

**Truth needs values: exploring Du Bois' truth-seeking attitude as an alternative to a value-free ideal
for science**

Abstract

The 'value-free ideal' (VFI) holds that science should be carried out in accordance only with so-called epistemic values so as to maintain the objectivity of its methods and conclusions. Such has been the guiding principle for scientific enquiry explicitly since the 20th Century, and implicitly since the Enlightenment. Yet, as Heather Douglas rightly draws attention to, science cannot be separated from society; this opens the door to criticisms of both the possibility and permissibility of the VFI. The question then is, what alternative ideal pays due though measured consideration to both the epistemic and non-epistemic values that good science requires? This is where, I argue, the 'truth-seeking attitude' (TSA) employed by W.E.B. Du Bois comes in. Using his uniquely liminal position as an academic and member of African American population in Philadelphia (the subject of his sociological research), Du Bois parallels the aim of the natural sciences: generating generalisable knowledge through rigorous empirical research, and meanwhile reappropriates and democratises the concept of truth. I contend that when we understand the TSA in terms of *primary* truth seeking though not *purely* truth seeking, it is not only wholly separate from the VFI, but offers itself as suitable replacement insofar as it accounts for epistemic and non-epistemic values in a warranted balance. This interpretation follows from Du Bois own presentation of his work, resting, I contend, in part on an intersubjective notion of truth that coheres with

his pragmatist commitments and mediate aims of social reform. Understood as such, the TSA appears to speak to modern-day feminist critiques in the philosophy of science – offering an intricate and compelling proto-response to the debate surrounding the role of values.

Introduction

Instigated by the 20th Century scientific boom, a prolific debate emerged surrounding the permissibility and role of values¹ within science, in turn challenging the role of science itself. Early discussion endorsed the assumption that scientific conclusions and judgements are (or should be) “impartial, grounded in facts, and ris[ing] above the personal”.² Hence, it was believed that only ‘epistemic’ values - namely those involved in directing research towards its goals and setting the parameters for what counted as sufficient evidence - were permissible.³ Yet, as Heather Douglas points out, science operates within society. As such, it is a mistake to think that just because it may be “our best source for reliable knowledge about the world”, it is (or should be) a “value-free enterprise”.⁴ Although such a ‘value-free ideal’ (VFI) preserves a

¹ Putatively: principles, interests and standards held by individuals or groups

² Fosl, P. (et. al), *The Philosopher’s Toolkit*, (Wiley: Blackwell, 2020), pp.225

³ Douglas, H. *Values in Science*, (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.610 - citing Rudner, R. 1953, and Churchman, W. 1948

sense of objectivity, the view fails to recognise the influence of “contextual values, interests, and value-laden assumptions”⁵ beyond the moment of scientific inference. For proponents of the VFI, we ought to limit the influence of ethical and social values to the peripheries of science - for example, which methodologies are held to be appropriate. Recent discourse has contested this: by illuminating the difficulties of restricting the input of our values in such a way, the debate has shifted towards the necessity of and responsibility in choosing the values we employ. In light of this, maintaining a VFI for science appears to be both a naive and non-preferable option.

Though articulated by various modern scholars, the foundations of this radical revision, I will argue, were laid by the early 20th Century sociologist and activist - W.E.B Du Bois. Inspired by Daniel Steel’s proposal for the permissibility of non-epistemic values insofar as they “promote the attainment of truth”⁶, I thus explore the ‘truth-seeking attitude’ (TSA) Du Bois employed as an “alternative ideal by which to manage values in science”.⁷ I will focus on the TSA as delineated in the context of writings surrounding

⁴ Douglas, H. *Origins of the Value-Free Ideal for Science*, (University of Pittsburgh Press 2009), pp.44

⁵ Longino, H. *Values and Science*, (Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.83

⁶ Steel, D. *Epistemic Values and the Argument from Inductive Risk*, (University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp.15

his empirical study of the African American population in Philadelphia, as paradigmatic of the way in which the TSA operates (not least to combine praxis and theory). Citing key contextual details I will defend the TSA against interpretations that frame it in terms of the VFI, with a particular focus on what I term the ‘objectivity challenge’ that arises from doing so. This will allow me to conclude that the TSA - when paired with the intersubjective notion of truth I believe Du Bois invokes - is indeed successful as an alternative to the VFI.

