

AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY, CIVILIZATION OF THE UNIVERSAL, AND THE GIVING OF GIFTS

Jeffrey W. Crawford, Central State University, U.S.A

Introduction

In 1897 in his “The Conservation of Races,” W.E.B. DuBois argued that race was the central idea of history and that world historical development resulted from racial groups organizing themselves to give their particular messages or gifts to world civilization. Near mid-century Leopold Senghor named the road leading beyond colonialism “Civilization of the Universal.” In ways reminiscent of DuBois, Senghor argued that human civilization was being raised to a higher and universal level through a synthesis of distinctively African and European elements. Toward the end of the century Lucius Outlaw proposed using the “gathering” notion of *Africana Philosophy* to bring together work regarded as philosophy which is done by Africans, African Americans, or “Africanists,” that is, persons who may be neither African nor African American but who recognize the legitimacy of African and African American philosophy and who contribute to its efforts. The primary goal of *Africana* philosophy, according to Outlaw, is “to catalog and study the many creations of African peoples, the contributions of African peoples to the treasure houses of human civilization.”¹

DuBois, Senghor, and Outlaw each espouse some form of contributionism, a common, if not always explicitly acknowledged, construction of historical understanding aimed partly at determining who should get credit for what. Examples of not so historically distant forms of contributionist

thinking might go something like this: From the Egyptian we get grand systems of myth, rules of thumb for successfully solving some mathematical problems, monumental architecture. From the Greek, true science, mathematics, philosophy. The forms of contributionism considered in this paper have to do with Africa and with African people. For some extended time such issues have been raised in a world in which race has been seen as a determinant of identity, culture, and value. The problematic of race, as discussed further below, provides the context for the forms of contributionism adopted by DuBois, Senghor, and Outlaw. Contributionism as it figures in the work of the three authors considered here seems to make two main assumptions:-

1. that general human progress, civilization, takes place through cultural exchange between identifiable groups and
2. that appropriate recognition of such exchanges will play a significant role in overcoming ideological racism.

This paper begins with an extended discussion of DuBois’ “The Conservation of Races” arguing that DuBois’ voice is prophetic as much as analytical or descriptive. DuBois is seen as speaking within a pre-existing tradition, a tradition that continues through Senghor, Outlaw, and others. Finally, there is a brief critical consideration of contributionism and civilization from a perspective 100 years beyond “Conservation.”

DuBois, Race, and the Giving of Gifts

DuBois begins “The Conservation of Races” by posing what is in effect a dilemma. He observes that the African American has an “intense personal interest” in discussions of race because “back of most discussions with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his natural abilities, as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong.”² The upshot, according to DuBois, is a tendency to “deprecate and minimize race distinctions, to believe intensely that out of one blood God created all nations, and to speak of human brotherhood as though it were the possibility of an already dawning to-morrow.”³ DuBois goes on to caution, however, that the reality of race must be acknowledged and that in the United States “the two most extreme types of the world’s races have met, and the resulting problem as to the future relations of these types is not only of intense and living interest to us, but forms an epoch in the history of mankind.”⁴ Thus, DuBois poses the dilemma that while African Americans might wish to minimize the importance of race, the reality of racial difference and contact in the United States is so important that it “forms an epoch in the history of mankind.”

As the discussion continues, DuBois sharpens the horns of the dilemma. He notes that science, in its consideration of the physical dimensions of race “declares, as Darwin himself said, that great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood.”⁵ By this point in the essay, then, DuBois, without explicit argument, has affirmed a doctrine of brotherhood that appears too high, wide, and low to get over, around, or under. Religion and science, though in different

languages, speak with one voice: race is of little importance and the human way passes through the door of solidarity between races. DuBois has presented a dual basis for “deprecating and minimizing race distinctions.” The Bible and Darwin both counsel that it would be imprudent to lean too heavily on the frail reed of race when considering the human condition. But DuBois now turns to an affirmation of the importance of race, writing that beyond “the grosser physical differences of color, hair and bone... there are differences—subtle, delicate and elusive, though they may be—which have silently but definitely separated men into groups... into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and the Sociologist.”⁶ And he concludes, “If this be true, then the history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history.”⁷

In the formulation of his dilemma, DuBois might have quoted Prime and Prince on behalf of themselves and other petitioners who declared in 1779 “Reason and Revelation join to declare that we are the creatures of that God who made of one Blood, and kindred, all the nations of the Earth.”⁸ Thus, on the one hand, religion and science agree that brotherhood trumps race. But on the other, experience trumps an uncritical brotherhood and teaches that “the history of the world is the history, not of individuals... but of races” and that the race idea in human history is the central thought of all history.

