically, and determine how we discriminate between objects in our various interactions. Here, we

find that “our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects” (132). Ideas are, after all, components of thought, but thought is a “system” whose “sole motive, idea, and function, is to produce belief” (129). The “action of thought is excited by the irritation of doubt” (127). We deliberate, and theorize, to resolve some practical matter. Beliefs are thus commitments that expedite practical action. As Peirce defines them, beliefs are “something that we are aware of” that “appeases the irritation of doubt” and “involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or...a habit” (129). Thus, “to develop [the] meaning” of any idea “we have, therefore, simply to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves” (131). “What is tangible and practical” is therefore “at the root of every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be” (131). “What effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive...our conception to have...is the whole of our conception of the object” (132). This is “the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension” (132). This is Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning.

Peirce’s third grade of clearness and pragmatic theory of meaning permit the identification of ideas that we learn through perceptual engagement. Thus, the first examples of ideas Peirce invokes after introducing the pragmatic rule of clearness are hardness and heaviness. For example, “to say that a body is heavy means simply that, in the absence of opposing force, it will fall” (133). Here, as in the case of hardness, “the whole conception of this quality, as of every other, lies in its conceived effects” (132). This is how Du Bois identifies the meaning of both the music and lyrics of the “Sorrow Songs,” through the practical effects it has on the speakers and receivers, the emotions they invoke, and the objects they direct our attention to. Thus, Du Bois can say that the songs “are the music of an unhappy people” (157). They invoke the rhythms and tones that we practically associate with sadness. But they also breathe “a hope:” the “minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence” (162). Interestingly enough, Peirce deals with music and musical analogies several times in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear.” He compares thought to “the air” of a piece of music and “sensations” to “separate notes,” suggesting that

we can frame ideas of processes and relations as much as monadic features of things (128-9). Thus, Du Bois can suggest that the spirituals “tell of...a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (157).

Now, Peirce does say that whenever there is “unity among our sensations which has no reference to how we shall act on a given occasion, as when we listen to a piece of music...we do not call that thinking” (131). But this is clearly no reason to think that his pragmatic theory of meaning can’t be applied to song. Peirce, after all, openly wondered whether the world was not composed of symbols. The point here is rather that meaning involves an operation, and thus a change in action. “Unity among our sensations” with “no reference to how we shall act” may not give us any meaning, but those same sensations taken as part of a larger whole related to action may suggest something of meaning. Here, Peirce is drawing a distinction between mere hearing, in the sense of receiving, and understanding, in the sense of thinking about what is received. This is the distinction slave songs actually exploit. What might sound like, and in fact partly is, benign melodizing can also be protest. Du Bois’s interpretation of the “Sorrow Songs” involves the identification of this implicit message. This is what the songs are really about, and where their true value lies. This is what the minstrel caricatures and the imitations miss. This is why Du Bois quotes “a black woman” saying of “Poor Rosy,” “it can’t be sung without a full heart and a troubled spirit” (160). Meaning, as Peirce notes, consists in “a possible difference of practice” (131). It’s not enough to hit the notes. They have to be hit in the right way. They have to come from the right place.

This leads quite quickly to James’s pragmatic theory of truth and to his doctrine of radical empiricism. James accepted Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning. In *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James introduces Peirce’s rule as “the pragmatic rule,” saying that it states that “the meaning of a concept may always be found, if not in some sensible particular which it directly designates, then in some particular difference in the course of human experience which its being true will make” (1979, 37). But James says “pragmatism” can also amount to “a certain theory of truth” (1975, 32-3). In the “Preface” to *The Meaning of Truth*, James employs Peirce’s rule with respect to true beliefs. “Grant an idea or belief to be true,” James says, “what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone’s actual life?” (169). The

answer: “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify” (169). In *Pragmatism*, James says that the pragmatist “gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to...the truth of a state of mind means this function of a leading that is worth while” (1975, 98). Thus, the pragmatic theory of truth is “that ideas...become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (1975, 34).

