

**Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois on ‘Emancipation’: A Reading  
from the Pragmatist Philosophy of Social Sciences**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*in partial fulfilment of the requirements*

*for the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Dated: 11/02/2022

## DECLARATION

I, Kumud Ranjan, declare that this thesis entitled **Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois on 'Emancipation': A Reading from the Pragmatist Philosophy of Social Sciences** submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my bonafide work. I further declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

*Kumud Ranjan*

Kumud Ranjan

## CERTIFICATE

Certified that this thesis entitled *Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois on 'Emancipation': A Reading from the Pragmatist Philosophy of Social Sciences* submitted by KUMUD RANJAN, in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University has not been so far submitted, as part or full, for any degree of this or any other university. This is his own original work, carried out in the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies.

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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“He [Bourdieu] is frustrated by the gap between the lofty ideals of universalism promulgated by French education and the actual practices of academic power regulating relations among faculty and students. He is incensed by the French academic mandarins who impose curriculum orthodoxy, who themselves do little or no empirical research, and who exercise tight control over the careers of aspiring future academics. He is offended by the thinly veiled prejudice against the lower classes he perceives in French academic culture” (Swartz 1997: 51).

Even though reservation and the provision of deprivation points have been followed in JNU to include students from deprived backgrounds, the thinkers, public intellectuals, and the research students should ask the question whether merely inclusion of deprived students will act as a leveller. I believe that our response to this question should reflect adherence to democratic values. One must also be aware of subtle ways/ [in]direct manner in which discriminatory practices within educational institutions prevail. Probably it takes more than what we human beings could collectively envisage making any institution democratic. It certainly takes more than prophetic and godly utterances on an everyday basis of armchair thinkers.

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Kumud Ranjan

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Introduction: Social Theory and Modernity

Philosophy of pragmatism is based on the proposition and claims of social hopes where knowledge is not an end itself but serves as a means towards the pursuit of ‘greater human happiness’ (Rorty 1999). This pursuit of ‘greater human happiness’ possibly enable us to think in terms of collective emancipation. In recent years there has been this question and the claim about the “*growing uncertainty as to what social theory can or should achieve, especially in its relationship to the various social sciences it is supposed to serve*” (Baert and Silva 2010: 288). In response to this question, it is possible to argue that social theory shall attempt to think about the normative dimension of social theory through its historical trajectory. This normative dimension with historical reflexivity towards social theory has to be embedded within the project of emancipation.

This aforementioned uncertainty has to contemplate upon the pursuit of social sciences or what Durkheim thought in terms of ‘synthetic science’ for the progression of philosophical thought (Durkheim, 1982: 255). This pursuit has to consider the parallelism which Bourdieu points out that “*in the social sciences, the progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge*” (Bourdieu 1991: 1). This progress of knowledge that Bourdieu refers to is also associated with what Rorty emphasises about formulating the right question, which holds a significant position within the discourse of pragmatism (Bourdieu 1991; Rorty 1999). It is in these questions of greater significance one can attempt to think of social hope for the pursuit of collective emancipation. In this regard, Jeffrey Alexander argues that “*Social theory is a mental reconstruction of its time, not a reflection but a self-reflection*” Alexander (2013: 6).



Jeffrey Alexander further states that:

“Art is self-reflection in an iconic sense and expressive form. Theoretical self-reflection is intellectual and abstract. It leads not to experience and epiphany but to analysis and thought. Social theory cannot include Catharsis, but it can transform understanding”. (Alexander 2013: 5)

This transformation of understanding is certainly a self-reflexive exercise of social theory on its own history i.e. a kind of historical reflection. At one level this attempt might make us believe that this exercise is full of possibilities or even infinite and possibly also a chimera at the other end. This ‘unending quest’<sup>1</sup> to understand the world we belong to is also situated within this story of human sciences in the twentieth century. It is mainly in the second half of the twentieth century that Habermas, Giddens, Bourdieu, Foucault, Luhmann were involved in their philosophical and social scientific research. This construction of social theory and the work of these five thinkers did not limit itself to any disciplinary regime. At the same time, their influences came from varieties of sources which included empirical studies, literary movements, social and political movements and methodological and theoretical approaches. It is in this period Foucault worked out his framework of ‘Genealogy’ and ‘Archaeology’. This is also the period of major student’s movements in different parts of the world whose implications became visible not only in the political realm but also in the structure of the university and the subsequent evolution of the social sciences. This is also a phase in the history of social theory when the influence of positivism and of Popper’s idea that social science should be free of values received serious challenges through several works in social theory and other disciplines and their subfields (Adorno et al. 1976; Gouldner 1962, 1971). This is not to say that their position in the academy were stable and the reception of their ideas was in accordance with the dominant academic cultural production of the time (Sapiro et al. 2020). In the beginning of the seventies Bourdieu explained to an American visitor in the context of the French intellectual landscape:

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<sup>1</sup> I have used this expression from Karl Popper’s intellectual Autobiography entitled ‘An Unending Quest’ in 1974.

“ All his (American visitor) intellectual heroes, like Althusser, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, not to mention the minor prophets of the moment, held marginal positions in the university system which often disqualified them from officially directing research...” ( Bourdieu 1984 [1988], xviii)

These ideas of Pierre Bourdieu have also been illustrated by Patrick Baert (Baert 2015). Baert in his work ‘The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre As A Public Intellectual’ argues that social sciences “became fully professionalized and institutionalized” during the period of 1950s and 1960s (Baert 2015). What Bourdieu explained to his American visitor is also reflective of Bourdieu’s own experiences in the French intellectual landscape of the time.<sup>2</sup> It is in this broader context that the twentieth century becomes a unique construction because of theorizing and in the same way theorizing is differentiated from earlier theorization.

The aforementioned notion of uncertainty encapsulates the view that both “Marx and Durkheim saw the modern era as a troubled one” (Giddens 1991:7). Marx believed that with the emergence of socialism the basic values of modernity can be saved. Therefore the claim of uncertainty about social theory has to be situated within the discourse of modernity. The project of modernity has

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<sup>2</sup> The sociological engagements with Bourdieu’s intellectual trajectory has been a central discussion from the perspective of history and philosophy of social sciences, historical reflection on French Intellectual life, sociology of ideas and intellectual history. One of these engagements has been in the writings of David Swartz. In one of the sections while explaining Bourdieu’s professional life as a sociologist, David Swartz writes:

“Bourdieu experienced ENS not only as a miraculous survivor of strenuous academic selection, but also as a cultural and social outsider. One of Bourdieu’s ENS peers recalls Bourdieu having an “extraordinary desire for revenge” against the Parisian intellectual world that dominated the Ecole (Dufay and Dufort 1993:196). This would find an echo later in *The Inheritors*, Bourdieu’s analysis of French university culture as hostile toward the popular classes and as privileging individualized stylistic distinction rather than genuine intellectual inquiry. It is sometimes said that behind every cynic lies a disappointed idealist. This can perhaps be said of Bourdieu, who likens his relation to French schooling to that of a frustrated ‘oblate’ Bourdieu borrows this religious term to refer to the “intense institutional loyalty felt by those teachers of humble origins who owe their cultural, social, and professional success to the educational system. Bourdieu, however, refuses to give allegiance to the institution that makes his success possible. He is frustrated by the gap between the lofty ideals of universalism promulgated by French education and the actual practices of academic power regulating relations among faculty and students. He is incensed by the French academic mandarins who impose curriculum orthodoxy, who themselves do little or no empirical research, and who exercise tight control over the careers of aspiring future academics. He is offended by the thinly veiled prejudice against the lower classes he perceives in French academic culture” (Swartz 1997: 50-51).

its own ambiguities. It offered hope for the future and freedom from the burden of tradition and at the same time it followed the crisis contained within it. It is this coexistence of contradiction in the form of crisis and hope of future possibilities which defines the ethos of modernity.