Having presented the dilemma and sharpened its horns, DuBois proceeds to define race in a problematically convenient way and then to sketch a theory

of the origins and functions of race which fits his definition. DuBois' definition is tailored to fit his needs not just as an historian and sociologist, but also as an activist.

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.⁹

This definition, made recently famous or infamous by Anthony Appiah for what Appiah claims is an illicit circularity (how can you tell who has a "common history" if you cannot identify them independently of a common history?), seeks to move color, hair, and bone to the periphery and history, traditions, and impulses to the center.¹⁰ Same race members may have different blood and language, though generally not, but they may never have different histories, traditions, or impulses. Further, same race members must be striving together for certain "ideals of life." It may seem that DuBois is defining race into the center of history, at least any history that deals with traditions and impulses and ideals of life, rather than discovering that race is central to history by an impartial sifting of the evidence. And as pure scholarship his approach is, I believe, open to some such criticism. However, DuBois did not create, but discovered personally and as a scholar and activist, a racialized world, a world characterized by a color line that divided wealth and power to the benefit of a privileged minority. Thus, to end the analysis with a criticism that he defined race into the center of history rather than discovering it there is to misread the piece and misunderstand his project.¹¹

The conditions DuBois was forced to address limited his range of appropriate conclusions. Within this context, placing the race idea at the center of history was natural because DuBois saw no other viable idea around which to rally African descended people in America. The debate, which has recently featured Appiah and others concerning the pros and cons of racial designations, was already several generations old by the time DuBois weighed in at the century's turn. He, along with many others within the veil, had concluded that minimizing racial differences in a highly racialized world was ill advised. Rather than minimizing racial differences, DuBois had concluded that a proper theoretical treatment of race was an essential part of successful strategies for uplift. What chance had one to lift the race up, if the race could either not be identified at all, or if significant portions of the race rejected self-identification as members? DuBois' definitional move was natural, given the typically racist tenor of the scholarship and social thought of the day. His definitional move was also well suited as an answer to what he saw as a beckoning necessity.

As "The Conservation of Races" unfolds, we get to the main ideas of interest for the present discussion. From the definition that puts history, tradition, and impulse at the center, DuBois moves to identify "eight distinctly differentiated races", in the sense in which History tells us the word must be used: "the Slavs of eastern Europe, the Teutons of middle Europe, the English of Great Britain and America, the Romance nations of Southern and Western Europe, the Negroes of Africa and America, the Semitic people of Western Asia and Northern Africa, the Hindoos of Central Asia and the Mongolians of Eastern Asia." Admitting that the picture is a bit more complicated than this with several minor race groups being

identifiable, the direction of DuBois' analysis emerges more clearly as he asks and responds to the question, "What is the real distinction between these nations?" The real distinctions are not physical because "no mere physical distinctions would really define or 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."¹² Picking one of the eight distinctly differentiated races as an example, DuBois continues that:

The forces that bind together the Teuton nations are, then, first their race identity and common blood; secondly, and more important, a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life.¹³

Anticipating the conclusion that for the good of all and of themselves African people must recognize and cultivate racial solidarity, DuBois can be seen as using the "Teuton nations" as a case study. The Teuton "nations" are bound together first by "race identity and common blood." Hair, blood, and bone. But physical racial identity is not what really matters in making "nations" into races worthy of attention from the eye of the Historian. From the perspective of the Historian, "a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life" count for more than hair, blood, and bone. DuBois does not stop here, however, but offers a general theory of the mechanisms that drive racial differentiation, of how it is that the deeper "spiritual, psychical" differences coalesce to take on world historical significance, to become the "central thought of all history."

This theory motivates DuBois' claim that the meeting of the extreme types of the English/Teuton and the Negro in America form an epoch in human history. DuBois' theory is stated in suitably naturalistic late 19th century evolutionary terms. The theory is naturalistic and materialistic, yet serves to explain the emergence of the spiritual qualities through which all significant history unfolds.

The whole process which has brought about these race differentiations has been a growth, and the great characteristic of this growth has been the differentiation of spiritual and mental differences between great races of mankind and the integration of physical differences.¹⁴

During the early age of nomadic tribes, basically extended families, physical differences were at an extreme. As cities formed, physical differences within cities lessened because members from different tribal families intermarried. However, spiritual and social differences correspondingly increased between cities because cities became specialized in the division of labor. "This city became husbandmen, this, merchants, another warriors, and so on. The *ideals of life* for which the different cities struggled were different."¹⁵ And as cities coalesced into nations, the same processes of physical integration and spiritual differentiation continued until something like the present (1900) racial/national historical reality emerged.¹⁶

DuBois' account is wonderful in many ways. He gets to keep all the racial mysticism of late 19th century racial romanticism while shedding at least some of its baggage. Racial destiny is real, historically, but for purely this worldly and naturalistic reasons. Further, since DuBois has moved *ideals of life* to the

center of all human history, race preservation and conservation has little to do with hair and blood and bone, but, rather, with matters spiritual. Each great race has a spiritual message to give to world civilization, the message of each race being based on those distinct *ideals of life* toward which it has been striving.