But James says that he is “interested in another doctrine in philosophy to which I give the name of radical empiricism” which “consists first of a postulate, next of a statement of fact, and finally of a generalized conclusion” (1975, 172). According to James “the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail” (Ibid.). That’s because the postulate follows from the pragmatic theory of truth. The “postulate” states “that the only thing that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience” (Ibid.). Because the pragmatic theory of truth is that true ideas help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of experience, and “ideas are themselves a part of our experience,” philosophy can avoid transcendental appeals regarding objects that are not experienced (1975, 34). Armed with this theory of truth and postulate, James makes an observation, which serves as the “statement of fact” in radical empiricism: “that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience...than the things themselves” (173). This observation is something James labored in *The Principles of Psychology*, as he struggled against the atomistic conception of the mind developed by Hume and others.<sup>11</sup> But this is not a significantly different distinction than the one Peirce identified in ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ where he too observed “two sorts of elements of consciousness,” “what we are immediately conscious of,” or what is “completely present at every instance so long as [it] last[s]” and “what we are mediately conscious of,” or what “cannot be immediately present to us, but must cover

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<sup>11</sup> In *Some Problems*, James accuses Hume of “half-hearted” empiricism for his failure to include conjunctions, as well as disjunctions, in his epistemological stance (1979, 100).



some portion of the past or future” (128-9). Of course, we might identify conjunctions of copresence as well as conjunctions of succession, but James seems to have realized that the capacity to perceive conjunction in general licenses both observations. Thus, the “generalized conclusion” of radical empiricism “is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience” (173).

These commitments of James get their full expression in many of James’s later writings published, in some cases, years after the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*. But, if I am right, these commitments were percolating in James’s work for some time, and, in some cases, in Peirce’s philosophy as well. To claim that these commitments influenced Du Bois, and that we can identify them at work in “Of the Sorrow Songs,” is thus just to say that Du Bois internalized them, first as a student and then later as a peer, and that they find expression in his work.<sup>12</sup> But what is the evidence for this suggestion?

The radical empirical commitment to the idea that conjunctions, as well as disjunctions, form a part of our experience pervades Du Bois’s account of the “Sorrow Songs.” Recall that at the beginning of the chapter, Du Bois says plainly that the songs “stirred me strangely” and that they “came out of the South unknown to me...and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine” (155). The phenomenological characterization that Du Bois has in mind here is not of a series of disconnected impressions. It’s not as if Du Bois first recounts the reception of a note, then, of a strange stirring inside of him, and finally of a recognition that the songs speak to him. Rather Du Bois says that the songs stirred him strangely and “*at once*” he knew them “as of me and of mine” (155, my emphasis). Of course, this isn’t to deny that a series of psychological reactions takes place, but that the reactions, as James says, “hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience” (1975, 173). This is similar to the language Du Bois uses to identify one kind of unity amongst the various spirituals. Du Bois says, “over the inner

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<sup>12</sup> Although it’s important, for my interpretative purposes in this essay, to note that *Souls* was published after *Varieties*.

thoughts of the slaves and their relations one with another the shadow of fear ever hung, so that we get but glimpses here and there, and also with them, eloquent omissions and silences” (160).

This “concatenated or continuous” structure of experience which requires “no extraneous trans-empirical connective support” is presupposed throughout Du Bois’s analysis of the spirituals (James, 1975, 173). As Du Bois says, the “music is distinctly sorrowful” (159). Du Bois might have said that the notes, timbre, tone, or key elicit distinctly sorrowful feelings, and that would, physiologically speaking, probably be true. But a note does not make a song. No disconnected series of notes could ever make a song. A song requires experiential connection between its elements. To hear a song, we have to be able to experience this connection. But if we can perceive this connection, we can perceive other connections too. We can not only identify what Peirce called “the air” of a song; we can also identify the specific “air” of the song (128). We can say that a song is distinctly sorrowful. We can also identify the meaning of an omission, or a silence, as Du Bois does. The monadic features of a silence are semantically vacuous, but as a part of a larger whole to which they relate, those same features may contribute to the meaning of the piece.