Giddens further states that:

“Modernity is a double edge phenomenon. The development of modern social, political and economic institutions and their spread across the globe has provided several opportunities for individuals to enjoy and achieve than any type of pre-modern system. But modernity also has a dark side which has become more apparent in the present age” (Giddens 1991: 3).

So, the question follows how to deal with the uncertainty of social theory by acquiring a certain philosophical and socio-political language. How to think about ‘theoretical certainty’ (Dewey, 1929)<sup>3</sup> within the realm of social theory in the light of Bauman’s concern that “there is no period in human history when people were really certain about what to do, had no surprises and no unexpected developments” (Bauman 2006).<sup>4</sup> Being novel is the “realization that uncertainty is here to stay” and the challenge is to “develop an art of living permanently with uncertainty” (Bauman 2006). Is this uncertainty also indicative of our limitations even within situated freedom? How shall social theory attempt to reflect upon these uncertainties contained within modernity in order to understand its own uncertainty? These uncertainties of modern societies and its institutions are also reflective of the enterprise of social theory in contemporary times.

This uncertainty is here to reflect upon the crucial problems which are not only intrinsic to social theory but are also determined by certain extrinsic factors which determine the knowledge of social theory. These extrinsic factors refer to the contradictions situated within modernity like the ‘re-invention of tradition and community structures’(Ulrich Beck et. al 2003). This process of

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<sup>3</sup> John Dewey delivered Gifford lectures at the University of Edinburgh between April-May 1929. The lectures were later published as “The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation Between Knowledge and Action”.

<sup>4</sup> From The Trouble with Being Human These Days, 2013, Zygmunt Bauman  
<https://economicsociology.org/2017/09/28/zygmunt-bauman-on-uncertainty/>

re-invention of tradition is also tied up with second modernity which is not compatible with the interest that social theory as an enterprise seeks to achieve.

The process of re-invention of tradition and its embeddedness in modern institutions have worked against the advancement of 'scientific thought about social affairs'. These 'scientific thoughts about social affairs' have to struggle against the power and hierarchy contained in traditions based on institutionalised intolerance and suppression. Social theory has faced this opposition since its origin as it constituted itself in the larger project of knowledge formation marked by a modern approach towards thinking in the new intellectual and cognitive world. This project of theorisation about society did not limit itself to reflect upon the characterization of society but also went on to acquire a language of normative prescription for the society. This prescription developed as part of the active participation of the researcher 'in the life of society' (Mannheim 2013 [1936]) where the attempt is also to bring about a change based on a scientific understanding of society. From Karl Mannheim's "sociology of knowledge" to Bourdieu's "critical sociology" to Boltanski's "Pragmatic sociology of critique" the idea of critique in the sociological imagination and construction of the world has gone through a radical and transformative change ( Mannheim 1936, Bourdieu 1977; 1990; Boltanski 2011; Wagner 2010; Susen and Turner [eds.] 2014)

Luc Boltanski in his work *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation* stated:

Compared with the so-called natural social sciences, the specificity of the social sciences is that they take as their object human beings grasped not in their biological dimensions, but in so far as they are capable of reflexivity ( that is why it is appropriate to distinguish between the social and the human sciences). Considered in this respect, human beings are not content to act or react to the action of others in order to make judgements on them, often hanging on the issue of good and evil- that is, moral judgements. This reflexive capacity means that they also react to the representations given of their properties or actions, including when the latter derive from sociology or critical theories (Boltanski 2011: 3).

Luc Boltanski argues that the notion of critique embedded in the formation of sociology or social sciences at large is different from natural sciences. For Boltanski, “Social theory as an enterprise seeks to explain not only domination but lays down the path for emancipation from domination (Boltanski 2011). Boltanski in his work *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation* made an attempt to shift from “Critical Sociology” to “Pragmatic Sociology of Critique” (ibid). Following the Bourdieusian approach Boltanski argues that “ the enterprise of emancipation is based on the practice of sociology” (Boltanski 2011: 19). This practice of sociology has to be based on engagement with the idea of ‘critique’ both as a methodological and normative approach. It is in this regard Emirbayer and Goldberg develop the framework of ‘collective emotion’ through pragmatism as well as some key ideas from Bourdieu’s sociology (Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005).

### **Pragmatism and Philosophy of Social Sciences**

The intrinsic domain of pragmatist philosophy of social sciences seeks to achieve emancipatory forms of knowledge towards a greater pursuit of collective emancipation. So, how do we situate a hermeneutic reading of social theory on the lines of the project of emancipation? Harding explores the logic of multiple subjects for thinking about who can make “liberatory knowledge and history”, the relationship between “experience and knowledge”, between “subjectivity and experience”, and between “subjectivity and objectivity” (Harding 1992). At the same time, individuals too are embodied with multiple identities based on what Hall argues about the construction of cultural and social identities as part of the formation process and engaging with modernity (Hall 1992: 7). Therefore, in such a situation how do we think about the idea of liberatory knowledge? On the contrary “how the interest and purpose of certain social groups come to find expression in certain social theories, doctrines and intellectual movements” (Mannheim 2013 [1936]). Virginia Woolf anticipates Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* when she writes: “The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself (Woolf 1929: 53)”. So, there is a history of opposition to the project of emancipation both in society and also in the way in which knowledge

constitutes itself. This brings us to Foucault's rejection of the conscious construction of discourse and even the conscious production of subjects and objects. This approach allows us to observe the hidden rules and beyond to understand the deeper structures which are embedded even in democratic forms of knowledge and discursive rationality. This is also to reflect upon how there is a legitimation process involved even within a democratic framework of inquiry in the production of knowledge (Foucault 1974; 1984; 1994; 2003).

An attempt towards the pragmatist philosophy of social sciences should be informed by a critical and reflexive history of social theory. How should social theory attempt to learn about new approaches to engage with uncomfortable experiences and develop alternative ways to think, communicate and act upon these uncomfortable historical experiences? In this context, Baert argues for the framework of self-referential knowledge to develop an understanding of a critical and reflexive history of social theory (Baert 1998; 2005a; 2005b; 2010). One of the limitations of self-referential knowledge which Baert recognizes is the notion of the other/s (Baert 2005a). This is mainly to highlight that an 'emancipating effect' would be constitutive of the other when we think of social hopes in terms of 'greater human happiness' as collective emancipation. Self-Referential knowledge as a framework is a conscious effort and struggle where a social researcher develops a critical understanding towards his own preconceived notions and established beliefs which usually appear to work at an unconscious level or are taken for granted. This conscious engagement presumes critical participation of the researcher 'in the life of society' unlike before to provide the researcher with an enhancement to improve upon the existing form of knowledge. This is to demolish the domination of their own framework to build better ones and build upon an understanding of 'social research as conversation', what Bernstein calls 'dialogical encounter' (Baert 2005: 154). Following the Habermasian idea, social research as part of the social theory constituted within the larger project of modernity has to form its own normativity (Habermas 1987b). Self-referential knowledge attempts towards the formation of this normativity by freeing from preconceived notions and beliefs. How does self-referential knowledge in the process of building up new normativity attempt to develop an understanding



towards pragmatist philosophy of social sciences which will allow us to think in line with the project of emancipation?