The English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the Romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are striving, each in its own way, to develop (sic) 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, that “one far off Divine event.”¹⁷

DuBois then turns to an account of the conditions necessary for a race to give its full message to world civilization. Arguing from example, DuBois notes that “the messages and ideal of the yellow race have not been completed.” He continues that “For the development of Japanese genius, Japanese literature and art, Japanese spirit, only Japanese, bound and welded together, Japanese inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the wonderful message which Japan has for the nations of the earth.”¹⁸ The corollary holds for the Negro.

We cannot reverse history; we are subject to the same natural laws as other races, and if the Negro is ever to be a factor in the world’s history—if among the gaily-colored banners that deck the broad ram-parts of civilization is to hang one uncompromising black, then it must be placed there by black hands, fashioned by black heads and

hallowed by the travail of 200,000,000 black hearts beating in one glad song of jubilee.¹⁹

So the theory has been presented to resolve the original dilemma which was that:

Those on the receiving end of racial deprecation would just as soon deprecate and minimize racial distinctions. To do so, however, would be to ignore the central thought of all history, for it is not individuals, but races that make history through the pursuit of distinctly different *ideals of life*.

To recap in more detail, science and religion are correct in their affirmation of brotherhood. Differences of hair, blood, and bone, great as they may seem, are ultimately superficial. Racial difference, as studied by the scientist of the physical, however, is not real racial difference. Real racial difference is the purview of the historian and the sociologist. And this kind of racial difference does seem to divide us, for different races strive to realize distinctly different *ideals of life*. Thus, the important racial differences are psychical, not physical. However, even here in the realm of real differences brotherhood is maintained, because it is the common destiny of each distinct racial group to offer to the whole of humankind its distinct spiritual message. All races share in being subject to the natural law of racial differentiation which presents each race with a specific historical destiny. We need not know in advance exactly what the distinct gifts of each race are to know that each race has such distinct gifts to give. Yet, to fulfill its destiny each race must discover for itself through self organization and sacrifice its distinct message. Only then, can its banner fly from the gaily colored “ram-parts” of civilization.

And what is the message to be more fully delivered before that uncompromising black banner can freely fly? In “The Conservation of Races” DuBois’ answer is brief, suggestive, and aimed at speaking to the specific historical circumstances in the United States that have brought together the two extremes of racial differentiation, the African and the Northern European. Consistent with his theoretical framework and in a plea for pluralism aimed at accommodating American realities, DuBois identifies race prejudice as “nothing but the friction between different groups of people; it is the difference in aim, in feeling, in ideals of two different races.”²⁰ If such difference extends to laws, language, or even religion, then two races cannot live together. However, if “there is substantial agreement in laws, language and religion; if there is a satisfactory adjustment of economic life, then there is no reason why, in the same country and on the same street, two or three great national ideals might not thrive and develop, that men of different races might not strive together for their race ideals as well, perhaps even better, than in isolation.” So, black life in these United States is at least possible because:

we are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Farther than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes... the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black tomorrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic to-day. We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual

ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes the differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development.²¹

It would appear then that DuBois has identified a two dimensional gift of black folk: on the one hand there is a softening of the whiteness of a Teutonic today to be effected through music and story, pathos and humor, messages of soul and compassion and wit. Related to these, however, but also distinct, is the gift of pluralism, what today might be called multi-culturalism or diversity, within a context of justice. The epoch of human history referred to in one formulation of DuBois’ dilemma, the epoch in which the most distinctly different races come together, is the epoch in which two or more races can strive for distinctly different ideals of life, while living on the same street. And they can, perhaps, do it even better than if they lived separately. Returning to DuBois’ theory of how racial differentiation initially occurred, it would appear, then, that part of the meaning of the American experience, in epochal and world historical terms, is that races which developed initially in different cities and then into different nations, have been brought into juxtaposition to each other for the realization of a higher human destiny. No single race can reach its highest development without giving the gift of its message to the other races and the human race as a whole can approach that one far off divine event only through a reciprocity of message sharing.