Section 1: Approaches to scientific enquiry

1.1 The value-free ideal for science (VFI)

The VFI finds its roots in the Humean distinction between facts and values. Hence, whilst not made explicit as an *ideal* until much later in history, it likely had influence over the way science was viewed and conducted in Du Bois’ society. Given our common understanding of a fact as a “worldly correlate of a true proposition”⁷, the (linguistic) presence of facts in scientific discourse is unsurprising. Assuming,

⁷ Douglas, H. *Values in Science*, pp.615 - ie. the foundational scientific value

that is, that we take the common picture of “science [as] a structure built upon facts”⁹ derived from “observation of the world carried out in a careful, unprejudiced way”.¹⁰ Values, on the other hand, are linked to evaluation and subjectivity; as such, they seem to jar with the traditional aim of science (ie. one pertaining to objective discovery). Given that science is concerned with the study of the external world, such an aim seems to follow as an appropriate guide for scientific theory and practice. Therefore, by presenting facts and values as not only discrete but opposing, Hume’s picture positions the VFI as an almost intuitive ideal for science. Yet it was the cold-war climate resulting in a “focus on the logic of science, divorced from scientific practice and social realities”¹¹ which popularised the ideal. Although the VFI acknowledges the role of epistemic values - for example, “accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity and fruitfulness”,¹² we cannot bypass this non-epistemic underpinning. As a value in itself, the VFI must be assessed according to the standard that it sets.

⁸ Honderich, T. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press: 2005), pp.287

⁹ Davies, J.J. *On the Scientific Method: How Scientists Work*, (Harlow Longmans, 1968), pp.8

¹⁰ Chalmers, A. *What is this thing called science?* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.1

¹¹ Douglas, H. *Origins of the Value-Free Ideal for Science*, pp.48

¹² Kuhn, T. *Objectivity, Value Judgement, and Theory Choice*, (University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp.332

Seeking to preserve the integrity of the domain, since it seemed that “science could remain objective even if *some* [epistemic] values were essential to it”¹³, the VFI can be viewed as a reaction against the increasingly unstable social environment. Therefore, whilst it endorses epistemic values, it cannot be one in itself due to its interconnection with non-epistemic values. It fails to satisfy its own criterion. This observation resonates with, what Douglas terms, the ‘boundary’, ‘descriptive’ and ‘normative’ challenges.¹⁴ The first highlights our difficulties in demarcating between ‘epistemic’ and ‘non-epistemic’ values. This is displayed by the dual character of the VFI. For one it is a value reinforcing the objective nature of science and the facts it pertains to. Yet, at the same time, it is a socio-political tool/ reaction in itself - insofar as it maintains the authority of science and autonomy (hence the power) of the agents who pursue it. This leads on to the descriptive challenge, in which feminist philosophers note the prevalence of political values within the history of science. Whether invoked explicitly or implicitly, these have served to reinforce sexism. Take, for example, the pervasiveness of gender-based stereotypes in early descriptions of reproductive biology: whilst the egg is “passively transported [...] down the fallopian tube

¹³ Douglas, H. *Values in Science*, pp.611

¹⁴ Ibid. pp.611-616

[...] sperm are ‘streamlined’ and invariably active”.¹⁵ The normative challenge follows, asserting that the epistemic-authority enjoyed by science is not warranted; given the continual interaction between science and society, science ought to pay consideration to both epistemic and non-epistemic values.