Perhaps this much is obvious. That is perhaps to be expected from a tradition of philosophers who took themselves to be defending something like common sense. The importance of articulating these kinds of commitments lies in the fact that they bring to the fore, and make explicit, various epistemic strategies we often employ so that we can vouch for their legitimacy. Recall, for example, Du Bois’s claim that in the “Sorrow Songs” there breathes “a hope...in the ultimate justice of things” (162). This observation is grounded in Du Bois’s recognition that the “minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence” (162). Radical empiricism permits Du Bois to make this observation; it suggests that this change is perceptible. A Humean would deny this; that, after all, is one of Hume’s claims to infamy: that causation is imperceptible because change is itself imperceptible. For Peirce, the Humean position enshrines immediate consciousness at the expense of mediate consciousness. For James, the Humean position enshrines abstract conceptions at the expense of concrete engagement. Du Bois’s

approach in “Sorrow Songs” presupposes these anti-Humean commitments. For Du Bois, the songs are “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas” (155). That experience is full of relations. It can “tell of... a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (157). It can “grope *toward* some unseen power and sigh for rest *in the End*” (159, my emphasis in italics).

In the preceding I said that the importance of articulating these commitments consists in the way they help identify typical epistemic strategies and consequently vouch for their legitimacy. To vouch for their legitimacy is to vouch for their reliability, or their truth. I have argued that this task is one of Du Bois’s concerns in “Sorrow Songs,” and that this is made explicit when Du Bois asks if the hope expressed in the spirituals is “justified,” and if “the Sorrow Songs sing true” (162). Here, we are asking nothing short of whether the spiritual experiences of an “unseen power” expressed in the “Sorrow Songs” justify faith in “the ultimate justice of things,” that is, in God (162). My view is that Du Bois answers here in the affirmative, that “Of the Sorrow Songs” ultimately includes an implicit case for moderate fideism, and for the legitimation of religious belief given religious experience. But to articulate this case, I first need to expound James’s pragmatic theory of truth and explain how Du Bois invokes that theory in his case. This is the task I take up in the next section.

#### The Morning: Du Bois’s Case for Moderate Fideism

An epistemological reading of “Sorrow Songs” has Du Bois posing an epistemological question about the legitimacy of faith in an “unseen power.” This is, of course, the same language James uses in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. If I am right, Du Bois employs a very similar strategy James employs when taking religious experience to license, or legitimate, religious belief. This case is what I have argued is implicit in the final chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*. To reconstruct this case, we have to understand what kind of reliability test pragmatism sets for beliefs. Only once we have this in view can we see how the songs “sing true,” how the experiences they express and evoke license the faith of their subject matter.

Recall that, for James, the pragmatic theory of truth has it “that ideas...become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (1975, 34). The “satisfaction,” James tells us “is no abstract satisfaction...but is assumed to consist of such satisfactions (*in the plural*) as concretely existing men actually do find in their beliefs” (270, my emphasis in italics). In “Hegel and his method,” given as part of the Hibbert Lectures that became *A Pluralistic Universe*, James says “rationality has at least four dimensions, intellectual, aesthetical, moral and practical; and to find a world rational to the maximal degree *in all these respects simultaneously* is no easy matter” (1977, 55). Thus, James says that the “name ‘pragmatism’ with its suggestion of action, has been an unfortunate choice” (1975, 267). Given this connotation, pragmatism “is usually described as...excellently fitted for the man on the street, who naturally hates theory and wants cash returns immediately” (267). But pragmatism, as we have seen, can be taken as either a *theory* of meaning, or a *theory* of truth. As a theory of truth, pragmatism just insists that theoretical deliberations, which themselves involve various sorts of actions, terminate in a habit, a practice, an endeavor of some sort. The point of pragmatism is to identify the sorts of connections between the mulling over that goes on in so-called theory and the intervening that goes on in so-called practice. The point isn’t so much an emphasis on consequences, as it is a refusal to throw asunder what is not thrown asunder. Thus, James says:

in that early California address, when I described pragmatism as holding that ‘the meaning of any proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive,’ I expressly added these qualifying words: ‘the point lying rather in the fact that the experience must be particular, than in the fact that it must be active’” (1975, 279).

The word “particular” is a bit out of place here because an abstract, or universal feature, could be instantiated in the kind of accounting James is describing. The point is that pragmatism is supposed to emphasize “the distinctively concrete” as opposed to the abstract (Ibid.). On this point, James says

“whenever I have emphasized the practical nature of truth, this is mainly what has been in my mind”  
(Ibid.).

