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## Darkwater's Existentialist Socialism

Thomas Meagher 

Published in 1920, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* comes at a middle period in W.E.B. Du Bois's lifetime and work. This places it between the two periods that tend to predominate in Du Bois scholarship: the period from the 1890's into the early nineteen-aughts, with Du Bois's existential and philosophical reflections on black oppression as well as burgeoning innovation in the social sciences at the fore, and the period in the 1930's and 1940's where Du Bois's Marxism and anti-colonial political commitments take center stage.

Coming as it does in this middle period, *Darkwater* rarely receives much holistic assessment as a text unto its own. This is unsurprising, given its eclectic composition: the text alternates between argumentative essays and a variety of narratives and poetic pieces. These latter give the book a coherent through line, in which themes established in the essays are brought together and given space to resonate. This through line, though, is established by weaving together a variety of pieces that stand on their own, most of which had been published in some form prior to *Darkwater*. As literary scholars Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum write, "The disparate parts that comprise *Darkwater* are thus, with few exceptions, read separately, and analyzed as if they exist in isolation."<sup>1</sup> These isolated readings often reflect the general scholarly tendencies toward clustering around the themes of the early and late periods of Du Bois's writings. Essays like "The Souls of White Folk" are often paired with works from the earlier period. Pieces like "Of the Ruling of Men" tend to be read alongside the later works. And the works of poetry and fiction in the text are, for the most part, examined only in the context of comparison with Du Bois's other lyrical writings.

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1. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Introduction: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition," in *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Gillman and Weinbaum (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 6.

These tendencies are not without good reason, as *Darkwater's* diverse range of topics and styles have much to offer for scholars looking at particular themes across Du Bois's oeuvre. Yet there is much about the evolution of his thinking that comes into sharper relief if *Darkwater* is examined as a coherent whole. In this paper, I seek to explore *Darkwater* in this holistic sense, arguing that the text develops the Africana existentialist themes of Du Bois's earlier works and in so doing puts forth a thesis that had been only inchoate prior to this period: that these existential quandaries demanded commitments to not only political but economic democracy in the form of socialism. In putting forth this particular brand of existentialist socialism, I contend that *Darkwater* advances a philosophical position that improves upon the basic precepts of prevailing tendencies in both existentialism and socialism.

### **Existentialism and Shared Responsibility**

What is existentialism? The question is one that invites a plurality of responses, and an examination of the basic philosophical tenets at play demonstrates why such plurality may be unavoidable. Many would object to the claim that Du Bois was an existentialist, and this is unsurprising given the variety of possible associations the term may evoke. Indeed, the vast majority of major thinkers associated with existentialism have, at one point or another, bristled at the term to some degree. Here I will put forth a conception of existentialism that I regard as philosophically coherent and that, as I will show later, can be fairly ascribed to Du Bois. For present purposes, I am concerned with offering a *philosophical* definition of existentialism. Hence, existentialism here does not refer to a historically specific group of thinkers or to a philosophical movement. Our purpose, then, is not to tread the familiar and oft-condescending path of identifying the intellectual currents that influenced a major black intellectual but rather to articulate a meaningful appellation to describe that black intellectual's own thought.

Put very briefly, we may start our philosophical definition of existentialism with the classic slogan that "existence precedes essence." Essence, in this vocabulary, is that which *is*, in the same way, for instance, that we may say a chair *is* a chair. Existence, however, refers to that which confronts choice. Human reality, existentialism contends, involves fundamentally a lived experience of choosing. What a human being *is*, then, is not a matter of destiny determined by supra-human laws but *is*, rather, a product of human choice. A fascist is a human being who has chosen to become a fascist (though not necessarily by

avowing the identity “fascist”), and a communist is a human being who has chosen to become one, etc.

In short, for existentialism, what we *are* is a product of the commitments we make, and the choice to make such commitments is inevitable. A caveat here is that this does not mean that all such choices are openly acknowledged. The key notion here is that of *mauvaise foi* or bad faith, which, in the existentialist tradition, means a choice that disavows its own status as chosen. In bad faith, human beings often state “I had no choice but to ...” For existentialism, though, human acts are always chosen.

Many are inclined to jump ship at this point, insofar as this would seem to imply an expansive and onerous conception of human responsibility. But this brings us to a second caveat. For existentialism, one confronts an indelible responsibility for one’s choices, but it is also the case that one is not alone in producing the array of options from which one shall choose. That is to say, if the individual is ever-confronting responsibility for choosing what to be, such choices are nonetheless made in the context of a social world that provides an array of ready-made paths, identities, values, and meanings for the individual to take up. So, too, may such a world constrain or expand these arrays for particular individuals and classes: the bourgeois is one who confronts a broad set of socially-sanctioned viable options; the lumpen-proletarian is one who confronts an eviscerated set of viable options.

The bourgeois lives a life dictated by his or her choices, but such choices emerge out of a situation wrought by the choices of countless others. It is likewise for the lumpen-proletarian. We may say that the bourgeois is granted an expansive set of *liberties* whereas the lumpen-proletarian, like the slave, is one whose liberties are with few exceptions nullified. As in the case of slave-masters, such liberties are often taken to their extreme in *license*, in which one has the liberty of acting as one wants without repercussion. For existentialists, though, “freedom” is distinct from liberty or license. Freedom means that one chooses, and, indeed, that one *must* choose. To use the language of Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, human reality is such that it is *condemned* to freedom, and the discomfiting anguish that attends such condemnation is a stimulus to bad faith.<sup>2</sup>

A source of such anguish is the paradoxical nature of human responsibility that this account implies. If the lumpen-proletarian and

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2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

the slave *must* make choices amid a world that denies them all viable options, then they experience themselves as having in some sense to take responsibility for their own oppression. In other words, even if I am not the source of my oppression, the central tenets of existentialism suggest that I nonetheless confront a world in which I am made to be responsible for that oppression. Responsibility, in short, can be absurd, but to point out such absurdity does not make it go away.