“The Conservation of Races” reveals DuBois as both prophet and student. A theory is needed, a theory grounded in history, but a theory adequate to support moral intervention to control the direction

of history. The long arc of the universe can always use a little help in tending toward justice. The eyes of the Historian and the Sociologist are necessary when engaging with history to ensure that such engagement is effective, to ensure that the central thought of all history is not ignored, to ensure that efforts at betterment are attuned to natural law, rather than attempting to subvert it. DuBois' commitment is not only to understand history, but also to change it. The dilemma he poses at the beginning of "Conservation" is not primarily a dilemma of thought, but a dilemma of action. The problem with not wanting to embrace the race idea, the first horn of the dilemma, is not that one will then err against historical truth. Rather, the problem is that not embracing the race idea will leave one powerless to create new historical truth, to "speak to the nations of earth a Divine truth that shall set them free."²²

Leopold Senghor, Civilization of the Universal, and Prophetic Voice

Over several decades in myriad ways, some more scholarly others more poetic, Leopold Senghor elaborated the concepts of Negritude and of the Civilization of the Universal.

However, the struggle for *negritude* must not be *negation* but *affirmation*. It must be the contribution from us, the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, to the growth of *Africanity*, and beyond that, to the building of the *Civilization of the Universal*. *Negritude* is part of *Africanity*, and as such is part of human civilization. To see that there are parts is not to set them against each other. Or rather, it is to set these against each other so as to be able to unite them more firmly in a *dynamic symbiosis of complementary parts*: for it is in this that Culture consists....

We must cultivate our *negritude* then, to take part in the necessary dialogue with white Africa, and then, united with the Arabo-Berbers of Africa, to enter into dialogue with other continents. This triple dialogue, between ourselves and the others, can have only one aim, to assure peace and build the *Civilization of the Universal*.²³

It is not surprising that Senghor emphasizes themes reminiscent of DuBois. As much recent work has demonstrated, Negritude has significant roots in the earlier North American literary movement of "black personality" that preceded and lent inspiration to the Harlem Renaissance. D.A. Masolo details the relationship of Negritude to "black personality" in the early pages of his *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*.²¹ Masolo notes that "black literature emerging in the United States in the early 1900s" was a response to Western value judgments of African people as "primitive," "evil," and "savage," among other things. The black personality literature saw such erroneous Western value judgments as the "base of the social (segregation), political (disfranchisement), economic (labor exploitation), and cultural (discrimination) problems which the Negro faced in America and worldwide." While the parallel civil rights movement at the time focused on gaining constitutional rights (manhood rights) within a North American context, the literary movement was universal. "Its aim was to rehabilitate the image of the black man wherever he was; it was the expression of black personality." Masolo continues, "Negritude was the black francophone version of this expression of black personality."

The exact causes of the similarities between DuBois and Senghor, at least in

the sense of who was reading or meeting with whom, are of secondary interest here. I am more interested in understanding the prophetic stance shared by both thinkers and projecting that stance forward to a consideration of the present. And, as suggested by the quote at the beginning of this section, it is Senghor's concept of the Civilization of the Universal that strikes me as most centrally expressing his prophetic voice.

From some perspectives, DuBois' and Senghor's accounts of black personality may appear arbitrary, valiant and elegant exercises in bootstrapping, creative flights of intellectual fancy to justify what they need for organizational and rehabilitative reasons. From a more historically grounded perspective, the traits they stress within their versions of black personality are far from arbitrary. The traits they stress derive from a double source: the battle field of negative Western value judgments and black personality defences on the one hand and the immediate and developing needs of self-organization on the other. There is the Caribbean and North American background of move and countermove that goes back well before black personality, back to Jamestown, to Charleston, and beyond. The names of the previous prophets can be called here, the Stono Creek rebels, the Prosser Brothers, Denmark Vesey and Gullah Jack, Nat Turner, and others who started fires and took up arms. But Richard Allen and Morris Brown should have their names called, too, along with other church starters and magazine and circular founders. Such background provides the deep history, the cultural genetics of the African experience in the "strangely promised land" being forged out of wilderness. The black personality literary movement pointed to in Masolo's analysis is best seen as a particular expression of this deep history. The moments in this history provided by

DuBois and Senghor, and both provide more than a moment each, may be seen as attempts to keep faith by speaking truth to power on behalf of the voiceless and to change the world in the interests of the voiceless. Each attempts to construct concepts grounded in a perceived reality that can be used to create a new reality.

In his "W.E.B. DuBois's Archaeology of Race: Re-Reading *The Conservation of Races*"²⁵ Thomas Holt defines the problematic of race relations in the modern world as characterized by three sets of interrelated problems:

1. the problems of identity and difference;
2. the experience of slavery, emancipation, and imperialism;
3. the continuing social relations of labor exploitation in which "a people denied the fruits of their labor could not claim their cultural birthright either."

The problematic of race relations is, then, pre-eminently a problematic within the arc of a moral universe, a universe in which the stakes are recognition of full humanity, redress for past wrongs, and access to and control of the material and spiritual fruits of one's labors.