### **Origins of Pragmatism: Philosophical and Historical Frameworks**

A.J. Ayer states in 'The Origins of Pragmatism' that though the philosophical movement of "*Pragmatism is thought to be a distinctly American Product of the late nineteenth century, it has fairly deep roots in the history of philosophy*" (Ayer 1968: 13). Charles Sander Peirce was a fellow of Harvard undergraduate William James and also his life-long friend. Peirce had a strong philosophical influence on William James. It was through James that his ideas became widely known. Ayer claims that James misunderstood or at any rate transformed them to a significant extent. James termed the movement as "Pragmatism" and announced Peirce as its founder. In his later years, Peirce decided to use the word "Pragmaticism" for his philosophical system of thought rather than 'Pragmatism' (ibid). In the following years, the term Pragmatism was associated with William James along with other thinkers and publicists like John Dewey, F.C.S Schiller and Italian Papini (Misak 2013; Olen and Sachs 2017 ).

William James delivered a series of lectures entitled 'Pragmatism' that was published in 1907 (James 1922; Kloppenberg 1996). The lecture was dedicated to the memory of John Stuart Mill. In these lectures, James primarily addressed the question of what Pragmatism means? For James, it was important to engage with this question from the perspective of the history of ideas.

Pragmatism is derived from the same Greek word 'pragma', meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come. James further stated that it was first introduced in the realm of philosophy in 1878 by Charles Peirce (James 1922; Peirce 1878). In an article entitled "*The Pragmatic Method*", James engaged with and substantiated the ideas of Peirce.

" that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in

anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all” (James 1904: 673)

James argued that our beliefs are really rules for action and to develop a thought’s meaning we need to determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: These thoughts of James which articulated an embodied relationship between ‘thought’ and ‘action’ was primarily formulated by Peirce in the essay entitled ‘How to make our ideas clear’.

the identity of a habit depends on how it might lead us to act, not merely under such circumstances as are likely to arise, but under such as might possibly occur, no matter how improbable they may be. What the habit is depends on when and how it causes us to act. As for the when, every stimulus to action is derived from perception; as for the how, every purpose of action is to produce some sensible result. Thus, we come down to what is tangible and conceivably practical, as the root of every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be; and there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice (Peirce 1878: 292).

The coming together of thought and action is the principle of Peirce’s philosophical movement of pragmatism. This thinking went unnoticed for almost twenty years until the philosophical union at the University of California brought it forward and made particular application to religion. And then the time seemed, i.e. 1898, appropriate for its reception. James also stated that the term pragmatism had found adequate space across philosophical journals by that time.

Referring to the writings of Schiller in 1904 Heath Bawden writes:

The term for Mr. Schiller in his 'Axioms as Postulates' and in his 'Humanism' seems to refer, to any practical, useful or teleological reference in experience. In his conversations with Plato and Aristotle Mr. Schiller credits the origin of pragmatism to a hyperatlantean god by the name of Iames. But he also reminds us that, in some of its basic principles, it is as old as Greek philosophy. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were pragmatists in certain of their teachings. Like the theory of evolution, it has had its advocates from the time of the Greeks to that of Professor James. But it is only in recent years that this mode of thought has come into prominence as a philosophic method. The best brief characterization of pragmatism in Mr. Schiller's book is this: 'Science subordinates itself to the needs and ends of life alike whether, we regard its origin-practical necessity, or its criterion-practical utility.' Mr. Schiller thus uses the term in a more comprehensive sense than does Professor James (Bawden 1904: 422).

Schiller attempts to develop an understanding of different historical and intellectual roots of the philosophical movement of pragmatism. This is in line with the aforementioned argument of A.J. Ayer that pragmatism as a philosophical movement has its roots in the history of philosophy rather than considering it only as a philosophical movement that originated in America. But at the same time, it is important to consider these thinkers from the second half of the nineteenth century who made immense and significant contributions.

Patrick Baert and Filipe Carreira da Silva write about the historical origins of Pragmatism:

By pragmatism, we refer to the distinct philosophical tradition that was initially set in motion by Charles Peirce, later developed by William James and John Dewey, and further articulated by Richard Bernstein and Richard Rorty. This philosophical tradition is often portrayed as quintessentially American, and for very good reasons. Not only did the major pragmatists live and work in the US; their philosophical works emerged in response to distinctly American problems and concerns: they expressed distinctly American sentiments, hopes and anxieties. This is not to say that pragmatism is solely an American enterprise. Some European philosophers of the nineteenth century, like Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, developed views were

remarkably close to those of pragmatism, as did the Oxford-based philosopher F. C. S. Schiller at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some of the older generation of American pragmatists studied in Europe, had regular intellectual exchanges with European intellectuals and were very much indebted to them. More recent exponents of pragmatist philosophy, like Rorty and Bernstein, engaged with and saw affinities with a number of continental European authors who were considered seriously out of line within the analytical tradition. The multiplicity of influences is not surprising, given that American pragmatism has always portrayed itself as non-doctrinaire, open and receptive to new ideas, in contrast with the boundary-consciousness of analytical philosophy and its general disdain towards much written in the German and French tradition (Baert and Silva 2010).

Baert and Carreira da Silva further argue that American pragmatism has been considerate towards European philosophy. But that is not the case with European philosophy in return. European philosophy has been less receptive towards pragmatism with the noteworthy exception of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas was influenced by the pragmatist tradition and in particular Peirce for developing his theory of communicative action and critique of positivism (Aboulafia et al. 2002). Pragmatism has been criticized for its view that it is limited to American society. But in the last few decades, we have observed continued dialogue between American pragmatism and European philosophy and the implications of pragmatism for the philosophy of social sciences (Joas 1993; Baert and Silva 2010; Silva 2010).

The idea is to engage with the historical understanding of the history of philosophy of social sciences in the twentieth century. The aim is to engage with the historical understanding of the pragmatism inspired philosophy of social sciences. It is more than a century now since the interaction between pragmatism and social sciences were conceived. It is important in contemporary times to engage with this historical interaction that took place prominently during the twentieth century.

The history of the influences and interactions between pragmatism and the social sciences is as rich as it has been neglected as a field of research. This volume – the first of a series of two – tries to explore both historically and theoretically some of these multiple relationships, building upon

the assumption that pragmatism has been one of the philosophical traditions that have taken most seriously the study of the social. In fact, since its origins classical American pragmatism has been a philosophy resolutely open to the social sciences. Not only pragmatists have been actively engaged in social scientific research themselves (think of W. James, J. Dewey, G. H. Mead, C. Morris), but they have also conceived of the birth and development of the social sciences as one of the most innovative traits of modern society, the one truly capable of incarnating the pragmatist conception of the scope of knowledge within human experience. It was mostly to social sciences, in fact, that pragmatist philosophers, social scientists, and reformers such as J. Dewey, W. E. B. Du Bois, L. Trilling, S. Hook, W. Mills turned to in order to find the analytical categories that could make philosophical thinking more attuned to the transformations changing contemporary societies. At the same time, the social sciences have always looked at pragmatism as a philosophy that offers useful critical tools for making sense of social, cultural and political practices and institutions (Frega and Da Silva 2011: 2).