These limitations on one's options, these furnishings or negations of liberty and license, constitute one's *facticity*, to use existentialist vocabulary. Freedom means that an existence chooses what to be, hence, whatever one has been, one may always elect to become different in some sense. Yet choice always emerges out of a context, and facticity denotes that which precedes choice. Human life, then, is an incessant transcendence of that which is factually given. Yet to say that this transcendence is incessant is not to say that it is radical or total. Hence, the existentialist conception of facticity is well-described by Karl Marx's famous statement in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>3</sup>

These issues point to matters that have long proven difficult for many existentialists. Namely, how does existentialism deal with the question of shared or collective responsibility? Facticity is a product of the choices of many, and although it is rather simple to demonstrate with an existentialist ontology why an individual has responsibilities to others, it is a more difficult matter to explicate the meaning of choices made by groups and collectivities.

The major reference point in discussions of these matters has been the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the two most significant figures who, although with some reservations, came to publicly embrace the "existentialist" label. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* involves careful attention to an ontological description of the individual, but it is not concerned with a normative argument in favor of values favoring the individual. The major normative argument explicitly advanced in *Being and Nothingness* is quite different than a defense, say, of the primacy of the individual (and would, in fact, refute such a claim). Put simply, Sartre contends that human reality, since it is characterized by "existence" rather than "essence," is suffused with a paradoxical desire to merely *be*. Freedom is a form of "being" only by paradox:

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3. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.

we are what we are, but this is only through choice, and the nature of choice is to become what one is not. A chair *is* a chair, but I exist as me, and as such my existence is burdened with the question of how to change or abandon this “me” that I am, and, indeed, even where I choose to remain the same, I am now the “me” who chose to remain “me,” and the first “me” is different from the second in at least that sense. Yet because what it lacks is the simplicity of being, human reality, Sartre argues, wants what it lacks: to be human is, in some sense, to desire relief from the anguish of having to choose what to be.

Sartre at one point refers to this simply as the desire to be God. God, per classical theodicy, is presumed to be intrinsically good. To be intrinsically good, though, implies a paradoxical absence of responsibility: if I *must* be good, then why is my goodness even relevant? At a base level, human reality is that for which goodness *and* badness are at issue: one can choose to do bad, and even the do-gooder must ultimately confront the question of how one could know, in reality, whether one’s acts are indeed as good as one presumes. Choice, in short, brings the anguish of having to justify one’s choices not only to others but to oneself. Yet the figure of God for many represents that which is good without having to choose whether to be good; God *is* good from such a perspective, in the same way that a chair *is* a chair.

A primary manifestation of this desire to be God would be what Sartre terms the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness is an effort to treat values as a feature of the world itself rather than as products of human agency. “The serious man” is one who does what he does because he *must* do so; he chooses to “be good,” but denies his agency in proffering an articulation of the good. The spirit of seriousness proffers contingent values as if they were necessary. The serious person lives according to ideals that are imagined to be infallible and beyond reproach. In the work of Sartre and Beauvoir, the key normative implication of existentialism, thus, is the central importance of struggling against the spirit of seriousness.<sup>4</sup>

The supposed conflict between existentialism and Marxism thus comes into sharper relief if the argument against the spirit of seriousness is brought to the fore. The simple point is that there have been many Marxists in the spirit of seriousness. The reasons for this are

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4. It can be argued (though space prevents doing so here) that this is also the ultimate normative contention of Sartre’s most important and explicit engagement with Marxism, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. See *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume I*, translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith, revised edition (London: Verso, 2004) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume II*, translated by Quentin Hoare, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006)

multifarious, and, indeed, the above description suggests why the spirit of seriousness is a possible modality for any human commitment. One finds no shortage, for instance, of the paradox of existentialism in the spirit of seriousness, which although philosophically incoherent is nonetheless seductive (though this typically takes the form, albeit at times indirectly, of nihilism, which, as Beauvoir argued in Chapter 2 of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*,<sup>5</sup> is ultimately at odds with existentialism).

The specific pairing of Marxism and the spirit of seriousness, though, has peculiar roots. The Marxist conception of a historical materialist account of human consciousness raises thorny issues about the relation between the normative and the descriptive in Marxist thought. In short, if the account is one in which historical factors determine the thoughts of each human being, then Marxism is a revolutionary force that *has been necessitated* by the contradictions of capitalism (contradictions which had, in turn, been necessitated by prior contradictions, and so on in an endless chain). A survey of how different Marxian thinkers have worked through these matters is beyond our scope. We may clarify the issue by drawing a distinction between accounts of human consciousness in which there is causal *influence* and those in which there is causal *determination*. The existentialist account of human reality as outlined above works within a framework of choice shaped by situation, such that influences constitute the facticity out of which given beliefs and acts emerge. It is one in which social, economic, political, etc. forces may have a probabilistic impact upon consciousness. Yet many Marxists have worked within a framework in which consciousness is constrained at the basic level of *possibility* by such forces. That is to say, for many Marxists, it is *impossible* to act or believe in particular ways given a set of historical conditions. Beliefs and, ultimately, values are thus regarded as products of necessity.

Given such a schema, it is not hard to see why, historically, a sharpening of the conflict between Marxists and existentialists would come about. The existentialist *description* of the individual's role in human reality has been taken by many Marxists as the dialectically-necessitated outcome of bourgeois ideology. Careful debate on this point is often further occluded by the tendency for it to become, ultimately, a conflict between Marxists in the spirit of seriousness and those "serious men" taking up the mantle of existentialism but arguing, ultimately, for a form of individualistic nihilism.

The dynamics of these oft-regrettable debates, though, should not obstruct the basic philosophical points at play. There are forms of

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5. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, pp. 35-73).

Marxism that are explicitly at odds with existentialism due to their accounts of human consciousness as governed by historical forces. Yet the flip side is also important: many strains of Marxism are compatible with existentialism, in which history plays a role in human consciousness but does not have final say. These are ones in which, ultimately, Marxism is regarded as a commitment chosen by human beings, a commitment to pursue ideals articulated by flesh-and-blood human beings, open to evaluation and debate. Before showing how *Darkwater* exhibits precisely this tendency, let us first consider Du Bois's early work in light of our description of existentialism.