1.2 Du Bois’ truth-seeking attitude (TSA)

Since the main issues arise from a view of values as separable into epistemic and non-epistemic, and the resulting prioritisation of the former, a substitute for the VFI should acknowledge the benefits of the interconnection between different kinds of values. I believe that Du Bois’ TSA achieves this; illuminating both the purpose of science and its function within society. From the striking observation that the 45,000 African Americans in Philadelphia did not form part of the larger social group, Du Bois stressed the “scientific interest and social gravity”¹⁶ of their study. Thus conducting 5000 door-to-door surveys, he gained conclusive evidence for their structural discrimination - resulting (at least in part) from the setup of urban spaces. This underscored their social problems: “failures of an organised group to realise its group

¹⁵ Martin, E. *The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles*, (University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.489

¹⁶ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, (University of Pennsylvania, 1996[1899]), pp.5

ideals".¹⁷ For example, in the Seventh Ward, 829 families were found to be living in one room, and, of the total 2441 families, only 13.7% had access to water-closets.¹⁸ Moreover - highlighting the rarity of Du Bois' social position as an academic and in turn reinforcing his sense of duty - "no Negro [had] been appointed to a permanent position outside the few coloured schools".¹⁹ As I will later return to, Du Bois uses this uniquely liminal position, as both member of the oppressed and well-established scientist, to advance his findings and instigate change. Hence, my emphasis on 'ideals' (fn.17). Pluralising this and applying it to the group, he inverts the concept from its typical use in scientific discourse - regarding objectivity and the VFI. The quotation thus makes explicit the connection between the scientific and the social, meanwhile offering insight into the approach Du Bois will pursue.

Using this combination of his own experience with the data collected, Du Bois highlighted just how integral the struggles of African American people were to broader socio-political issues in the US. In this way, he paralleled the approach traditionally adopted by the natural sciences: empirical study aimed at

¹⁷ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Study of the Negro Problems*, (Sage, 2000[1898]), pp.14 - my emphasis

¹⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, pp.292

¹⁹ Ibid. pp.89

producing generalisable knowledge. Not only did he illuminate the extent of these social problems, but also, their twofold root: historically-grounded racial inequalities, and an inadequate attention shown towards understanding and resolving them. In failing to acknowledge the necessity of a systematic and unbiased scientific method for the collection of social data, prior studies “hurt the cause of scientific truth”.²⁰ Herein lies the motivation for Du Bois’ approach. If we neglect to perform social studies with appropriate rigour, the agents and their research harm society and “degrade[s] the high-end of truth-seeking”.²¹ Du Bois maintained that by striving towards the attainment of truth (as is the sentiment of scientific pursuits) social reform can be instigated.²² That the uptake of African American college students in the years proceeding his study went from 1000 to 19,000, for example, may be testament to Du Bois’ core idea; holding “the pure ideals of science [...] if we would solve a problem we must study it”.²³ Yet importantly, by reframing sociology as a science, the *primary* motivation for conducting research in the field could not be some political aim, as it had been before.²⁴ This is a point I shall return to later.

²⁰ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Study of the Negro Problems*, pp.19

²¹ Ibid.

²² Morris, A.D. *Du Bois, Scientific Sociology, and Race*, (University of California Press, 2015), pp.36

²³ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Negro Citizen*, (Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 463; and *The Study of the Negro Problems*, pp.5

Section 2: The TSA as an alternative to the VFI

2.1 Is the TSA just a variant of the VFI?

I begin my assessment of the TSA by determining the extent to which it is distinct from the VFI, since shared characteristics will bear significantly on its strength as an alternative ideal. On Liam Kofi-Bright's view, the two are deeply connected - with the TSA taken as a specific *form* of VFI. This consists in two parallel strands: the 'justificatory value-free ideal' and the 'normative-psychological value-free ideal'.²⁵

The former attributes to Du Bois the idea that non-epistemic values have a limited role, only being legitimately relied upon "when deciding what may justifiably be asserted as the conclusion of [scientific] inquiry".²⁶ In acknowledging the essential role of subjective judgement in scientific pursuits, albeit in a restricted way, the TSA as a justificatory VFI can acknowledge the motivation towards objective truth or understanding it shares with the traditional VFI, but can nonetheless avoid the negative implications of such a view. However, Kofi-Bright appears to contradict himself, later stressing that Du Bois believed

²⁴ See eg. Kofi-Bright, L. *Du Bois' democratic defence of the value free ideal*, (Springer, 2018), pp.2234

²⁵ Ibid. pp.2230

²⁶ Ibid.

scholars should rely on purely *epistemic* considerations when deciding what conclusions to report.²⁷ This coheres (at least in part) with Du Bois' attitude - evident for example in his claim that the scientist "must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish, desire and belief".²⁸ Yet, we are left wondering how the justificatory VFI may *itself* be coherent as a reading of the TSA, given the two distinct and arguably opposing presentations of it (Kofi-Bright pp.2230 and 2236).