Both Frega and Carreira da Silva rightly argued that the interaction between pragmatism and social have not received required attention both from philosophers of social sciences and social scientists. The historical interaction between pragmatism and social sciences primarily between the first half of the twentieth century is a crucial source of resource for research in contemporary times. This is not to say that early classical pragmatists or the members of the ‘metaphysical club’ were concerned with social sciences since the early years of their interaction and intellectual trajectory. While this dissertation takes into consideration the political turn of pragmatism to which John Dewey contributed significantly. It is also possible to argue that his contribution towards politics has positioned Dewey as the foremost public intellectual of America from the early decades of the twentieth century (Westbrook 2015).

### **W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar and Hannah Arendt: Encounter and Engagement with Pragmatism and Vision for Democracy**

The political turn to pragmatism became possible because of the significant contributions of social scientists and social workers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams and B.R. Ambedkar (Milligan 1985; Muller 1922; Posnock 1995; Levingston 2013; Taylor 2004; Knight 2005; Škof

2013; Stroud 2016; Dieleman et al. 2017; Stroud 2017a, 2017b, 2019), even though this contribution is less recognised both in the social sciences and philosophy.

The dissertation also takes into consideration Hannah Arendt's engagement with some of the crucial themes prominent within pragmatism since its political turn. The attempt is also to understand how Arendt's encounter with pragmatism and social sciences both in terms of agreements and disagreements contribute to a formidable understanding of 'evil' and 'violence' in the twentieth century. In her thinking on 'evil' and 'violence' or even American democracy, Arendt is much closer to Ambedkar and Du Bois compared to other thinkers prominent within the philosophical thought of pragmatism in the twentieth century. Thus, these historical interactions have serious implications for a global approach to social theory in contemporary times. The contributions of these intellectuals remain invisible in the history of pragmatism and the history of philosophy and social sciences at large. In this thesis, the focus is primarily on the intellectual and political trajectory of W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar. Dewey's philosophical trajectory began from his background in experimental psychology. One of his early concerns was with the ideas of experience and conduct. It is in this context of early concerns of James and Dewey, Kloppenborg writes:

Both [James and Dewey] rejected the dualisms of the body and the mind and also the subject from the object that had divided idealists from empiricists since Rene Descartes and John Locke". They were equally scornful of nineteenth-century idealists' infatuation with introspection and positivists' reduction of all philosophical questions to matter and motion. Instead, they preferred other metaphors such as "field" or "stream" or "circuit" to suggest the continuity and meaningfulness of consciousness that had eluded both empiricists and rationalists; their "radical empiricism" rested on their revised concept of consciousness. Immediate experience as James and Dewey conceived of it is always relational (it never exists in the abstract or in isolation from a world containing both other persons and concrete realities, as did Descartes's rationalist cogito), creative (it never merely registers sense-data passively, as did Locke's empiricist tabula rasa), and imbued with historically specific cultural values (it is never "human" or universal, but always personal and particular). Pragmatists distrusted all forms of foundationalism, all attempts to establish philosophy on unchanging a priori postulates. Rather than grounding values in the



bedrock of timeless absolutes, they urged us to evaluate all of our beliefs -philosophical, scientific, religious, ethical, and political - before the test they considered the most demanding of all: our experience as social and historical beings (Kloppenber 1996: 102).

Like other pragmatists, Mead and Dewey held that the development of self-critical habits of intelligence can influence the destinies of individuals by ensuring that they will never escape unexpected contingencies (Dewey 1922[2002], Blumer 2004). Pragmatists including Dewey did not consider human beings as passive agents who are guided by forces beyond their control. With Dewey and Mead, the social and political aspects of pragmatism came to the foreground. The central idea of their philosophical vision is centred around the notion of democracy as a form of communal life (Bernstein 2010).

Thus, Dewey argued with regard to democracy:

Democracy as compared with other ways of life is the sole way of living which believes whole heartedly in the process of experience as end and as means; as that which is capable of generating the science which is the sole dependable authority for the direction of further experience and which releases emotions, needs, and desires so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. For every way of life that fails in its democracy limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is enlarged and enriched. The task of this release and enrichment is one that has to be carried on day by day. Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and all contribute (John Dewey cited by Richard Bernstein 2000: 217).

In another context Mead emphasised his vision for democracy:

The principle of democracy is that there are common ends in which men are individually interested, and that these individual interests in community ends may be made the basis of government. Different schools have very different ways of accounting for the individual's acquiring an interest in a community end, but they all affirm that it finally appears, and that with

its appearance comes the possibility of democratic institutions, and they are confident that this situation is present in all human societies in which civilization exists, though the democratic conclusions may not have been drawn from the premises. It may be necessary to inaugurate revolutions to oust privileged classes and monarchs from power, but the material for the erection of democratic institutions is present, and requires only the freedom of the individual from restraint, and sufficient education to recognize the community ends which are also his own, to reach their fruition (Mead 1917-1918 [2011]: 294).<sup>5</sup>

Both Dewey and Mead remained committed to the programme of radical democratic social reforms and human rights beginning with their collaboration at Chicago. They remained relentless critics of American society for failing to realize democratic ethics and promises (Singer 2018). It is in this philosophical and intellectual milieu it is important to consider the engagement of W.E.B. Du Bois, Hannah Arendt and BR Ambedkar with the philosophical movement of pragmatism. Their encounter and engagement with pragmatism took place in different ways. Their writings are also situated in different ways within the broader spectrum of the social sciences and philosophy. Therefore, it is in this context it is relevant to consider here the interaction and influence and criticism within their thought and writings. Their arrival on the intellectual and philosophical landscape marks an important shift in our understanding and belongingness to this world. The latter part of the thesis shall make an attempt to understand the contradictions and dark and evil sides of modern societies through their writings. This dark side is not only the part of the world where the movement of emancipation is perceived and imagined or probably realized in different ways at times. This dark or evil side of modern societies is not limited to the phenomena of social reality in our everyday collective life but also the way it is configured in various approaches towards modern knowledge. This darkness is also part of or embedded in the process in which modern knowledge is conceived but also the way it is organised and disseminated not merely as information but also something in terms of values which it is expected to fulfil following its promise. For example, the phenomenological method that Hannah Arendt learned from Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger recognizes the serious significance of feelings in human beings.

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<sup>5</sup> Mead, George Herbert. and Filipe Carreira da Silva. *GH Mead: a reader*. Routledge, 2011.

The truth of history cannot be found and known only through reason because the experience of every passing moment of human lives involves feelings and moods, which are more accessible to our understanding through mechanisms of emotions rather than pure reason (Maier-Katkin 2010). Thus Arendt wrote, “With the rise of the modern age, thinking became chiefly the hand-maiden of science, of organized knowledge; and even though thinking then grew extremely active, following modernity's crucial conviction that I can know only what I myself make...” (Arendt: 1971:7).

### **Human Conditions: Historical and Cultural Sufferings**

The beginning of Arendt's life as a refugee in exile was a new experiential moment unlike her previous experiences of being born a Jew and then later becoming part of the German academic and philosophical circles. It was during this she completed her biography on Rahel Varnhagen. This work of Arendt was primarily her *Habilitationsschrift*. Arendt found a companion in Rahel Varnhagen who was unconventional and vulnerable and definitely passionate. Arendt shared a world with Rahel even though there existed a distance of more than a hundred years between them (Arendt and Blucher 2000: 10).