### Du Bois's Africana Existentialism

Existentialism, we have argued, is concerned with the status of human values and ideals as chosen. A consequence of this is its concern with how values are lived: existentialism pays careful attention to the anguish, anxiety, and dread of living one's responsibility and commitments. In surveying the concerns of Du Bois's early career, it is clear that both of these themes predominate.

These concerns are clearly present in Du Bois's first major public statement as an intellectual, his 1890 Harvard commencement address, "Jefferson Davis as Representative of Civilization."<sup>6</sup> Davis, he argues, was the embodiment of "the idea of the Strong Man," and the direction of his argument suggests that here "idea" has the same meaning and function as "ideal." This ideal, Du Bois contends, has been the standard for "Teutonic civilization." Though Davis is thus an individual, as an individual he represents an ideal with a strong social grounding and with both individual and institutional manifestations. "Whenever this idea has for a moment, escaped from the individual realm, it has found an even more secure foothold in the policy and philosophy of the State. The Strong Man and his mighty Right Arm has become the Strong Nation with its armies. [A] Jefferson Davis may appear as man, as race, or as nation ..."<sup>7</sup>

The ideal represented by Jefferson Davis was, for Du Bois, dialectically linked to another type. The Strong Man could not exist without "the Submissive Man," and although Du Bois does not here address the extent to which the Strong Man creates and/or constitutes the

6. W.E.B. Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization," in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), pp. 14-16.

7. Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis," p. 14.



Submissive Man or vice versa, he is clear that the Submissive Man has something to offer the world beyond simply facilitating the rise of the Strong. Here in inchoate form is the argument later fleshed out in such works as 1897's "The Conservation of the Races."<sup>8</sup> The ideal put forth by the Strong Man begets, ultimately, a response from the Submissive Man. The thinking of the latter engenders new developments and new ideals. Du Bois concludes his address by stating that his audience, "whose nation was founded on the loftiest ideals, and who many times forgot those ideals with a strange forgetfulness,"<sup>9</sup> owes a debt to humanity to listen to and facilitate the development of the black perspective. The tendency to appeal to white audiences in this way would diminish over the course of Du Bois's career. The central point, though, remained: that out of the experience of oppressors living according to corrupt ideals would come choices and inventions by the oppressed that would ultimately guide humanity toward higher ideals.

"The Conservation of the Races" extends this line of thought. Du Bois warns against the temptation of racial eliminativism, avowing that race does in fact exist. However, surveying the attempts by the European sciences to delineate the races and finding them severely lacking, he proffers a radically different definition of the concept: "What, then, is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily *striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.*"<sup>10</sup> In short, for Du Bois, the very notion of race was linked to the existential matter of striving towards the fulfillment of ideals. "[N]o mere physical distinctions would really explain the deeper differences—the cohesiveness and continuity of these groups. The deeper differences are spiritual, psychical, differences—undoubtedly based on the physical, but infinitely transcending them."<sup>11</sup> Du Bois contends that each of the race groups "are striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, for that 'one far off Divine event.'"<sup>12</sup> Continuing the dialectical argument of the Jefferson Davis

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8. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races," in *The Seventh Son: The Thoughts and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Julius Lester (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 176-187.

9. Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis," p. 16.

10. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races," p. 178. Emphasis added.

11. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races," p. 179.

12. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races," p. 180.

speech, Du Bois argues that “the full, complete Negro message of the whole Negro race has not as yet been given to the world ...”<sup>13</sup> The titular conservation of races is thus mandated by the need for black people to develop and deliver shared ideals that could not emerge if they chose, instead, for the path of assimilation into Americanism.

These ideas are further explicated in perhaps Du Bois’s most widely-read text, the chapter “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from *The Souls of Black Folk*, a revised version of an 1897 essay. There Du Bois lays out his conception of double-consciousness, articulated in terms of the presence of “two warring ideals in one dark body ...”<sup>14</sup> This conflict brings out the experiential dimension of this lived relation to ideals; there is attention to what Du Bois presents as the otherwise unasked question of how it *feels* to be a problem. The American Negro, on this account, is one who encounters the anxiety of serving two mutually unfulfillable ideals and the dread of being unable to extricate oneself from such anxiety. Du Bois devotes endless attention, both in *The Souls of Black Folk* and throughout his corpus, to the *felt* dimensions of racism and oppression, to the sorrow, striving, and passion that accompany a world in which one must choose how to exist despite being deprived of basic liberties.

I have argued above for a philosophical rather than historical definition of existentialism. This brief discussion of Du Bois’s early work should, I hope, suffice to show the basic degree to which he was working through themes that could be characterized as philosophically existentialist. What we may note as *historically* interesting about such work vis-à-vis the existentialist appellation is the degree to which Du Bois is clearly not focused on the individual to the exclusion of collectivities. That is to say, if existentialism is often branded with the label of individualism due to the tendency of its European avatars—Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, etc.—to work through the category of the individual, Du Bois’s work stands in contrast to this tendency. For Du Bois, we are dealing, ultimately, with an existentialist conception of *race* and not of individuals alone.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races,” p. 181.

14. W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, with an introduction by Shawn Leigh Alexander, (Amherst/Boston: UMass Amherst Libraries and University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), p. 3

15. This is a different claim than to say that Du Bois *applied* existentialism in his conceptualization of race and racism. Many philosophers have examined race in terms of European existentialist thought that centers the individual. Du Bois accomplished a different task: he articulated an existentialist conception of race itself.