But if pragmatism is more akin to pluralism, and the dimensions of rationality include the intellectual, aesthetical, moral and practical, then, an emphasis on practicality isn't just an emphasis on the need for concrete description. Otherwise, the practical cannot be a dimension of rationality. Instead, our good theories, our true accounts, give concrete descriptions, generate predictions, and inform interventions; they satisfy the dimensions of rationality by capturing our experiences and leading us into other experiences our theory, or ideas, can also capture. This notion of leading is at the core of James's pragmatic theory of truth.<sup>13</sup> As I just mentioned, and as James is trying to explain, this notion isn't intended to emphasize consequences (although the intent is to include them as well as other things). The central metaphor James employs here is that of fruits, and, as I will explain, his own inconsistency in the handling of that metaphor is partly responsible for the misinterpretations of pragmatism. In “What Pragmatism Means,” James says pragmatism involves the “attitude of looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts” (1975, 32). And in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James describes the “empiricist criterion” as “By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots” (25). This contrast, between fruits and roots, is not the one James wants, although he does use it in *Varieties* as a sort of protective strategy. I'll shortly argue that this is not the only strategy James employs in *Varieties* (and that it's not Du Bois's either), but it isn't ultimately sustainable. The very idea of a fruit presupposes something well-rooted. Fruits don't fall like manna. The distinction James is more after is a distinction between genealogy, or etiology, and prediction, or intervention. The problem with a focus on ungrounded prediction is that ungrounded prediction licenses the adoption of any hypothesis so long as it makes a prediction far enough out in time. If we have an approach that allows people to take up any commitment they want to so long as

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<sup>13</sup> For James, the epistemic value of “our thoughts” consists in how “they successfully exert their go-between function” (1975, 37).

neither confirmatory nor disconfirmatory evidence has yet come, we have the worst kind of voluntarism, as critics of *The Will to Believe* noted. But it's worth noting how inconsistent this kind of approach is with the empirical cataloguing of psychological patterns in religious life that James does in *Varieties*, or that Du Bois documents in "Sorrow Songs." The metaphor of fruits is apt not because it contrasts with roots, but because it emphasizes the plurality of rationality's dimensions, because it suggests a concrete image, and because it suggests the need for informed interventions in the concrete world.

So, James's pragmatic theory of truth involves four dimensions. How do we know when these dimensions have been satisfied? First, the intellectual dimension has us examine the extant facts and formulate propositions we already know are true. To assess any claim suggested by our empirical engagement with the world, we must therefore first ask whether it contradicts any of these propositions. If it does not, we can then ask whether the claim contributes to the overall beauty of our general outlook, whether it aids in us in our moral careers, and whether it modifies our behavioral suggestions in such a way that leads us to experiences that also satisfy these dimensions. If the claim does, an agent is rationally permitted to accept that claim. This is my interpretation of James's account of truth. It doesn't license voluntarism, and the arbitrary adoption of commitments, because, as an empirical approach, it only entertains commitments that suggest themselves through perceptual engagement with the world. We cannot forget that pragmatism is set as a tradition against the Cartesian-Leibnizian model of beginning from an epistemological zero point. If we want to draw a distinction between fruits and roots, here is the place to draw it: between starting from scratch and starting in the middle of things, not between explanation and prediction. For James, pragmatism is supposed to be a way of accounting for the connections between successful explanation and prediction.

James can therefore accept Proudfoot's (1985) suggestion that religious experiences generate hypotheses about the explanations of the episodes they are identified with (163). Proudfoot recognizes that, in *Varieties*, James "distinguishes between existential judgments, which are aimed at establishing the constitution, origin, and history of an object or event, and spiritual judgments, which are attempts to

determine its importance, meaning, significance, or value” (165). Proudfoot also notes that James’s distinction between fruits and roots, which countenances the distinction between existential and spiritual judgments, functions as a protective strategy for religious experiences, effectively nullifying the potential for an etiological account of a religious episode to debunk that episode’s pretensions. The problem is that these very pretensions suggest “a noetic quality to the experience” (169). While these “experiences have the feel of direct sensations...they have the epistemic status of hypotheses” of “a hunch” (163). This noetic quality includes “an embedded claim about the cause or origin of the perceptual experience” (176). So, if these experiences are veridical, these claims are going to need to be plausible, and this requires an explanation of the etiology of those experiences.