Thus Daniel Maier-Katkin wrote with regard to the bond between Rahel Varnhagen and Hannah Arendt: “love is regard for another from whatever distance the world puts between us”. (Maier-Katkin 2010:102)

Arendt understood from Rahel's experience that even though the German enlightenment did welcome Jews as equal citizens, it did not mean that it was an invitation to make them part of the “good society”. On the contrary, they remained “pariahs” through their marginalization, if not despised. Arendt eventually developed a sense of self-similar to that of Rahel's. This sense of self as pariah echoes “*Mädchen aus der Fremde*, that is, as a person who did not fit comfortably into the world of Germans and Jews into which she was born” (Maier-Katkin 2010: 24). The

coming of enlightenment did not bring an end to the “pariah” status of Jews. Perhaps Arendt was aware of the experience of evil, unbelonging and exile that Jews of Europe shared with the “untouchables” of the Hindu caste order. Ambedkar wrote his autobiographical essay *Waiting for a Visa*<sup>6</sup> (around 1935-36) during the same time period when Arendt wrote “We Refugees” (1943) and “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition” (1944). The word ‘pariah’ comes from an “untouchable” community in South India. The period of the 1930s and 1940s is also the time period when statelessness and human rights began to find its global voice. The global voice also reflected the moral and psychological call for political consciousness and solidarity among the historically and culturally oppressed human beings across time and space.

It is in this context of the failure of enlightenment that Daniel Maier-Katkin writes:

Enlightenment did not bring an end to this: the emancipated Jew (however accomplished, even Einstein) was less a part of the nation than the lowliest peasant, whose place was never in question. In response to this insight, Hannah made the judgment that the proper course among a pariah people (whether one is religious or not) is to accept pariah status with dignity, participating in the larger culture to the extent possible, while accepting what one is and asserting solidarity with other marginalized people, working on behalf of justice and a radical improvement in the conditions of all oppressed people (Maier-Katkin 2010:114).

C.L.R. James in his classical work, ‘The Black Jacobins’, stated that the revolutionaries of the Haitian revolution redefined the “Declaration of rights of man” as a founding document of racial equality (James [1938]2001). The idea of ‘Rights of man’ (what later come to be termed as Human Rights) whose beginnings are also traced back to the struggle of Haitian revolutionaries have been read along with equivalence of the same trajectory of struggle in the case of caste radicals (Rao 2009). This struggle for the ‘rights’ of the slaves and the untouchables has been a struggle to be recognised as equal ‘human beings’. This argument regarding the anthropological dimension in the realization of ‘human beings’ in the context of ‘untouchables’ in South Asia (also termed as Indian subcontinent) and ‘slaves’ (later called as African-Americans in American

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<sup>6</sup> Please see [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt\\_ambedkar\\_waiting.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_waiting.html)

society) is central to the idea of ‘Philosophical Sociology’ developed in the writings of Daniel Chernilo (Chernilo 2016). The question of the ‘rights’ for human beings as the realization of ‘humanity’ is prominently available in the writings of Hannah Arendt. The idea is to understand that there needs to be some form of correspondence among anthropological capacities of human beings across histories. These anthropological capacities are concerned with ‘vita activa’ i.e labour, work and action and ‘vita contemplativa’ i.e thinking, willing and judging (Arendt [1958] 2013). It is this general feature of the anthropology of human beings that they acquire through human rights and fights against the social and political status of being ‘pariah’.

This notion of pariah and the denial of human rights remains central to the Arendtian critique of humanism and modernity. What the previous generation of thinkers and scholars had thought turned out to be lawful and enlightenment turned out to be evil. The question that every thinker including Arendt encountered during this period was that “What could philosophy offer in a shattered world?” (Maier-Katkin 2010: 471)

### **Humanism and Critique: Pragmatism and Social Sciences**

The notion of sociological humanism originates in the debates between humanist and anti-humanist thinkers/social theorists. Marcus Morgan articulates this idea as a space for how to strategically construct our collective consciousness. A humanist philosophy, for example, created doubt and suspicion among those who sought to distance and thus separate humanities from sociology (and even further social scientific knowledge in pursuit of knowledge) in order to preserve the social scientific credentials (Morgan 2016). This view was also held by those who perceived sociology as a discipline based, in part, on epistemologically realist and positivist views of its functions. Besides the idea that there has always been space for creative developments for the advancement of thought, there has also been much discussion on the idea that creative developments have been allowed in the past. This recognition of creative ideational processes is significant for modernity to develop its own critique and thus “new political and epistemological possibilities” originates ( Brown 2001: 5).

According to Morgan, even in the era of humanism when exclusions are common, it is actually in these occurrences when radical understanding emerges through criticism, philosophy, art, science, politics, and so forth. Therefore, the idea of critique is central to this understanding of humanism, as Edward Said noted, "Humanism and criticism have always been linked across cultures and eras" (Said, 2004: 23). One of the major concerns of social theorists has been to understand the relationship between sociology and social critique (Abbott 2001). The notion of critique has been an evocative question and concern for the discipline of sociology from the beginning (Boltanski 2011). Boltanski reflects upon one of the foremost crucial queries that the discipline of social science continues to confront since its origin, related to the orientation of social science on the lines of the natural sciences. This orientation towards the natural sciences needed a descriptive approach and on the opposite side was social science that needed to be oriented towards a critical framework of society.

It is in this regard Boltanski attempts to develop a relationship between sociology and critique. Boltanski discusses the nature of critique itself which has become central in the domain of sociological knowledge. Boltanski refers to a certain question that is essential in his project. Boltanski argues that the notion of critique is central to the formation of sociological knowledge. Thus he engaged with the question of sociology and social critique in the following manner:

This is a question that has never stopped haunting sociology since the origins of the discipline. Should sociology, constituted on the model of the sciences, with an essentially descriptive orientation, be placed in the service of a critique of society - which assumes considering the latter in a normative optic? If so, how should it go about making description and critique compatible? Does an orientation towards critique necessarily have the effect of corrupting the integrity of sociology and diverting it from its scientific project? Or, on the contrary, should it be acknowledged that it in a sense constitutes the purpose (or one of the purposes) of sociology, which, without it, would be a futile activity, remote from the concerns of the people who make up society? Questions of this kind have periodically arisen in the course of the history of sociology, hitching up with other pairs of oppositions en route - for example, between facts and values,



ideology and science, determinism and autonomy, structure and action, macro social and micro-social approaches, explanation and interpretation and so forth (Boltanski 2011: X)

According to Boltanski, the notion of critique is embedded in the formation of sociology as a form of emancipatory enterprise. The study of critical theories starts from the vantage point of understanding dominance or social theories whose aim is to understand social dominance. He explained how, for example, theories of dominance have been conceptualized in sociology. According to the sociology of dominance, power exists in the form of a complex web (Boltanski 2011). In Boltanski's view, this complex becomes entangled, contradicted, confronted, and in certain instances, may even neutralize itself. According to him, human agents are aware of being dominated or dominant as part of their consciousness. The context in which Boltanski explains power is definitely a contesting arena. Power is a dimension that is frequently observable from the observer's perspective especially due to its presence even in a non-static mode. Or there are those forms of appearance of power that have been made to appear rational and legitimized in the Weberian perspective. The justifications of such forms of power provide the appearance of the robustness of life based on its everydayness (ibid).