Perhaps Kofi-Bright's second interpretation strand better encompasses Du Bois' attitude. The TSA as a normative-psychological VFI suggests that "scientists, when engaged in their work, should only be motivated by curiosity, a pure desire to seek the truth".²⁹ This certainly resonates with the nature of the TSA. After all, for Du Bois the core aim of science is the discovery of truth, and "any attempt to give it a double aim, to make social reform the immediate rather than the mediate object of a search for truth will inevitably tend to defeat both objects".³⁰ Although social reform may be a consequence of good science,

²⁷ Ibid. pp.2236

²⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black reconstruction in America*, (New York: The Free Press, 1935), pp.722

²⁹ Kofi-Bright, L. *Du Bois' democratic defence of the value free ideal*, pp.2230

³⁰ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Study of the Negro Problems*, pp.16-17

to make it the primary or ‘immediate’ goal is to treat the practice (sociology in this case) non-scientifically. The destructive consequences of this can be displayed in the presentation of the American civil war by the historians of Du Bois’ time. Misinformation was allowed to pervade the social consciousness for the purposes of “inflating the national ego” and “influenc[ing] and educat[ing] the next generation” in accordance with bias.³¹ This both exacerbated existing social problems and created new ones in the form of deep public mistrust. To rectify this, scientists have a duty not to “conceal or distort facts” in the process of their inquiry or the conclusions they present.³²

Viewing the TSA as a normative-psychological VFI captures this. As Kofi-Bright highlights, Du Bois seemed to believe that presenting scientifically acquired information *en masse* would allow it to better serve its mediate purpose of social reform.³³ Hence, the TSA, so construed, does not advocate for an unobtainable pure objectivity as the traditional VFI does. Again, Du Bois is shown to acknowledge the role of subjective judgements, insofar as they are conducive to truth seeking. However, whilst his project

³¹ Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black reconstruction in America*, pp.714

³² Ibid. pp.722

³³ Kofi-Bright, L. *Du Bois’ democratic defence of the value free ideal*, pp.2240

indeed stems from the realisation that seeking something “besides the discovery and dissemination of the truth”³⁴ underlies various socio-political issues, I do not think this commits Du Bois to the claim that, as Kofi-Bright suggests, “scientists must be [...] motivated by a *pure* desire to ascertain the truth”.³⁵ Driving this view, Kofi-Bright highlights the necessity of public trust in science to not only give the results force (thereby enabling them to drive social change) but to conduct sociological research in the first place, in which public cooperation is imperative. However, framing the TSA in terms of pure truth-seeking places too stringent a constraint on it in my opinion. The very decision to engage in sociological research of the kind Du Bois does, is, for example, a clearly value-laden judgement based not only on wanting to expose the truth, but vindicate the social problems of the African-American community.

Interestingly, this illuminates a possible response to the problem of coherence faced by Kofi-Bright’s first reading (the TSA as a justificatory VFI). Upon retrospection, Du Bois recognised that the nature of the objects of his study (ie. social) made adherence to a strict pure-truth-seeking ideal impossible.³⁶ Du Bois