The relevant notion of prophetic voice is the voice of problem solving within the moral universe. If truth is involved, it is not in the sense in which A.J. Ayers' *Language, Truth, and Logic* engages that concept. The truth of prophetic voice is the truth that seeks to free us not from ignorance but from perdition, not from the commission of run of the mill sins, but from the conditions that make sinning against self and others a normal part of daily life, that make sin seem so easy, so necessary. A prophetic voice is an oracle for justice, possessed by the spirit of justice, and

engaged in working assiduously to tilt the long arc of the moral universe toward justice.

Marx's is a prophetic voice in the relevant sense, railing with a steady passion against the conditions that alienate us from our essential selves as social self and world-makers. Cornel West's concept of the *politics of conversion* in his *Race Matters* is essentially a prophetic concept, an attempt to defeat the nihilism produced by market values having, to a large degree, replaced community values. In the face of and as a prophetic response to nihilism understood as meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness, the politics of conversion involves a turning one's soul toward love and care. The politics of conversion reasserts "the best of one's past without romantic nostalgia—and [is] guided by a universal love ethic."²⁶

As a problem solver within the moral universe, the prophet identifies a problem and proposes a path that leads beyond. In "Conservation," I have argued, DuBois poses the problem as a dilemma. To play their assigned role in getting to that one far off divine event, the pot of justice at the end of the historical/moral rainbow, black folk must embrace the race concept, the very concept that white folks have used to belittle and suppress them. The solution is to realize that white folks' misuse of the race concept is a false stumbling block on the road to salvation. For DuBois, white folk's thinking about race has the virtue of being correct in general, but the vice of being wrong in some particulars. European and European American traditions of social and historical analysis have been generally correct in seeing race as the central thought of all history. These same traditions, however, have been wrong in assuming that races fall into a natural hierarchy with the European race or races grouped at the top overall. They are not

wrong that racial differences are real and discoverable, at least by historians and sociologists. They are not wrong that some races are better at some things than are other races. They are wrong that one race or another is better overall. Thus, while some racial groups of whites (Teutons or Anglo-Saxons) may excel in this or that particular trait (commercial freedom, for example), Africans excel in other traits. None is closer to or further away from God on the Great Chain of Being, none is more or less definitive of what it means to be human. Having removed the false stumbling block of a race concept tainted by its association with white supremacy and black inferiority, DuBois can go on to identify the true stumbling blocks to progress for Negroes in America. Giving full sway to both the present Victorian values he held in the late 1800s and the socialist values he would increasingly adopt, DuBois identifies these true stumbling blocks as moral degradation on the one hand and unwillingness to engage in criticism/self-criticism on the other.

As a prophet in the tradition, Senghor incorporates many of the same basic analytical moves found in DuBois' "Conservation." By the 1950s and 60s, however, the process of civilizing the Universal had progressed somewhat. DuBois wrote "Conservation" within fifteen years of the Conference of Berlin, while the grip of European colonialism was still tightening. What is striking is that DuBois' basic analysis was still useful sixty years later in the heady days of independence. Indeed, it seemed then as if the divine event was not so far off, that it was just around the corner; that Africans would increasingly be free to give their gifts to the world and that the universal would soon be civilized. It seemed that Europe would awake from its delusional and dogmatic slumber in which it dreamed of its superiority and that a flag of

uncompromising black would soon fly from the ram-parts of human civilization.

So now, one hundred or fifty years later, what can be said of the giving of gifts and the Civilization of the Universal? In short compass, many gifts have been given, African people on the continent and around the world may be seen as subsidizers of the political, cultural, intellectual, and economic well being of others, particularly of Europeans, and yet, there are clearly ways in which the universal is hardly civilized. The path to and further development of this conclusion passes through a consideration of philosophy, that discipline often seen as most paradigmatically European and as most distant from Africanity.

Lucius Outlaw, *Africana Philosophy, and Civilization of the Universal*

In his 1992 article “African, African American, and *Africana Philosophy*”²⁷ Lucius Outlaw proposed using the “gathering notion” of *Africana* philosophy to bring together work regarded as philosophy which is done by Africans, African Americans, or “Africanists” who may be neither African nor African American, but who recognize the legitimacy of African and African American philosophy and who contribute to its efforts. Constructing *Africana* philosophy as a third order grouping, a strategic proposal for framing a particular second order discipline area, philosophy, Outlaw confesses to many motives. For Outlaw African and African American philosophers are engaged in some strikingly similar practices, including “the development of discursive formations within the discipline of philosophy that invoke ‘Africa’... through efforts to identify, reconstruct, and create repositories of thought by African and African descended persons and peoples, in both oral and