Boltanski envisaged this critique at the intersection of social theory and American Pragmatism. We shall situate the academic, intellectual and political trajectories of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Du Bois in Boltanski's framework and interrelationality of 'sociology' and 'critique'. This hermeneutically inspired reading of the social sciences shall focus upon the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois, Hannah Arendt and B. R. Ambedkar. This is an attempt to situate their intellectual life and 'unending quest' in response to the concerns of the human conditions in historical time. The concerns regarding human conditions over centuries have been shared by other thinkers who came before them and afterwards as well. As it is said in the 'history of ideas' that those who do not meet in time and space meet in the realm of ideas (Arendt 2013 [1958]).

Through this hermeneutic philosophy of social sciences, we will contribute to an understanding of the diverse genealogies of emancipation in the intellectual and political struggles of Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar. This is also to understand how social theory as a meta-narrative of social

sciences interacted with the pragmatist tradition. This is not to argue for or situate pragmatism within the North American philosophical tradition and thus limit it. At the same time, it is true that towards the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, Chauncey Wright, Charles Cooley, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and George Herbert Mead were the pioneers of this intellectual movement in America. These thinkers were located in North America but did not remain oblivious of the philosophical and knowledge movements that originated and developed in different parts of the world especially Europe. At the same time, it is important to highlight that most of these classical pragmatists have been criticised for not engaging with the question of racism, slavery and colonialism. Thus, in this thesis, we attempt to extend the scope of classical pragmatism beyond America to engage with some pertinent questions in the twentieth century. Secondly, the attempt is to understand how Du Bois and Ambedkar broadened the scope of the ‘social’ and ‘political’ through their engagement with questions of slavery, colonialism, racism, casteism and social democracy. Further, Arendt's encounter with pragmatism became an interaction of ‘Existenz philosophy’ and pragmatism. This resulted in some of the key debates on the public sphere, the realm of the ‘polis’, critique of social sciences and sociology in particular.

### **Social Theory and Uncertainty: Thinking about Social Sciences**

Both the claim and the question that “there is growing uncertainty as to what social theory can or should achieve, especially in its relationship to the various social sciences it is supposed to serve” (Baert and Silva, 2010:288). The purpose is to understand this uncertainty and think about the theory of uncertainty as the project of the social sciences has unfolded historically. The idea of uncertainty is found in the writings of different thinkers in the twentieth century like Max Weber, Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, Everett Hughes, Zygmunt Bauman. These thinkers argue that different faces of uncertainty are embedded and entangled within the project of modernity. For example, Bauman points out that the Holocaust has more to add to our knowledge about sociology rather than sociology in its present conditions have added to our knowledge of the Holocaust (Bauman [1989] 2000). The significant concern has been, in the words of Hughes, to

understand who are these people who inflict atrocities? What are the circumstances under which ‘good’ people allow them to do so? How do we develop better knowledge to understand the circumstances under which these forces rise to power and what better ways are there of keeping them out of power ( Hughes 1962, Fein 1989)?

The purpose is to understand the aforementioned questions and objectives in the writings of W.E.B Du Bois, Hannah Arendt and BR Ambedkar. These three thinkers have had their own interaction with and influence upon pragmatism. This is not to state their thoughts, approach and writings were totally influenced by pragmatism only. However, several themes and ideas that became prominent in their writings were overlapped with pragmatism. These three thinkers in their pursuit raised certain fundamental questions. These questions also allowed them to transcend their context and ask questions about the idea of the human conditions through a shared understanding of the global. This global context is about the suffering and pain in human society and the ability of human society to transcend their specific contexts towards collective emancipation.

The radical origins of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt are constitutive of ideational engagements on several ideas and practices that are concerned with three perennial questions of Kant: “What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?” (Kant Cited by Alix Cohen 2009: xi)

Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt are concerned with questions that determine human conditions. Furthermore, we will discuss how Du Bois and Ambedkar addressed the question of human conditions through pragmatism, while Arendt dealt with it through her phenomenological and existential philosophy. The purpose is not to understand their ideas as pragmatists but rather how they engaged with some of the core ideas prominent in classical pragmatism, primarily on the question of the ‘political’ and the ‘social’. This sociology of ideas is not only about how they engaged with particular thinkers, texts or even ideas to think about society and worldview. This thinking is also about their constant search for democratic institutions and communitarian ways to live in this world. This constant search to belong to the world was based on the

correspondence between texts, ideas, practices that had existed across time and space. This very world in which our existence becomes possible is also the source of pain and suffering that remain inside us through our long-lived memories. How were these three thinkers trying to speak to power in their conscious constructions of social truths? One of the major constructions of these social truths began in their writings based on in-depth reading and engagement with historical constructions and imaginations that gave rise to modern societies.

This thesis significantly takes into consideration the perspectives from the ‘new sociology of ideas’ as developed in the writings of Neil Gross and Charles Camic. With regard to origins and development of ‘new sociology of ideas’ they argued:

Over the course of the past twenty years, an important field of study, which we call “the new sociology of ideas,” has been quietly taking shape. The field focused on women and men who specialize in the production of cognitive, evaluative, and expressive ideas and examines the social processes by which their ideas-i.e. their statements, claims, arguments, concepts, beliefs and assumptions, etc.-emerge, develop, and change. For much of the twentieth century interest in these processes fell, along with many other concerns, to the often marginalized specialty area of the sociology of knowledge, where they suffered relative neglect. Recently, however, a major turnabout has occurred, as a result of the work of scholars in a number of specialty areas, including- in addition to the sociology of knowledge itself- the sociology of science, the sociology of culture, and general sociological theory, as well as intellectual history (Gross and Camic 2001: 236).

The ‘new sociology of ideas’ unlike ‘sociology of ideas’ will help to engage the intellectual positioning of Ambedkar, Du Bois and Arendt. On the one hand, it will help to engage with intellectual, political and cultural positioning of their ideas in the twentieth century. On the other, it will help to engage with how their ideas remained marginalised through different social structures and processes? And then what is it about their ideas that with changes in the intellectual, political and cultural contexts, rose to the forefront of intellectual and academic life?

Quentin Skinner states that any historian of idea is confronted with this basic question “what are the appropriate procedures to adopt in the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the work?” (Skinner 1969:3). In his attempt to answer this question he points out two kinds of orthodox answers to this question. Though he believes that these two are also conflicting in nature. The first is to understand the text by situating it in a certain context. This context is associated with time and space, religious, cultural, political, social and economic factors that might be considered to determine the meaning of any given text (Skinner 1969: 3). The second orthodoxy is concerned with the “autonomy of the text” (ibid). This is to say that not to think of the text in the “total context” but rather to think of the text “as the sole necessary key to its own meaning” (ibid).

In this context of the Skinnerian perspective on the history of ideas, this thesis attempts to situate the formative intellectual formation of Du Bois and Ambedkar on the one hand and then how the intellectual world of Arendt radically changed since her arrival in America as a refugee. In their encounter and engagement with pragmatism in different ways, how these thinkers shaped debates on the fundamental issues of the twentieth century that continue to haunt us. The purpose here is to understand how the writings of these three thinkers provided an alternative paradigm within the discourse on the philosophy of social sciences. This alternative paradigm of philosophy of social sciences is based on their conscious construction of a worldview that enabled them to engage with the long view of history, of several crucial aspects of the human condition primarily concerned with the questions of racism, caste and untouchability and the crystallization of various historical processes that culminated in the ‘origins of totalitarianism’.