In this sense, as a matter of historical tendency, it would be fitting to say that Du Bois is to a degree representative of broader tendencies in what may be termed Africana existentialism. We may sketch a conception of Africana existentialism in terms of existentialist philosophical positions expressed in relation to questions raised by modern experiences of enslavement, colonization, and dehumanization. The philosophical questions posed by such experiences, Lewis Gordon argues, center around three questions: philosophical anthropology, liberation, and the metacritique of reason.<sup>16</sup> Major thinkers who have proffered philosophically existentialist answers to one or more of these questions—and here a useful though neither authoritative nor exhaustive list might include Martin Delany, Edward Blyden, Anna Julia Cooper, Amílcar Cabral, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Angela Davis—have tended toward positions that call, ultimately, for reckoning with questions of group identity and the difficult work of articulating shared ideals.

A probabilistic Marxian account of influence is appropriate here, insofar as the major figures of European existentialism are, by and large, organically linked in some fashion or other to the European bourgeois and hence to ideological complexes linked to the primacy of the individual. Africana existentialism, by contrast, emerges as organically linked with communities whose oppression is definitively grounded in ascriptions of group identity. The typical case of the oppression of the European worker is attended to by the mythology of possible advancement of the individual. By contrast, it is typical of modern forms of anti-black oppression that race functions to impose hard limits on how far the individual can advance; the mythology is not absent but can only extend so far.

There are, of course, further sociological dimensions involved. As Paget Henry argues, Afro-diasporic philosophy in the Caribbean and the Americas draws upon creolized inheritances from African philosophical groundings, predominant among which are many traditions that are clearly philosophically existentialist.<sup>17</sup> Yet these are so in such a fashion that they are linked to a philosophical anthropology in which the individual cannot emerge without a relation to community and ancestor. That is to say, Africana thought as a modern emergence retains links, albeit ones transmuted under conditions of duress, to an

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16. Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

17. Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), especially Introduction and Chapter 1.

African existentialist lineage in which there is no primacy of the individual.

In that sense, then, we may say that the work of the early Du Bois can be characterized as Africana existentialist thought. There are, of course, many penumbras of socialist and Marxist filiation in this period. Yet it is also certainly the case that Du Bois's Marxian commitments did not achieve explicit or mature formulation until later years. How might such commitments be understood as of a piece with the Africana existentialism of the early Du Bois? To answer, let us now turn to *Darkwater*.

### ***Darkwater's* Anti-Theodicy**

*Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* includes texts written over the course of two decades. It begins with the latest and earliest of these, the text's postscript and Du Bois's "Credo," respectively. The former places the text as one dealing with universal themes—matters that those who live must, ultimately, come to reflect upon. Du Bois states that he "venture[s] to write again on themes on which great souls have already said greater words" because, having "been in the world but not of it [and having] seen the human drama from a veiled corner," he "may strike here and there a half-tone, newer even if slighter, up from the heart of my problem and the problems of my people."<sup>18</sup> In short, *Darkwater* seeks to address human themes more rigorously through careful attention to problems made evident through the experience of dehumanized and oppressed people.

This suggests a peculiar importance to the opening line of the "Credo," which was first published in 1904 and is re-published in *Darkwater* in 1920. "I believe," it begins, "in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell."<sup>19</sup> The wording here is particular. A more commonplace statement would be to declare "I believe *that* God made of one blood all nations." In other words, Du Bois could have proceeded with a theological argument that begins with faithful belief in God and moves toward an elaboration of why such a God must be committed to or commensurate with human equality. Du Bois's belief "that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no

18. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, Dover Thrift Edition, with an introduction by Manning Marable (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), postscript.

19. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 1.

essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development"<sup>20</sup> suggests that what is at issue is not *whether* a God already articulated would have created human beings thusly but rather *that* God is only worthy of belief insofar as God is commensurate with—or, indeed, emblematic of—such principles.

These matters are taken up in "A Litany at Atlanta," the first of many poetic texts in *Darkwater*. The litany, initially written and published in 1906, introduces theodicean questions that predominate throughout the text. The question raised in the litany is easily summed up by the title of William R. Jones' 1973 classic that was partially inspired by it: *Is God a White Racist?*<sup>21</sup> Lynchings and white terrorism abound, and yet God is silent. "Is this Thy Justice, O Father?"<sup>22</sup> If God is all powerful, then is the seeming omnipotence of white antiblack racists evidence that God thinks whiteness divine and blackness evil? No divine clarifications are in order, for God remains silent; "What meaneth this? Tell us the plan; give us the sign!"<sup>23</sup>

The "Litany" is delivered from the perspective of a black congregation for whom God's silence is mystifying. It finds its counterpart in the poem included in chapter nine, "The Prayers of God." Here the address is from the perspective of a white believer. War and horror abound; the frame of reference, as indicated by the poem's original publication at year's end in 1914, is World War I. "All hell is loose," declares the poem's speaker, but "Thou sittest, dumb."<sup>24</sup> God is excoriated for permitting such calamity and a demand is issued that God break His silence and speak. While the poem proceeds in monologue, the poem abruptly shifts and it seems our white speaker is now in dialogue with God. The speaker seems to have been called to task by God for the spilling of blood. The speaker responds that it was not from war, but from the exercise of dominion— "and over black, not white; / Black, brown, and fawn, / And not Thy Chosen Brood, O God, / We murdered. / To build Thy Kingdom ..."<sup>25</sup> In short, this worshiper had regarded God as a white racist and had, through the agency of himself and his fellows, sought to manifest such divine will. "For this, too, once, and in Thy Name, / I lynched a Nigger,"<sup>26</sup> he continues.

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20. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 1.

21. William R. Jones, *Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology*, with a new preface and afterword (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

22. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 14.

23. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 15.

24. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 145.

25. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 147.

26. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 147.

Yet the encounter with God leads to a realization: “*I lynched Thee?*”<sup>27</sup> The poem’s speaker is led, finally, to wonder whether the horrors of lynching and conlization constitute the real crucifixion of God, as opposed to “that funny, little cross, / With vinegar and thorns ...”<sup>28</sup> At the closing of the poem, the speaker has reached a realization: that God sobs, weeps, and prays. Hence, the matter is not prayers *to* God but the prayers *of* God; God needs the action of humanity, and not the other way around.