³⁴ Ibid. pp.2233

³⁵ Ibid. pp.2235 - my emphasis

thereby had to act, motivated by decisions about which hypotheses to pursue, *prior to* the collection of sufficient evidence in favour of or against them. As he elucidates: “I saw before me a problem that could not and would not await the last word of science, but demanded immediate action to prevent social death. I was continually the surgeon probing blindly [...] possibly effective, if I persisted.”³⁷ In this way, the TSA as a justificatory VFI may be seen as aiming towards solely epistemic values having influence over the conclusions asserted, but necessarily permissive of non-epistemic ones in the case of complex sociological studies. Taking this further, the role of such non-epistemic values in combination with epistemic ones when conducting science in line with the TSA is arguably essential for Du Bois’ project: “we wish not only to make the Truth clear but to *present it in such a shape* as will encourage and help social reform”.³⁸ Whilst these comments may render the TSA as a justificatory VFI coherent, they do so at the expense of the normative-psychological reading, hence reflecting a more fundamental incoherence in Kofi-Bright’s view.³⁹ I do, however, acknowledge its significance in the interpretation I have come to

³⁶ Ibid. pp.2237

³⁷ Du Bois, W.E.B. *My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom*, (Clinical Sociology Review, 1990[1944]), pp.46-47

³⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B. *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of Race Concept*, (Oxford University Press, 2007[1940]), pp.63-64 - my emphasis

develop of the TSA: facts are collected in a systematic and non-biased way, but need to be ordered/ interpreted by scientists so as to make their patterns salient to the public. The findings can in turn serve to guide policy decisions. In this way, the scientist, whilst motivated by an epistemic goal, recognises not the influence but the *necessary role* of non-epistemic values in her taking up of this end.

2.2 Facing up to the objectivity challenge

I will thus advance the idea that the TSA should be taken as an alternative to the VFI, and explore the extent to which it may be better. One may contend that, via its emphasis on truth, the TSA reinforces the scientific project towards the development of objective understanding. This seems problematic; it was, after all, the focus on such objectivity that underscored the restrictive and ultimately damaging picture of the VFI (see sect.1). I shall term this the ‘objectivity challenge’. Yet, linking to my prior discussion, in contrast to the view that “promot[ing] social change [is] detrimental to objectivity and detachment”⁴⁰, Du

³⁹ I.e. because Koi-Bright does not propose the two as disjunctive accounts of the TSA as a whole, but as resonating with different aspects of it.

Bois maintained that politics was an inseparable factor in and result from truth-seeking. Through disregarding the epistemic significance of subjective accounts of individual experiences, the science constructed by the VFI is partial. Falling short of the sense of truth and neutrality it desires, it rather reflects the context of the agents who promote it. Within Du Bois' society, these were the instigators of oppression themselves. This has strong echoes of the feminist critique of the VFI (Douglas' 'descriptive challenge'). Since - as I stress, the VFI being a value itself - we cannot separate science from values, feminist scholars highlighted our duty to make active choices about which ones we employ throughout our scientific endeavours. Drawing parallel with Du Bois' project, they recognised the importance of objectivity as a value within science, but redefined this in accordance with a political purpose: the promotion of equality.

Helen Longino captures the position: since "the science is only relevant to the policy making that *accepts the assumptive framework* of that research"⁴⁰ (else it is causally impotent), choosing the assumptions

⁴⁰ Morris, A.D. *Du Bois, Scientific Sociology, and Race*, pp.53

based on the values they reflect is legitimate.⁴² Putting a normative spin on this, Janet Kouraney argues for an “ideal of socially responsible science”⁴³ which holds both empirical activities and social values as necessary features of scientific pursuits. However, assuming a connection between the feminist critique and Du Bois’ own attitude, counterintuitively, generates a further challenge to it. According to Du Bois, the disenchantment of some members of society with science was not with the domain itself, but rather, the ulterior motives of those in charge of the VFI⁴⁴ image of it - white, male, authoritative figures. Therefore, he thinks it crucial to follow what the scientific pursuit of objective understanding actually calls for and give voice to the minority, as a means by which everyone in society will come to see what is right. Such instrumental use of the TSA for a political purpose (ie. an ulterior motive), however, is the very means by which science based in the VFI was used to oppress Du Bois’ own community. In maintaining the integrity and thus authority of science as a discipline for ‘learned’ members of society, the VFI reinforced such inequality by pursuing an exclusionary idea of objectivity. Following suit and

⁴¹ Longino, H. *Conclusion: Social Knowledge*, (Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.231 - my emphasis. See also Douglas, H. 2019, and Longino’s discussion of the inseparability of socio-political values and knowledge in reference to scientific pluralism (2013).