Arthur Lovejoy stated that an idea has to be understood through the intellectual life of society as they come to reflect the thinking and acting of that society (Lovejoy, 1963). At the same time, they also find expression in different disciplines in their attempt to organize their knowledge and social milieu. Thus, ideas are understandable in relation to society and its social processes. Sociology and history of ideas attempt to expose the limits and confinements of ideas yet to be explored and thus challenges the established notions of history, philosophical assumptions and

different domains of knowledge. based on the understanding that “the action has to await the future to await its meaning” (Skinner, 1969: 24).

### **Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt: The Purpose of Knowledge**

Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt infused their intellectual and political engagement with different philosophical traditions and, at the same time, transformed their modes of thinking on historical questions in radical ways. While Du Bois and Ambedkar remained critical in their practices and pursuit of social scientific knowledge since their early days at Harvard and Columbia respectively (Du Bois [1899]2007, [1903]2007, 1910 ; Ambedkar 1916, 1918, 1923)<sup>7</sup>. Arendt's engagement with philosophy changed during the period of 1930s and 1940s. We observe a shift in her thinking in the philosophical and political since her arrival in America. The experiences of being a holocaust survivor and then as a refugee in America shifted her approach from the ‘spectatory theory of knowledge’.

Margaret Canovan has stated:

Arendt did not make great efforts to communicate her ideas. As she once explained in an interview, the motive behind her work was her own desire to understand, and writing was part of the process of understanding. If this meant that others shared her insights, that was a satisfaction to her, but she suggested half-seriously that if she been blessed with a good enough memory to be able to remember all her thoughts without working them out on paper, she might never have written anything. Misreadings of her books left her largely unmoved. She declared on another occasion that fceach time you write something and you send it out into the world . . .everybody is free to do with it what he pleases... You should not try to hold your hand now on whatever may happen to what you have been thinking for yourself.' This unusual sense of detachment from her readers was part of her more general detachment from academic debate, that 'majestic

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<sup>7</sup> Ambedkar, “Mr. Russell and the Reconstruction of Society,” In vol.1. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches 1:487; originally published in Journal of the Indian Economic Society 1 (1918).

Ambedkar, Bhimrao R. “Mr. Russell and the reconstruction of society.” . In Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches vol.1, 481-492. New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India. 1918 [2014].

indifference' to the standard academic literature on her subject on which Sheldon Wolin commented when reviewing her last book. Rather than being contributions to public discussion, her best-known writings were essentially inward-looking, part of the endless dialogue with oneself that seemed to her to constitute the life of the mind (Canovan 1994: 2-3).

Arendt experiences during the period of totalitarianism allowed her to question the nature of knowledge along with its limitations. This led her to think of the processes through which ideas acquire prominence in the public sphere. It is possible to argue that even though Canovan argued that “Arendt did not make great efforts to communicate her ideas”, she [Arendt] understood the central importance of the communicative method in the formation of ideas in the realm of the public (Arendt 2013[1958]). The formation of ideas has never been a process that exists at the individual level. Though it needs to be mentioned here that for Arendt communication existed as a historical process and not confined only to the present age. As part of the historical process, she [Arendt] communicated with thinkers across time and space to understand phenomenology and existential philosophy and the age of totalitarianism (Arendt 1958 [1973], 2013 [1958]).

According to the spectator theory of knowledge is that which discloses the “...an inner nature of an outer world as accurately as possible” (Baert 2005b: 129). Pragmatism attempts and hopes to break away with this metaphorical vision to mirror the world in the world of knowledge. In accordance with Darwinian evolutionary theory, pragmatism offers a true anti-representationalist perspective on life (Dewey 1910]). In this perspective, knowledge acquisition is viewed as an active exercise as it is a way of coping with the demands of life. For example, the pragmatists learned from Darwin that it is possible to explain how the human species have evolved language as one means of coexistence in this world. It is certainly important to understand from a Darwinian perspective how human beings would have acquired the capacity to represent the world (Wiener 1972). In the work of John Dewey and G.H. Mead, the pursuit of knowledge involves a mechanism that makes possible the continuation of a previously inhibited course of action (Baldwin 1986; Huebner 2014). For Dewey, pragmatism builds upon modern science and, in contrast with ancient conceptions of experience and science, experimental science underscores

the active processes, the doing, in knowledge acquisition (Dewey 1910). For rationalists reality is ready-made, complete and waiting to be discovered; for pragmatists, it is always in the making. Knowledge is not about copying but coping (James 1907; Rorty 2013).

In contrast to their counterparts, especially European thinkers, the American Pragmatist movement initiated by people like Charles Pierce, William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead observed that social life is multidimensional instead of being described in terms of structurally deterministic explanations. They tend to emphasize and highlight how social events can be a product of negotiation and strategies rather than exploitation and dominance on all occasions. Regardless, this is not to imply that structural dominance does not persist in human life, but on the contrary, there is a constant struggle in the 'life of the mind' to imagine intelligible ways to live in this world (Arendt 1971). The purpose is to emphasize, in both similar and different ways, how these three thinkers internalized the 'life of the mind' in their intellectual and political trajectories.

There are different approaches that contribute in major ways to the research question this thesis has proposed to explore. One of the approaches involves sociology of knowledge which includes the writings of Mannheim and extends up to Bourdieu's critical and reflexive sociology (Mannheim 1929 [2013]). This, for example, includes how certain ideas, concepts and categories intrinsic to the realm of the social theory were conceptualised (Ringer 1990). We should take into account how pragmatism is reflected in traditional and contemporary social theories, as well as its potential to solve crucial issues in social theory (Joas 1993). This approach enables identifying the intrinsic and extrinsic factors which influenced social theory in its present status. This to some extent engages with an analysis of thought processes themselves which gets influenced by the thinker or the researcher's engagement with their own society. This is not to confine social theory within some kind of relativism. On the contrary, this reflects how social theorists took part in thinking and essentializing the ideas they were engaging with. This highlights self-referential pedagogy adopted by Bourdieu which firmly refuses the breakaway of theory and research into an isolated form of intellectual activity (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1992).



It is also significant here to understand self-referential pedagogy as a reference point for self-referential knowledge. How this relationship of knowledge (in particular social theory) and society has to be contextualised, locating genealogies of emancipation (within social sciences) when certain normative claims were made. This is to argue that social theory itself, constituted as a body of knowledge, is embedded within the project of emancipation. And therefore, social theory needs to emancipate itself first from this uncertainty in order to develop genealogies of emancipation.

### **Chapterization of the dissertation:**

#### **Chapter 2: The Early Beginnings and the Questions:**

This chapter engages with the question of how W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar and Hannah Arendt began their intellectual and academic journey in different historical, intellectual and institutional contexts. How were their formative years crucial in terms of 'beginning' in the intellectual and the academic world? How did their formative years shape their intellectual trajectory? How did this intellectual trajectory become crucial for them both from experiential and philosophical perspectives?