To listen to the prayers *of* God rather than pray *to* God suggests a clear response to the theodicean question. An omnipotent God would not need to pray to us, nor for us to answer those prayers. God, then, can be beneficent but lacking in power. This means, in short, that God’s meaning is *as an ideal*—God refers to that ideal of the good but is only capable of agency through human deeds. “A Hymn to the Peoples,” the hymnal that closes *Darkwater*, reinforces this perspective. Although part of the traditional function of a hymn is to bind the community that sings it, the hymn is also typically addressed to the divine. That this hymn is *to* the peoples—and not only “the people” as a mass, but “the peoples” as an array of races, nations, etc., each possessing its own strivings and ideals—suggests that divine agency here is that which would be achieved through humanity. Hence, the lines that close both the hymn and *Darkwater* as a whole: “Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce, / To make Humanity divine!”<sup>29</sup>

The spirit of seriousness involves a peculiarly theodicean grammar. The spirit of seriousness regards values as ready-made, that is, as material features of a given world. The notion of God as dually beneficent and omnipotent suggests that divinely-created goodness can be a material feature of the world. The serious believer need simply manifest the substance of grace which has already been imputed in her/him. Secular forms follow the same pattern. Consider theodicies of “the market,” in which it is said *both* that the market has all-determining power to regulate human affairs *and* that such power is the highest ideal of human conduct. Given the truth of the former, the appeal to the latter should be utterly irrelevant. Yet market fundamentalists put forth this joint thesis as a theodicy: convert to our side not only because it is good, but because you also have no choice. But the effort to convert those who one avows have no choice in the matter betrays an intrinsic dimension of *mauvaise foi*: it is the converter, ultimately,

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27. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 147.

28. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 147.

29. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 162.

who is *choosing* to regard “market forces” as ideal. It is not the substance of the world itself that provides or guarantees such ideality. Du Bois, in offering an anti-theodicean conception of ideals, rejects the spirit of seriousness in this manner. God can refer to the human ideal, but God’s agency is thereby purely contingent. It is neither *a priori* nor necessary that God possesses divine power to back that ideal.

That a secular spirit of seriousness was on Du Bois’s mind and was a direct target of his argumentation is made clear in what has been regarded by many as *Darkwater*’s most incendiary essay, “The Souls of White Folk,” originally published a decade earlier. Whiteness—which Du Bois notes at the outset as something historically produced and of recent vintage—is given simple definition: “the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!”<sup>30</sup> Whiteness, in short, is not a matter of phenotype but is, simply, an existential commitment—and, extending the thesis of the Jefferson Davis speech, a commitment to the ideal of the Strong Man. The Strong Man is he who owns the earth by virtue of the thesis that might makes right. Might making right, of course, is a theodicean spirit of seriousness: what is good is no more and no less than that which is powerful (and that which is ideally good is no more and no less than that which is ideally powerful). The “soul” of whiteness, then, is the Strong Man in the spirit of seriousness. This attitude towards value, in turn, is manifest in the national project of the United States:

[S]ay to a people: “The one virtue is to be white,” and the people rush to the inevitable conclusion, “Kill the ‘nigger!’”  
Is not this the record of present America? Is not this its headlong progress? Are we not coming, more and more, day by day, to making the statement “I am white,” the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality?<sup>31</sup>

This has, of course, two implications. The first is simply that, if whiteness serves as the spiritual ideal of not only whites as a race (in the Du Boisian sense) but of a nation as well, then that nation will employ its might toward the “ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen” both at home and abroad, meaning racist violence on a global scale. The second implication, as Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness had put forth, was that for blacks to take the American ideal as their own is for blacks, ultimately, to adopt an anti-black consciousness and hence a self-averse existential condition.

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30. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 18.

31. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 20.

That there would be “souls of white folk” and not simply souls of individuals who happen to be white would be a consequence of the existential and dialectical conception of human identity already present in Du Bois’s early work. Human identity, for Du Bois, develops in relationship to ideals, and this is inclusive of the personal and individual element of choosing one’s values but also very much influenced by the shared and collective forms of valuing that condition the facticity of the individual. It is clear that for Du Bois not all whites have this particular “soul.” But the flip side is that this “soul” is, nonetheless, a being at issue for all whites, insofar as it constitutes the factual limit against which they might need to struggle to attain higher ideals. “A true and worthy ideal,” Du Bois writes, “frees and uplifts a people; a false ideal imprisons and lowers.”<sup>32</sup> The American national project, then, is one in which both whites and blacks have to struggle with a situation in which a tendency toward fulfilling an ideal that imprisons and lowers is inherited. The struggle to strive for higher ideals is paramount.

Where might such higher ideals be located? Here, again, Du Bois provides imagery owing to the religious that suggests a clear answer. In “The Second Coming” and “Jesus Christ in Texas,” we encounter short stories in which Jesus is black (or, at least, a person of color of African descent). A black Jesus represents the divine and we find a clear schism. Black characters in the stories instantly recognize the black divine before them. White characters generally do not, and the “whiter” they are (existentially speaking), the further they are from recognition. They need to come to the realization that the speaker in “The Prayers of God” (later in the text) comes to: that in lynching blacks (as occurs in “Jesus Christ in Texas”) they are lynching the divine.

This theme is developed in the very brief story, “The Call.” It concerns a king, but the thick layer of biblical allusion involved makes clear that the king stands allegorically for God. The king senses enemies at the gates and issues a call to his servants to come to his aid. The servants pretend not to hear. The call is repeated to no effect. A third call brings forth one servant. The king welcomes her, but she expresses hesitation, for, she explains, she is lowly—merely the servant of the king’s servants. The king smiles, undeterred, and asks for her help. She worries, though, she is unfit, for she is a woman. “Go then, mother of Men,” the king replies.<sup>33</sup> She has one last worry: she is black. The king swipes his veil aside to reveal his own black countenance, and the woman sets forth to battle.

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32. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 20.

33. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 94.