⁴² Ibid. pp.83

⁴³ Brown, M.J. *The source and status of values for socially responsible science*, (Springer, 2013), pp.68

⁴⁴ NB: ‘VFI’ in reference to Du Bois’ society invokes something reminiscent of it (prior to its explication)

utilising a conception of objectivity (albeit, as defined according to truth-seeking) to promote certain socio-political ideas, the TSA may be charged with “replicating the system to which [it] objected”.⁴⁵ This not only undermines the success of the TSA as a possible alternative, but does so by the very criticism Du Bois puts against the image of science constructed by a VFI.

However, first recall that Du Bois sees social change as a significant but necessarily *mediate* aim to the immediate one of truth-seeking. As mentioned previously,⁴⁶ it is only when socio-political aims take the foreground and either disregard the importance of, or actively seek to repress, truth, that they undermine the ‘scientific’ conclusions they yield. Think, for example, of the Platonic idea of a ‘noble lie’ - the dissemination of false information by authority figures on account of its perceived benefit to the public. This brings forth an important distinction: the political or social effect being aimed at through the means of science, and it being an inseparable factor in and consequence of a *primary* scientific aim. It is a mistake to assume that the instrumental value of the TSA, and subsequent endorsement of this on account

⁴⁵ Rath, R.C. *Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W. E. B. Du Bois*, (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.495

⁴⁶ Cf. the civil war example in particular

of its positive outcomes, entails that Du Bois possesses ulterior (corrupt) motives. His goal is first and foremost truth, sought for its own sake, and the recognition that pursuing this can help resolve inequalities is surely only a benefit of the TSA. This is furthermore supported upon noting his situation in a framework where science - particularly the idea of truth - holds significant power and authority. Whilst Du Bois employs terms embedded in scientific discourse, he invokes different meanings to the ones they possess when in reference to the VFI. In fact, he uses the restriction imposed on him via his social context to his advantage; reappropriating and hence democratising the concept of truth. In this way, he is able to shift the power dynamic from within that very framework.

These notes, I hold, reveal that the main challenge to the TSA is founded in misinterpretation. As has been explored, the VFI for science is centred on the discovery of objective (natural) facts. Yet, by restricting scientific pursuits to only those of certain agents in certain fields, it not only fails to actualise its goal of objectivity, but attaches false meanings and negative connotations to core concepts. Whilst I maintain that Du Bois' TSA represents truth more fully and links it to a non-partial (and so not self-

contradictory) notion of objectivity, we ought to be cautious about using this word in relation to his approach. By not explicitly tying truth and objectivity together, perhaps Du Bois was conscious of the limitations of using such language. Moreover, as Lorraine Daston highlights, the concept of “scientific objectivity is neither monolithic nor immutable. [...] we slide from statements about the ‘objective truth’ of a scientific claim, to those about ‘objective procedures’ that guarantee those findings [...]”.⁴⁷ For example, the VFI is motivated by the belief that through objective procedures (ie. a repeatable and reproducible method) science can uncover objective truth (ie. facts about the world). Without even touching upon our various other uses, including those regarding its social role, we can see the terminological complexity surrounding ‘objectivity’. By what I take to be a mischaracterisation of the TSA, Kofi-Bright not only seems to reduce it to what it is not, but in doing so, commits Du Bois to the problematic sense of objectivity attached to the traditional VFI.