Du Bois can also accept the claim that these experiences have a noetic quality and contain embedded claims that can be corroborated by explanation. Du Bois says that “the Negro folk-song...is the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas” (155). He says also that in these songs, “the slave spoke to the world” and that “such a message is naturally veiled and half articulate” (159). Insofar as these songs capture actual spiritual experiences, and contain partly articulate messages, they too can be described as capturing perceptual experiences containing embedded claims about the etiology of those experiences. That they might also be treated as hypotheses is seen in Du Bois’s posing the question of whether they “sing true” (162).

Now that I have elucidated the dimensions of James’s pragmatic theory of truth, I can explain how Du Bois answers this question. If the songs, or more accurately, the experiences the songs evoke and/or capture, contain hypotheses regarding an “unseen power,” then, the first question to ask is whether this hypothesis coheres with other propositions we already know to be true. Here, Du Bois launches into a critique of “the silently growing assumption” that “the backward races of to-day are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving” (162). This might seem irrelevant, but the “unseen power” of the “Sorrow Songs” is an ally to an exiled people. The hypothesis of the spiritual experiences that the sorrow songs capture and evoke is that there is an unseen power working for “the ultimate justice of things”

(162). If this power is real, then, at the very least, this cause cannot be meritless. As Du Bois explains, it is not. The American nation is not the product of pure white effort, but also of the “story and song,” the “sweat and brawn,” and the “Spirit” of the “Negro people” (162-3). This being the case, the “silently growing assumption” is little more than “ignorance and unhallowed prejudice” (162). So, the hypothesis of the sorrow songs is not defeated by these alleged sociobiological considerations.

Thus far then, the hypothesis is plausible. It has been authentically suggested by empirical engagement with the world, and it is not in contradiction with any of the extant facts. James’s pragmatic theory of truth has us next ask about the aesthetic, moral, and practical import of the hypothesis. Du Bois has already vouched for the beauty of the hypothesis calling the songs “the most beautiful expression of human experience” (155). Of course, Du Bois doesn’t just have us take his word for it. His account of the success of the Jubilee Fisk Singers reminds us how deeply and widely the songs resonate, and how “the magic...kept thrilling hearts” (156). This suggests public access to the aesthetic value of the hypothesis. The moral acceptability of the hypothesis follows from the rejection of the sociobiological thesis just discussed. If there is no reason a group of people is inferior to another, it’s perfectly morally acceptable to require efforts aimed at establishing equality between groups, whether we prefer to cash out that equality in terms of consideration, rights, recognition, and/or capability. Thus, the hypothesis has perfectly fine practical import as well: it suggests a task and aim we can work with. This is why Du Bois concludes the chapter with “Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler.” After quoting a few lines ending with “Let us cheer the weary traveler along the heavenly way,” Du Bois says “And the traveler girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning, and goes his way” (164). The imagery of girding suggests an adoption of an outlook and it’s striking that Du Bois capitalizes “Morning,” suggesting the coming of the better world he also describes as “the End” (also capitalized) earlier in the chapter (159). Of course, the point is not that the End, or Morning, has arrived, but that they are on the horizon, providing a destination for the traveler and indicating the practical import, and acceptability, of the Sorrow Song’s hypothesis. The Morning, to be sure, has not yet come, but belief in that Morning has proven to be epistemically acceptable, given



James's pragmatic theory of truth. Full confirmation of the hypothesis requires "God," the "Gentle One," to "in Thy good time...turn the tangle straight" and render Du Bois's work "crooked marks on a fragile leaf...not indeed," as Du Bois describes in "The After-Thought" to *Souls* (164). So, the conclusion is not that the theistic hypothesis has been totally confirmed, but that it is consistent with the facts and the demands of rationality. Thus, Du Bois constructs not a rationally decisive argument for theism, but a rationally persuasive case for a form of moderate fideism.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