### ***Darkwater's* Socialist Ideal**

God as an ideal for Du Bois, then, is simply black. Again, such blackness would be existential rather than phenotypical. What, then, is this ideal's existential content? Here "The Call" connects to an answer provided in "The Servant in the House." There Du Bois addresses a problem in African-American strivings. White Americans view blacks as fit only for service, for a menial form of labor in which, simply, there remains the grammar of bondage to a master. The "servant," then, amounts to a neo-slave, one who is degraded and subordinated, who does not merely sell labor-power for a wage but sells, ultimately, a subservient self-presentation. For many blacks, then, to escape from the class of servants is held up as an ideal. Yet the problem is that many cannot imagine such escape beyond its obvious marker: to have servants of one's own. In other words, Du Bois raises the obvious problematic of class mobility as being no solution to the problem of class oppression. And, indeed, Du Bois worries about efforts that might throw out the baby with the bath water. If there is a demeaning and dehumanizing dimension of being a servant, it does not follow that the forms of domestic labor associated with such servitude are below human dignity. Hence, Du Bois asks, "can we not, black and white, rich and poor, look forward to a world of Service without Servants?"<sup>34</sup> In short, for Du Bois, *service* can be ideal without requiring *servitude*—that is, the form of subordination that mandates the dehumanization of the servant.

This notion of service without servants would seem to be a culmination of the concerns of the early Du Bois. If the white is the Strong Man and the black the representative of the "Submissive Man" in the early speech on Jefferson Davis, then the dialectical relationship between the two produces a further term. That is to say, the ideal Du Bois has in mind is not the black person who submits to whites but rather the one who, having experienced and observed such servitude develops a dialectical movement beyond it. Such movement entails articulating new ideals that had yet to emerge on the human scene before. The oppression of African peoples by European peoples creates the white and attempts to produce the negro, a subservient figure. I leave the term "negro" un-capitalized here, distinct from Du Bois's usage of "Negro," insofar as what the white *sought* to invent was distinct from what was actually produced. The striving toward the ideal of whiteness seeks to produce negroes but produces Negroes instead (although here

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34. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 69.

there is no uniformity, insofar as choosing to become the white-pleasing negro remains an existential option for the Negro). The Negro, in turn offers a gift to the world, even if the white is existentially committed to seeing the Negro as one who has nothing to offer: this gift, in short, is a black consciousness developed through a critical relationship to the world by way of what Paget Henry, building upon Du Bois, terms “potentiated second sight.”<sup>35</sup>

Hence, the black woman in “The Call” – a servant to the king’s servants – represents, ultimately, what for Du Bois is an existential imperative: to serve the highest of ideals. But that the king, like Du Bois’s other representations of the divine, is both human and black is salient here as well. The ideal to be served is not abstract and otherworldly but is embodied and en-fleshed in the actual material world. To serve the highest of ideals is to serve flesh-and-bone human beings. Hence, there is no ultimate appeal to values in the spirit of seriousness that could be served directly. Any ideal transcending human existence could only be served by human service *to human beings*. “The Call” and “The Prayers of God” both speak to a notion of divinity that is powerless without human beings serving it.

This idea is manifest explicitly in “Of the Ruling of Men,” where Du Bois puts forth an ideal conception of rule. Rule, he notes, is a form of service. The problem, though, is that the tendency in human affairs has been toward the establishment of rule in order to serve, we may say, The Strong Man and those in fealty to his interests, meaning that systems of rule are set up in opposition to a dialectically excluded third who are to be excluded from any input in the matter of ruling. To fulfill the ideal of rule would require fulfilling two necessary demands.

The first of these is that rule be by all. There is an epistemic component to rule in which rule is premised on consciousness of that which is ruled. People who are ruled, and the endeavors in which they are engaged, are most likely to be best known by themselves and their fellows, rather than rulers whose class advantage renders them inattentive to the realities of the ruled. Hence, Du Bois calls for rule as a universal democracy rather than one circumscribed by gender, race, class, or distinctions of qualification. One important consequence is that Du Bois is clear in calling for an industrial democracy. It is

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35. Paget Henry, “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” in *Journeys in Caribbean Thought: The Paget Henry Reader*, eds. Jane Anna Gordon, Lewis R. Gordon, Aaron Kamugisha, and Neil Roberts (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), pp. 38-46.

workers, he argues, who understand the work, and not capitalist managers nor even Marxist forms of centralized planning. This is one among many senses in which *Darkwater's* commitments are clearly socialist, and while space does not permit a treatment of the differences among the terms Marxist, socialist, and communist, let us say simply that Du Bois offers a socialism that may be compatible with Marxism and/or communism rather than a particular breed of Marxism or communism that is incompatible with socialism. Another consequence, then, is that for Du Bois, the ideal of rule calls, ultimately, for the struggle for ideal and universal education. The requirement of educational qualifications is used to divide, undermine, and exclude. For democracy (industrial and otherwise) to function, those who rule must be ideally educated. This means not that ideal education is held out as a bar to entry but rather is established as the first and most weighty demand upon the national project. A democratic nation needs to be committed above all to the project of producing educated citizens—and, given Du Bois's internationalist commitments, such a project taken to its logical conclusion entails a radical commitment to the education and enhanced knowledge of humanity writ large.

The second basic demand of rule, besides it being *by* all, is that it be *for* all. Du Boisian democracy does not value the rights of each to be educated in order to best articulate their individual interests and then represent this interest in a competitive deliberative forum. No: the point of democracy is to facilitate decisions that serve the interests of all. This does not mean a Pollyanna effort to reduce the interests of all to a simple formula. That would amount, as we have seen, to a form of the spirit of seriousness in which, ultimately, human beings' interests can be definitively established because they are fixed by a transhistorical essence. What our interests are can change—and, indeed, in some sense those interests ought to change. The process of articulating those shared interests is a communal one for which much debate—and, hence, much critical process of learning and evaluating knowledge—is necessary. Rule ultimately is called upon not to serve the static and fixed interests of a given and final ideal but rather of those ideals that emerge through the messy developments of human lives lived.