written literatures, as forms of philosophy.”²⁸ Through such a process, for instance, Frederick Douglass is recast not only as an abolitionist orator and activist, but as a thinker engaged among other things in philosophical anthropology. Through a similar process, the various theologies of the ancient Nile valley are to be read also as abstract accounts of creation resulting from principles of being, rather than only as mythological invitations to participate in and contact the divine. Another and related motive is that African and African American philosophers share hopes for the future shape of their discipline: “I join with others in calling for a serious revision of our philosophical praxes and agenda. It is my sincere hope that the expansion of the recognized areas of discourse in philosophy to include *Africana* philosophy is indicative of a movement in this direction, and that, as a result philosophy will come to be practised without pernicious racism and ethnocentrism.”²⁹

Outlaw’s focus is on a particular, the discipline of philosophy, and hopes for the future better health of that discipline. The stance is prophetic, responsive to the problematic of race relations, that set of three interrelated problems identified by Holt as:

1. problems of identity and difference;
2. the experience of slavery, emancipation, and imperialism;
3. the continuing social relations of labor exploitation in which “a people denied the fruits of their labor could not claim their cultural birth right either.”

While Outlaw’s focus may be particular, a specific focus on creating a liberated zone within the academy to be called African philosophy, his resting place is universal.

Africana philosophy... is not a proxy for an immutable essence shared by all African peoples. The gathering together of various traditions and practices, various literatures, identified as “philosophy,” is just an initial... step. Then the real labor begins: interrogating works, learning from them, comparing and contrasting them (with endeavors by African and other peoples) as part of a larger, ongoing effort to catalog and study the many creations of African peoples, the contributions of African peoples to the treasure houses of human civilization.³⁰

We seem, then, with Outlaw’s proposal to have returned to the beginning, to the giving of gifts, the sharing of messages, the Civilization of the Universal.

Conclusion

But surely the Universal we see now before us is far from civilized. And the problem now, the problem of the 21st century, is still significantly the problem DuBois identified almost 100 years ago as the problem of the 20th century: the problem of the color line. Writing about twenty years after “Conservation” in the wake of the particularly brutal race riots of 1917 in East St. Louis, DuBois wrote:

There are no races, in the sense of great, separate, pure breeds of men, differing in attainment, development, and capacity. There are great group[s.]—now with common history, now with common interest, now with common ancestry; more and more common experience and present interest drive back the common blood and the world today consists, not of races, but of the imperial commercial group of master capitalists, international and predominantly

white; the national middle classes of the several nations, white, yellow, and brown, with strong blood bonds, common languages, and common history; the international laboring class of all colors; the backward oppressed groups of nature-folk, predominantly yellow, brown, and black.³¹

Were an accurate description given today of the lines along which the world falls apart, the lines apportioning wealth, power, and suffering, the description would be an update of what DuBois wrote more than eighty years ago. It would be a picture of today’s color line.

And ironically, tragically, the success of Africana philosophy or of its two constituent parts, African and African American philosophy, can tend to mask this reality. Genuine steps toward Civilization of the Universal in many areas, and philosophy is such a significant step, may tend to deflect attention from the continuing problem of the color line. For the reality of Africana philosophy, along with so much else, has surely succeeded in weakening the racist ideological justifications of uncivilized patterns of the past. It could even be said that today the color line is left naked, without clothes. Emperors, however, have been known to rule without clothes for long periods. What, then, allows the color line to be rationalized, to the degree that it can be rationalized at all? Ironically, part of its rationalization may be precisely the weakening or permutation of 19th century European and Euro-American ideological racism, the fall into disrepute of White Supremacy theory, while new forms of a white supremacist reality continue. Borrowing a conceit from DuBois’ *Dusk of Dawn*,³² we can hear the voice of his white friend, Roger Van Dieman reasoning thus:

We in the West are not racist and our policies toward Africa or the rest of the world of color are not based upon ideas of our superiority and their inferiority. Therefore, to the degree that any patterns of radical material inequality may exist, we are guiltless. The problems are their's to solve. Besides, we are clearly incapable of solving any of the major kinds of problems others may have. The best we can do over all, and the best we can do for them, the economic others, is to keep our economies expanding, keep the global economy growing, keep globalization moving. Since capitalism has been proven through history to be the most effective system of production, the expansion of capitalism is the best hope for lifting up those who are now behind. Therefore, form the trading blocks, nudge interest rates up or down to control inflation, promote free trade locally and globally, and set the throttle on full speed ahead.