In "The Irrelevance to Religion of Philosophic Proofs for the Existence of God," Steven Cahn (1969) argued that "religious believers have...little interest in philosophic proofs for the existence of God" because "they have little or no relevance to religion" (170). According to Cahn, religious belief is not deduced or inferred. Instead, religious belief is grounded in a "self-validating" "personal experience" in which one is "absolutely certain that it is God whose presence one is experiencing and whose will one is apprehending" (171). I have argued that this is not the view of William James or W.E.B. Du Bois. Though it's true that William James occasionally invoked the protective strategy I described in the preceding, a strategy Cahn's case seems to presume, this is not the primary way James handled these experiences. For one thing, James does not pretend religious experiences license any kind of certitude. He is well-aware of the mystical experiences that motivate something like Hegelian pantheism. He documents them in *Varieties*. But he never gives believers the right to posit whatever they'd like from these experiences. In the Postscript to *Varieties*, he insists that religious episodes only suggest a "power" "other and larger than our conscious selves" (338). And in "The Sick Soul," James claims that "healthy-mindedness," which James associates with Hegelian theodicy, is "inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality" (136).

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<sup>14</sup> Blum (2007) argues that the sorrow songs "demonstrated that blacks felt fear and hope and proved that people of color were authentically human and had a special connection to the divine" (84). As a comparative sociological case about the religious lives of black Americans, I suspect that "Sorrow Songs" does amount to something of a proof in this direction, but as an epistemological inquiry into the veridicality of religious experience I think Du Bois is comfortable with moderate fideism.

Second, James does not suggest that the experiences are “self-validating.” Even the protective strategy of distinguishing between fruits and roots does not permit that. But Cahn’s suggestion that religious belief is primarily a reaction to religious experience is also at the core of the James-Du Bois approach. It’s just that, on this approach, the experiences generate hypotheses that may be rationally accepted, although not rationally confirmed.

I have argued that this position is best described as moderate fideism: an empirically informed fideism constrained by the limits of metaphysical possibility. We see this in the fact that the forms of faith the position permits must be consistent with the extant empirical facts and metaphysically plausible (unlike the forms of healthy-minded perfect being theism James rejects on philosophical grounds in *Varieties* and elsewhere). Thus, there is something indelibly right about Cooper’s interpretation of James as involved in multiple projects, with some going beyond the data of others. It’s true that James’s ideas developed, and that he modified, and even abandoned, some doctrines. He says this much on many occasions.<sup>15</sup> But it’s wrong to suggest he ever dropped fideism in favor of empiricism. James’s fideism was always moderate and directed towards the empirical confirmation of its claims. So, I have argued, was the fideism of Du Bois as developed in “Of the Sorrow Songs.”

What can we learn from this bit of philosophy? Probably many things, including some sociohistorical things about the professional discipline of philosophy. But philosophically I hope to be reminded of the epistemic value of various practices. If James and Du Bois are right, participation in the world is not only the fate of our theorizing, but the impetus. This is what treating experience as hypothesis-generating shows. That’s why James insists on philosophy keeping the “door and windows open” (1979, 55). If we aren’t empirically engaged, we aren’t open to novelty. Perceptual engagement, and participation, are the lifeblood of theory. They flow into theory and theory must flow out into them. Various modes of engagement in the world generate new hypotheses for philosophers to consider. “Of the

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, James’s retraction of the logic of identity that prevents the compounding of consciousness in *Principles* he later accepts in *A Pluralistic Universe*, particularly in the essay “Concerning Fechner.”

Sorrow Songs” suggests one such mode, but perhaps there are others, as might be the case with yoga or meditation.<sup>16</sup> If so, this calls for a method of managing this diversity. Pragmatism, as a theory of truth, is intended to provide this method through an articulation of what successful connections between various forms of engagement amounts to.

There is certainly more to say about how successfully pragmatism manages conflicts between these various forms. The case of religious belief is just one example where the hypotheses generated by religious practices, such as the singing of hymns or the taking of eucharist, might clash with the practices of scientific explanation. I’ve suggested that the James-Du Bois view is that this conflict can be mediated without any egregious violations of scientific commitments. In this view, rationality is multi-dimensional and it’s always important to entertain the hypotheses our various forms of empirical engagement with the world suggest. Thus, the more of our experience we can successfully explain and confirm, the better. Our best explanations can always be improved if they can countenance, or explain, more of our empirical engagement with the world. The James-Du Bois view is that our best explanations will ultimately countenance the experiences of religious believers, and that they are perfectly consistent with the extant facts as we now understand them.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Sarukkai (2002).

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