That such rule must be *for* all suggests, of course, socialist and Marxian elements. Marxists, he notes, have made progress toward that very ideal. A problem, though, is that many Marxists had taken on the attitude of the Strong Man vis-à-vis Negroes. For many, black people were beyond the pale (so to speak) of those to be served by organized labor. And even for many revolutionary socialists, black people were seen as having no *intellectual* contribution to make to such

revolutionary struggles or to the states and institutions that they would eventually beget. In this sense, Du Bois's argument suggests that the failures of many Marxists to develop a mature understanding of dynamics of racism and white supremacy revealed a greater problem that we have suggested above can be interpreted in terms of a Marxian spirit of seriousness.

These matters are fleshed out in the chapter "Of Work and Wealth," which takes the East St. Louis Race Riots in 1917 as its point of departure. There the northern industrialist is treated as the figure devoted to learning in order to exploit. The masses of white workers are kept ignorant by the industrialist in order to secure their wage labor at lower rates. Black workers are the fulcrum of the industrialist, for the racism of the white masses permits the hyper-exploitation of both black and white alike. The white invests more heavily in a racist sense of honor erected on a foundation of antiblackness than in securing higher wages. Where whites develop labor power, industrialists may turn to blacks as scabs to break the unions, all the while reinforcing the anti-black racism of white workers. Even where blacks are welcomed into labor movements, they are given subordinate roles and typically excluded from the more skilled guilds, undermining the bargaining power of all. To fulfill a socialist ideal, then, labor must commit to solving the problem of the color-line, not as an eventual byproduct to be achieved after class revolution, but as a necessary component of the development of an anti-capitalist consciousness. This entails, ultimately, a labor movement that regards black people as *those it must serve* rather than those who can be recruited as its servants.

This conception of service without servants is manifest, as well, in Du Bois's treatment of colonialism and gender. In "The Hands of Ethiopia," originally published as "The African Roots of the War" in 1915, Du Bois analyzes World War I as the product, in short, of a world governed by whiteness. "Ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" meant a world divided between masters and servants, a division, clearly, along a global color-line. World War I was the consequences of the imperial contradictions that such colonial commitments engendered. A necessary antidote to the root causes of the war, for Du Bois, was the end of colonialism. The nations of Africa and the rest of the world needed to be able to rule by and for themselves. Yet Du Bois goes further in his analysis. European colonialism had involved a coalitional structure: nations competed with each other but also collaborated in erecting a global imperial system with Europe at its head. The cleavages in such a system begat the terrors of World War I visited upon the metropole (but, Du Bois notes, nonetheless visited first upon the colonies). What

would a post-colonial Africa need to look like? It would need to go further than Europe had in terms of an international system of federation, in which nations could have distinct national identities and interests but were called upon, ultimately, to serve the interests of all. An international African state would mean a form of rule by all Africans for all Africans, though without—as did Europeans—presuming that all Africans could be flattened and reduced to homogenized status.

The matter is strikingly represented in the short story “The Princess of Hither Isles,” in which a white princess is called upon by a white king to facilitate his colonial efforts. The princess rebuffs the king’s entreaties: the land and its gold belong, she maintains, to its people, personified here by a poor black beggar. The king violently responds, but the princess does not budge; in the end, she rips out her heart in offer to the beggar, and the king bitterly cuts off her hand. She is undeterred, and leaps to certain death in order to be free of the king’s tyranny. The allegory can be read on many levels. There is the theme of the smaller nations and states’ need to combat the major colonial empires by siding with those in the colonies. There is, as well, the thematic relation to the need of white workers to side with the most oppressed against the bargains of the capitalist class. There is also, obviously, the matter of gender. White women, Du Bois argues in “The Damnation of Women,” are oppressed. They are to be, in short, servants of white men. The reign of lynching as a “protection” of white women against black men is to be accepted by white women as affirmation that white men value them. Yet this is a condescending and ultimately dehumanizing form of valuing. Would white women, then, be willing to risk their lives to fight against oppression *tout court* by taking a stand with people of color against their mutual oppressors? This theme is returned to in *Darkwater*’s final (and longest) story, “The Comet,” in which Du Bois explores the matter of what happens to a racist white woman’s consciousness when confronted with a black man in the apparent radical absence of white male power.

“The Damnation of Women,” though, raises another dialectical point. The oppression of white women is brought about through a system in which they are infantilized in order to be the servants of men, as playthings, subservient mothers, and objects of sexual desire. Yet black women, within such a system, were not regarded as properly feminine. This did not emancipate them from the oppression faced by women: they were still sexually assaulted and abused and still faced the onerous burdens of the peculiar system of domestic labor (often *in addition* to other labor demands, in contradistinction to the bulk of white women). Yet being outside of the ideology of femininity, Du

Bois suggested, presented them with a differential existential situation. This was one, he contends, in which they could *liberate themselves* from the damnation of women. That liberation from an oppressive imposition of infantilized femininity did not, in itself, liberate black women altogether is obvious, insofar as this does not itself entail the eradication of the classed and raced systems of labor and power. Nor, too, does Du Bois treat such a matter as a foregone conclusion: there are many black women who take on the misogynist ideal of femininity. Yet Du Bois's point is that, liberating themselves from the yoke of being servants to man, many black women devoted their lives instead to a higher ideal: to serve the cause of liberation. Hence, as in the "servant's servant" black woman in "The Call," the liberatory, democratic, and socialist ideal argued for by Du Bois is one that had been dialectically achieved in the souls of black women through a form of potentiated second sight.

### The Immortal Child

After suggesting this ideal of service without servants, Du Bois writes: "A miracle! you say? True. And only to be performed by the Immortal Child."<sup>36</sup> This cryptic remark is clarified in the later chapter aptly titled "The Immortal Child." Much genius, he notes, is lost to the world because the world does not invest in it. Echoing themes in Anna Julia Cooper's classic essay "What Are We Worth?"<sup>37</sup> he bemoans that there is much of value that is simply never developed. This is because, on the one hand, many people face burdens too extreme to devote time to developing their talents, and, on the other hand, because far too little is invested in the development of those talents. The radical commitment to universal education is thus not only requisite for democracy but is necessary to achieve the heights of human flourishing.