Section 3: Du Bois’ conception of truth

⁴⁷ Daston, L. *Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective*, (Social studies of Science, 1992), pp.597

3.1 Pragmatism and intersubjectivity

Appealing once more to his context, it is most plausible that the sense of truth invoked by the TSA is one of intersubjectivity rather than objectivity. This resonates with, but necessarily extends beyond notions of the objective. Such becomes clear if we consider, as Longino does and, following from my discussion, I believe Du Bois would, that experience itself comes about through an interactive process⁴⁸ and “the objectivity of science is secured by the social character of inquiry”.⁴⁹ Underpinning my reading of Du Bois’ thought in an intersubjective light, is his connection with the pragmatist tradition: a school of thought founded in the idea that “Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process.”⁵⁰ Since objectivity is associated with a more dogmatic conception of truth (oftentimes realism⁵¹), it appears to jar with the pragmatist perspective. By defining truth according to its utility in given contexts, pragmatism allows us to retain multiple non mutually-exclusive ‘truths’.⁵²

For example, within Du Bois’ society, although the white middle-class belief that “young educated

⁴⁸ Longino, H. *Conclusion: Social Knowledge*, pp.221

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp.62

⁵⁰ James, W. *The Meaning of Truth*, (Dover Publications, 1909), pp.1

⁵¹ I.e. the idea that truth exists independently of us

⁵² Capps, J. *The Pragmatic Theory of Truth*, (The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2019)

Negros become criminals”⁵³ was true insofar as it had some statistical support, it was equally true that they suffered great discrimination in finding work. One can then plausibly theorise that they turned to crime - perhaps as a form of retribution against an oppressive society, or simply in order to generate sufficient income for survival. As the example serves to show, by privileging facts about the lives and perspectives of certain members or groups, we limit the scope of truth so as to maintain a power imbalance.

Hence, Du Bois seems to be advocating for truth as intersubjective: a web of “contingent, ontologically subjective facts - dependent on human mental states for their existence [...] but facts nonetheless, endowed with epistemic objectivity”.⁵⁴ In this way, it includes the idea of objectivity without committing Du Bois to its complexity and connotational issues. This is embodied by Quine’s contention that “the requirement for intersubjectivity is what makes science objective”.⁵⁵ Whilst I acknowledge Du Bois’ adoption of various philosophical identities throughout his work, the above highlights particular

⁵³ Du Bois. W.E.B, *Evolution of the Race Problem*, (New York Publishing, 1909), pp.145

⁵⁴ Taylor, P. *What’s the use of calling Du Bois a Pragmatist?*, (Wiley, 2004), pp.109

⁵⁵ Quine, W.V. *The Pursuit of Truth*, (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.5

advantages of interpreting his ideas through the lens of his connections with the pragmatist movement.

This clearly, for example, chimes with the sense of action and responsibility at the heart of the TSA; “as revised by Du Bois, pragmatism overcame [...] determinist fatalism” leaving what he termed ‘live options’ for “free-willed agents to affect the world”.⁵⁶ There is, however, notable ambiguity in how we should interpret intersubjectivity in the context of the TSA. On one view, by collecting and presenting the data en masse “truth seeking promotes efficient arrival at true beliefs”.⁵⁷ Whilst the data provides insight regarding the experiences and attitudes of various individuals and groups, *the Truth* stands outside of these facts; it is the macroscopic conclusion that “ultimately will out”.⁵⁸ For example, in the case of Du Bois’ studies, this was that the African-American population in Philadelphia was being systematically oppressed. This picture of intersubjectivity sees truth as something over and above the data. In his capitalisation of truth (fn. 38) and so presentation of it as in some important way unified, Du Bois appears to offer support for this interpretation.

⁵⁶ Rath, R.C. *Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W. E. B. Du Bois*, pp.470 - see also Taylor, P. 2004

⁵⁷ Kofi-Bright, L. *Du Bois’ democratic defence of the value free ideal*, pp.2234

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp.2239

However, this presents subjective facts as important only to the extent that they provide the means for the determining of some objective truth about a state of affairs. Furthermore, the picture steers dangerously close to realism - in almost construing truth as something 'out there' in need of revelation. This, of course, is in tension with a pragmatist stance. Hence we are led to a second interpretation of intersubjectivity: subjective facts are seen constituting the conclusion or composite truth. We can draw parallels with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea that truths are expressions of perspectives:⁵⁹ subjective interpretations of the world all contain some element of truth but do not capture the whole. Perhaps then the greater the number of perspectives, the fuller a picture of the world, and thereby truth, one develops. Claiming that knowledge requires "interpret[ation] through the experience of a large number of individuals"⁶⁰ Du Bois also seems to support this take on intersubjectivity. However, it arguably reduces truth to a set of beliefs or opinions, each with an equivalent 'truth-value', and thereby invokes truth-