Such a view can be best countered by noting that the most serious problem with 19th century racism may not have been that it was false. Most of what humans have ever thought has been false. The more profound problem with racism is that it was and is so horrendously self-serving. The same problem exists with the Van Dieman rationalization as with 19th century justifications of the color line. The same old color line, 100 years older and looking just a bit different, rationalized by the same type of self-serving denial. And here the concept of the Civilization of the Universal may be useful as a continued platform for prophecy. As with all prophetic uses of concepts, using the Civilization of the Universal prophetically means to be oriented in a certain direction, more than to develop any specific program or engage in any specific actions. It means to look

at the world and to be in the world with a certain orientation, with one's soul turned in a certain direction.³³

I propose a set of three assumptions to serve as guides to forms of contributionism that challenge color lines while recognizing that the diversity among and between human populations, as well as human concepts, is far from static. The three assumptions are universality, diversity, and interdependence. This proposal for a set of jointly tuned assumptions I take as being derivative of directions proposed by DuBois, Senghor, Outlaw, and others.

By universality I mean that what we end up with in the human domain results from what all of us do, all six plus billion now mucking about, along with the Almighty Dead to whom DuBois offered a parting prayer even as he prepared to join them. And, of course, what we all do in the conditioning totality of whatever we may hold true of atoms, molecules, and powers and principalities that we take to have made us and in which we live and move and have our being.

By diversity I mean to point to complexity, "bushiness," to borrow a term from Stephen J. Gould, as well as difference. If our DNA, for all its similarities from person to person and group to group is also diverse, and if it mutates and interacts with nutrition and experience in complex ways, what of our cultural heritages, our practices, our manners of finding and making and propagating meaning in the sublimely absurd realm of human consciousness?

And by interdependence I mean to point to a Darwinian-type understanding of the world not just of species and environment, but of behaviors and styles and manners of producing and reproducing our ways and ourselves. Such an understanding can be

expressed in many vocabularies and is suggested by a wide range of words, concepts, and images. For instance, the historical development of those ways of knowing now referred to as science, is nothing if not reciprocal, now developing faster along the Nile, now the Yangtze, now the Charles, but always on the bushy base of those who are drawing water and hewing wood. The interdependence I am pointing to may also be expressed in the Ibo proverb “Eneke the bird said that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.”³⁴ Adaptability in the face of changing circumstances is as human as apple pie is thought to be American and this adaptability is often as characteristic, perhaps often more characteristic, of the common folk as it is of those in official positions of power.

Now admittedly, it is too simple, to say that from all of us, both alive and dead, we get all of what we have. But even though some more detailed stories are warranted, some contributionist stories have clearly outlived whatever usefulness they may have had. Such stories probably include most that go “From the Greeks we get... and from the Egyptians...; from the Teutons this and from the yellow races that.” Such accounts, as with most 19th century accounts of race, tend to freeze and reify cultural identity and credit, leaving us with single cause canonical stories that belie history’s strange and messy ways.

In saying this I do not mean to rule out all contributionist stories. Rather, I mean to indicate the kinds of stories that might be more aptly told. The following from a Julius Nyerere address (“Africa: The Current Situation”) is suggestive of our times and of the context for such story-telling, story-telling in service of a more fully civilized Universal.

The whole world is going through a period of very rapid change, carried forward by technological developments about which we often know nothing and understand less, yet the effects of which none of us can escape. You in Scotland, and we in Africa, are being brought closer together all the time, even without our knowing it. But knowing more about each other, about our respective hopes, problems, aspirations, we may all be able to contribute towards the building of a human community in which all of us would like to live.³⁵

Nyerere’s characterization of this period of very rapid change and the role technology plays in carrying that change forward could be enriched by pointing to other dimensions of our connectedness. These would include how good a time in the world it is for the human immuno deficiency virus, how the clouds of global warming and environmental degradation scud overhead and glower on the horizons of our collective futures, and how old arms races appear ready to transmute into new ones. Connectedness is also signalled, however, by the persistence of such international bodies as the United Nations, the continued development of international law, and the development of civil society on an international scale. Simple as they are, Nyerere’s words may provide guidance for how to orient our moral compasses toward an appropriately civilized universal.

Increased transparency should be a cardinal direction on the moral compass of a civilized Universal. A student of mine once said that good character was when you didn’t do a lot of things you didn’t want other people to know about. Such an idea seems to be behind an ancient story associated at least loosely with both philosophy and cultural contact. It is said

that Solon was concerned that extremes of wealth and poverty would jeopardize the well being of Athens. Therefore, he introduced from Egypt what might be called an annual Rite of Fiscal Transparency. At the end of each year all citizens had to publicly declare the sources of their wherewithal, all had to publish their IRS returns. On a global scale, of course, such information can be gathered, but it is not volunteered. Rather, how the haves and the rest of those on the wrong side of the color line subsidize the haves must be ferreted out. That such must be ferreted out is a measure of how far we are from a civilization worth the name. A good civilization, it would seem, would be one in which regions, areas, individual nations, and races, properly demystified and understood, would get their wealth in ways they would be glad to reveal to others. Those living in a good civilization would have the transparency my student claimed as defining good character. Nations, groups, and peoples in a well-civilized

universal would not do a lot of things they didn't want others to know about.