The Immortal Child is humanity's horizon, ever present, ever in the future. What the Immortal Child can achieve is unknowable. To limit the Immortal Child in advance is folly. We have seen that such limits are related to the spirit of seriousness: if we state full knowledge of the ideal to be served, then no one else need be involved in the process of articulating ideals. My values in the spirit of seriousness

36. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 69.

37. Anna Julia Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including a Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters*, edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 161-87. That Du Bois does not cite Cooper on this point or elsewhere is one of *Darkwater's* most shameful elements.

become self-sufficient. But Du Bois suggests instead that the figure of the Immortal Child speaks to the intrinsic incompleteness of human ideals. There is an existential paradox in the striving that Du Bois ultimately calls for: it is a striving to bring about an ideal that could not now be fully articulated. God, of course, is a fitting figure to represent such an ideal, provided the attachment to God's omnipotence is removed, because God is ineffable. God remains silent, leaving the hard work of articulating what God "meaneth" to those who live. Yet this hard work is called upon in order to serve God, not to abandon God.

God, of course, needs to be served on Du Bois's account. So, too, for the Immortal Child. The infinite *possibility* that the Immortal Child represents does not amount to an omnipotence. The Immortal Child is starved and suffocated without the help of those who live. In "The Children of the Moon" and "Of Beauty and Death," Du Bois evokes the profound anguish that such a situation engenders for living. To live in the "Here and Now" is to encounter oppression and terror; it is to deal with the incessant dread of ever-encountering a world that is neither ideal nor under one's command. The only exit from such anguish is death. Yet the problem is that, should *I* choose such an exit, this ugly end shall be the only exit available to those who succeed me. A beautiful future is possible only if I take up my situation through the project of serving the Immortal Child. I cannot fulfill the highest of ideals today, but I can build a world in which the Immortal Child may have sufficient liberty to do so. Here there would be reason to want the efforts represented by the spirit of seriousness, which would try to render the Immortal Child a fixed substance, an ideal articulated in advance; this avenue would offer relief from the anxiety of having to anticipate what one who does not yet exist will need. But there is no relief in sight: to serve the Immortal Child is to take up the anguish of having to make difficult decisions to serve a beautiful future that is tragically beyond guarantee.

These reflections suggest two important implications. The first is that Du Bois, in offering what I have argued is an existentialist socialism in *Darkwater*, offered a Marxism that is ultimately more desirable than that proffered by many of his contemporaries. For many, Marxism represented a God both fully-articulated and implicitly omnipotent. Du Bois's socialist commitments could not, like those of some of his peers, be subordinated to the party line, to a Serious Marxism. This meant that Du Bois was, like many other of his fellow black intellectuals, engaged in the critical struggle for an alternative conceptualization of socialist and Marxian thought. This struggle, it bears noting, was

present throughout Du Bois's adult life and was not merely a product of his turn to Marx's writings in the 1930's. The arguments of "Of the Ruling of Men," for instance, were presaged by his unpublished paper "The Socialism of German Socialists,"<sup>38</sup> and the central problems analyzed in "The Hands of Ethiopia" and "Of Work and Wealth" develop an insight that had struck Du Bois in Germany: that Germans were "trying to translate colonial imperialism into home socialism ... [T]he higher wage of the home workers was going to be based on the low wage of the colonial workers."<sup>39</sup> Yet the early Du Bois also saw sweeping economic change and eradication of a *de facto* caste system as integral to black liberation; his response to failings in extant socialisms was neither to excuse them through theodicean rationalization nor to use them as pretext to abandon the socialist project wholesale. As he wrote to Isaac M. Rubinow circa 1904, "While I would scarcely describe myself as a socialist still I have much sympathy with the movement & I have many socialist beliefs." By the 1910's, Du Bois's embrace of socialism was much more explicit, as evidenced by his writing and editorial work for *The Crisis*<sup>40</sup> and *The New Review*.<sup>41</sup> In short, *Darkwater* reflects a deepening of Du Bois's pursuit of a socialism whose ideality would be the product of ongoing human struggle rather than an infallible and panacean one whose ideality could be regarded as a logical necessity.

The second implication is that Du Bois's work has helped, we may say, establish the facticity we now inherit. Du Bois showed future

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38. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Socialism of German Socialists," ca. 1896, W.E.B Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Available online at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b230-i101>.

39. William T. Ingersoll, oral history interview of W.E.B. Du Bois, ca. June 1960, W.E.B Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, pp. 106-7. Available online at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b237-i137>.

40. Socialism was a frequent topic in *The Crisis*, with Du Bois voicing his clear support for socialist solutions regularly but also often addressing the shortcomings of socialists with regard to racism and its manifestations. See, for example, "Forward Backward" in Vol. 2, No. 6 (October 1911, pp. 243-4).

41. *The New Review* was a socialist journal that ran from 1913-1916, subtitled *A Weekly Review of International Socialism* in volumes 1-2 and *A Critical Survey of International Socialism* in volumes 3-4. For information and digitized archives, see <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/newreview/1914/index.htm>. Du Bois served on the board of editors for much *The New Review's* run and contributed three articles: "A Field for Socialists" in Vol. 1, No. 2 (January 11, 1913, pp. 54-7), "Socialism and the Negro Problem" in Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1, 1913, pp. 138-41), and "Another Study in Black" in Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 1914, pp. 110-4).



generations the respect of treating them as incomplete, not pre-determined. We today retain the responsibility for manifesting the ideals Du Bois articulated then. This means not only the project of serving ideals generated through the strivings of black liberationist struggles but also the difficult task of continuing to explore and critically re-evaluate those ideals, as well as to articulate new ones, even if only, as Du Bois said in the postscript to *Darkwater*, striking a note a “half-tone” different than what preceded it. The meaning of socialist ideals worthy of being served, then, is one that has yet to be fully resolved, not because of some critical and fatal shortcoming in socialist theorizing to date but because it is desirable that this be the nature of the ideals for which we fight.

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