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, F. *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, (Atlantic Highlands N.J. Humanities Press, 1979[1873]), OTL.1

⁶⁰ Du Bois. W.E.B, *Human Rights for all Minorities*, (University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 1945), pp.7-8

relativism.⁶¹ This would be incompatible with Du Bois' mediate aim of social reform. Since the aggregate perspective of white oppressors is the majority of the society, this lens on truth would bear most significantly on the conclusion that was generated.

Consequently, it seems that interpreting Du Bois' view in terms of either sense of intersubjectivity over the other is unsuccessful. Hence, I suggest, it synthesises both. This is salient in the pragmatist tenet Paul Taylor ascribes to Du Bois: "the centrality of experience and truths that work"⁶² and manifest in Du Bois' own surgical analogy (fn.37). Subjective facts create a picture of the lived experience of individuals, and the truth that this points to 'works' to the extent that it reflects this picture and calls for response to the issues it may reveal. The data yielded from Du Bois' fieldwork depicts the social realities of the time through a plurality of perspectives, meanwhile pointing to the overarching truth that the majority of social problems being faced were a result of an oppressive system. Here, I agree with Kofi-Bright that

"democratic decision making [ie. the mediate aim of truth-seeking...] goes best when as many people as

⁶¹ The idea that truth is the product of the different conventions that gives rise to it, and so gains epistemic or social authority within that context.

⁶² Taylor, P. *What's the use of calling Du Bois a Pragmatist?*, pp.100

possible are allowed to contribute [and they...] have as much information available to them as possible.”⁶³

Such ‘epistemic understanding’ of what democracy entails, frames truth-seeking as an activity bound to non-epistemic considerations insofar as these permeate subjective facts, but nonetheless directed towards some decision representative of the truth the democratic process reveals. Echoing an intersubjective sentiment, the two interpretations of intersubjectivity need not be mutually exclusive. If we accept this, we gain a more coherent picture of the TSA, able to hold its own against the VFI.

Conclusion

Whilst my work draws heavily on Kofi-Bright’s, I have demonstrated the shortcomings of taking the truth-seeking attitude as a kind of value-free ideal, instead suggesting that it can perform the same role as the VFI (ie. guiding science) without being viewed reductively. Hence, I have argued that the TSA adopted by Du Bois for his research in the social sciences, is a successful *alternative* to a VFI for science.

Taking note of his context as a pragmatist situated in a power dynamic of inequality, it becomes apparent

⁶³ Kofi-Bright, L. *Du Bois’ democratic defence of the value free ideal*, pp.2243

that whilst he is bound to the value-laden terminology of scientific discourse, the sense of truth invoked by the TSA is more akin to intersubjectivity. In this way, Du Bois' TSA is able to retain the integrity of science as a discipline (emphasising the primacy of truth-seeking), meanwhile evading the problems of the VFI. Intersubjective truth combines objective and subjective elements; it recognises the importance of facts regarding individual experiences in constructing both a more 'objective' and expansive picture of the world. By redefining the idea of truth in response to the problematic political undertones of the VFI and biased construal of objectivity this advocates for, the TSA speaks to Douglas' comment on science as entrenched in society. In further conveying its ability to overcome a significant challenge, I have highlighted its strength as a value to ground our scientific pursuits. Yet most interestingly, the use and (as I have argued) success of the TSA as an ideal for science suggests that a *rejection* of the VFI may be just as built into the fabric of the debate about values, as its traditional endorsement. Recognising Du Bois' sociology - far predating the debate about values in science - *as a science*, the TSA appears as both a more plausible and less radical suggestion than its modern-day echoes.

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