Past and current patterns of wealth acquisition have many of the virtues of theft over honest toil because they have been and continue to be significantly forms of theft, forms of maintaining ill-gained privilege by means both fair and foul, i.e. by any means both effective and necessary. To call for transparency in such matters is certainly naïve, yet every call for a moral re-centering in the face of established power is similarly naïve. To expect transparency seems, perhaps, to expect too much. Yet expectation matched with well-conceived deeds and projects is a significantly human stance. What better than to expect, demand, and work for such transparency? How better, along with "knowing more about each other, about our respective hopes, problems, aspirations" to work "towards the building of a human community in which all of us would like to live?"

Notes and References

1. DuBois' *Conservation of Races* is reprinted in Albert Mosley's *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1995, pp 30-39. Quotes from Senghor are taken from English and Kalumba, *African Philosophy: A Classical Approach*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1996. The references to Outlaw are to his *African, African American, and Africana Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXIV, Numbers 1-3, Fall-Spring 1992-93, pp 63-93. The quote is from p 88.
2. In Mosley, pp 30.
3. Mosley, pp 31.
4. Mosley, pp 31.
5. Mosley, pp 32.
6. Mosley, pp 32.
7. Mosley, pp 32.
8. Harding Vincent (1981) *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, New York, Harcourt Brace, p 24.
9. Mosley, p 32.
10. Appiah, Anthony. (1992) *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York, Oxford University Press, Chapter Two, "Illusions of Race," pp 28-46. See also Appiah's "The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race" in Mosley, pp 199-215.
11. See Thomas Holt's "W.E.B. DuBois's Archaeology of Race: Re-Reading *The Conservation of Races*" in Katz and Sugrue, *W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and its Legacy*, pp 70. Holt writes, "despite the encumbrance of nineteenth-century ideas about race, therefore, DuBois succeeds in shifting the emphasis of the ongoing discussion of 'the Negro Problem' fairly emphatically to the common historical experience and the common relations to power that their New World experience had entailed for African Americans."
12. Mosley, pp 32-33.
13. Mosley, pp 33.
14. Mosley, pp 33.
15. Mosley, pp 34.
16. For more on this theme, see Holt, in Katz and Sugrue, pp 66. Thanks to Stephen Hall for referring me to Holt and for helpful input on earlier drafts of this paper.
17. Mosley, pp 34.
18. Mosley, pp 34. Holt makes the point, pp 68, that DuBois was attracted to the race idea partly as a counter to the liberal fascination with individualism.
19. Mosley, pp 34-5.
20. Mosley, pp 36.
21. Mosley, pp 36. DuBois goes on to caution, however, that the gift can be given only if the demands of Victorian morality are met. If the people are moral, if the traditional pursuits of the downtrodden are given up, then nothing can stop progress. If, however, the people are not united to "keep black boys from loafing, gambling and crime; [not] united to guard the purity of black women and to reduce that vast army of black prostitutes that is today marching to hell," then progress will neither occur nor be deserved.
22. Mosley, pp 37.

23. English and Kalumba, (1996) *African Philosophy: A Classical Approach*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, pp 49-50.
24. Masolo, D.A., (1994) *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press. See Chapter 1, particularly pp 9 and 10. See also Abiola Irele's "Contemporary Thought in French Speaking Africa," in Mosley, pp 263-296, for more on the historical dimensions of Negritude.
25. In Katz and Sugrue, pp 61.
26. West, Cornel, (1993) *Race Matters*, New York, Vintage Books, pp 30.
27. Outlaw, pp 64.
28. Outlaw, pp 63.
29. Outlaw, pp 88.
30. Outlaw, pp 88.
31. Quoted in Holt, note # 18, from DuBois' "The Massacre of East St. Louis," *The Crisis*, 14 (September, 1917).
32. DuBois W.E.B., (1940) New York, Harcourt Brace. The dialogue DuBois has with his white friend, Roger Van Dieman is in Chapter 6, "The White World," and stretches from pp 140-153.
33. The language of "turning one's soul" is borrowed from Cornel West in his discussion of recovery from Nihilism in *Race Matters*.
34. Achebe, Chinua, (1969) *Things Fall Apart*, New York, Fawcett Crest, pp 24. Achebe originally published the book in 1959.
35. In *African Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 1, June 1998, pp 12.