#### **Chapter 3: The interlocutors, trajectories and pathways**

This chapter follows the historical trajectory of the philosophy of pragmatism on the one hand and the social sciences on the other. The trajectories of W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar take us into the history of classical pragmatism and the social sciences. Both Du Bois and Ambedkar began their academic and intellectual training at Harvard and Columbia University respectively. Hannah Arendt started her academic training in Philosophy at Marburg University where she was influenced by Martin Heidegger. Martin Heidegger had acquired a significant position in German philosophy since the publication of *Being and Time*. Arendt's intellectual and political trajectory

took her from Marburg to Heidelberg University and then finally to America as a holocaust survivor and a refugee among other emigré intellectuals in America.

#### **Chapter 4: Pragmatism, Darwin and Social Sciences**

This chapter engages with the debates that took place among the members of ‘the metaphysical club’ later crystallised as philosophical pragmatism. The members of ‘metaphysical club’ debated the ideas of evolutionism, Herbert Spencer and then Charles Darwin and his book entitled *On the Origin of Species*. John Dewey and Franz Boas delivered lectures in the seminar entitled ‘Charles Darwin and his influence on Science’ in 1909 at Columbia University. In the very next year, John Dewey published *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*. John Dewey had fundamentally argued that Darwin’s ideas refuted long-standing natural, philosophical and theological doctrines. Both Du Bois and Boas had developed intellectual and political collaborations primarily on the question of ‘race’ in human societies. During his studies at Columbia University Ambedkar was primarily influenced by Deweyan pragmatism and Boasian anthropology. Informed by the broader tenets of Boasian anthropology and Alexander Goldenweiser’s work, Ambedkar problematized the question of caste and developed a sociological and cultural critique of the practice of untouchability.

#### **Chapter 5: Towards Historical Reflexivity: Reading History and Social Theory**

This chapter attempts to understand the relationship between history and social theory. Initially, it attempts to understand how the history of social theory needs to be contextualised in the twentieth century. For example, how the history of colonialism, slavery, race and caste, and holocaust violence were marginalized in the domain of social theory during the first half of the twentieth century. How did Du Bois and Ambedkar begin thinking about the question of history? Thus, there is an attempt in this chapter to understand the early historical engagements of both Du Bois and Ambedkar and their implications for social sciences.

## **Chapter 6: Arendt, Ambedkar and the Question of Evil:**

This chapter is an attempt to engage with the question of ‘evil’ that did not acquire a significant place in social theory throughout the twentieth century. The question of evil is a crucial framework to engage with historical and cultural along with the catastrophes and violence that took place during the age of totalitarianism, several wars and episodes of violence in the twentieth century and continue to take place. Jeffrey Alexander has argued that even though “Evil is a powerful and a sui generis social force”, it did not receive enough systematic attention from the perspective of the social sciences. Arendt and Ambedkar remain two formidable thinkers in the twentieth century on the question of evil. The aim is to understand how ‘radical evil’ in the form cultural and historical oppression of human beings in the form of race and caste continued to exist through the twentieth century and gave rise to dehumanised forms of violence. Thus, this chapter attempts to engage with the idea of ‘evil’ through the writings of Hannah Arendt and B.R. Ambedkar.

## **Chapter 7: Homelessness in the World of Thought-Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois**

This chapter begins with Elizabeth Goodstein’s identification of Simmel as the ‘internal other’ in the disciplinary imagination and construction of sociology in the twentieth century. This identification as ‘internal other’ reimagines the disciplinary formation from an alternative perspective and has significant consequences for the history of sociology and social theory. It is through broadening the phenomenological perspective of ‘internal other’ as homelessness in the world of thought. This idea of homelessness in the phenomenological sense attempts to critique the logic of the canon and the idea of ‘founding fathers’ in thinking about the origins of social theory.

## **Chapter 8: Sociological Futures: Towards a Pragmatist Philosophy of Social Sciences**

The concluding argue how Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar envision a future based on humanism through their intellectual and political critique of existing modes of understanding in the domain of knowledge and polity. These intellectual and political efforts of Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar made it possible to envision democracy through an emancipatory approach of social scientific knowledge and philosophical approaches. The emancipatory approaches were concerned with thinking about the human condition that allowed historically and culturally oppressed to find their place in the world of appearance i.e. in the public sphere. Their appearance in the public sphere with their pain and sufferings made it possible to broaden the vision of democracy and challenge the radical forms of evil that confront us. Our understanding is that both Du Bois and Ambedkar, both pragmatists, as well as Arendt, created this formidable approach towards the centrality of the ‘human conditions’, as opposed to ‘human nature’, is crucial for humanism in the contemporary age.

## Chapter 2

### The Early Beginnings and Questions

#### Historical and Educational Context of Pragmatism and Sociology

C Wright Mills argued that the development and spread of academic philosophy in America has to be observed *vis-à-vis* the immediate setting following which academic philosophy took a particular shape in America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He argues that the history of Pragmatism is also about the history of the academic profession in America (Mills 1969).<sup>1</sup> Mills' fundamental argument is that the history of pragmatism in America has to be understood against the backdrop of the advancement of higher education and research in America. Sociologically speaking the immediate situation that influenced the 'pragmatic movement' is often associated with the transformation of the university in the nineteenth century particularly after the civil war (Mills 1969; Misak 2013; Jewett 2012). A broader view of Pragmatism suggests that it is a philosophical movement that has to be positioned historically between the end of the Civil War in America and the beginning of the Cold War in the twentieth century. This trajectory reflects significant changes from the 1960s onwards.

The changing nature of the American university system since the civil war has been considered to be the most significant paradigmatic shift in American Intellectual life. This shift is also crucial to understand the early beginnings of pragmatism in American intellectual life and the role of 'scientific democrats' in bringing about these changes (Jewett 2012; Bacon 2012; Davaney and Frisina [Eds.] 2012). The classical pragmatists were associated with university life during this period. According to Jewett the rise of the modern American university coincided with: "*the desire of natural scientists to create institutions and facilities for producing new knowledge rather than simply disseminating existing knowledge; the knowledge needs of a rapidly industrializing economy; or the secularizing impact of Darwinian evolution on American*

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<sup>1</sup> It is this argument of philosophy as an academic profession in America, which recurs throughout Mill's "Sociology and Pragmatism".

*intellectual life*” (Jewett 2012: 28). The third chapter of this thesis significantly engages with the impact of Darwinian evolutionism and broadly evolutionary theories. The evolutionary theories as philosophical and political discussions were one of the central debates in the intellectual and public life of America including for the thinkers of the ‘The Metaphysical Club’ also referred to as the school of ‘Classical Pragmatism’ (Hook 1949; Kuclick 1979; Louis 2001; Behrens 2005). It has also to be pointed here that the period of classical pragmatism in the history of American political life and the American university coincides with the era of the ‘Reconstruction’ and the promulgation of Jim Crow laws.

The era naturally shaped “Jim Crow Sociology” that was concurrent with other developments such as ‘scientific racism’ and the beginnings of the ‘eugenics’ movement (Bernard 1948; Stanfield 1985; Wright II 2006, 2020; Gooding-Williams 2009). Craig Steven Wilder in his work “Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the troubled history of America’s universities” discusses the dark side of the rise of the American university system whose legacy, among others, was also connected with the history of slavery and colonialism (Wilder 2013). American universities also went through the radical transformation from “proslavery to antislavery” primarily because of the intellectual and political movements that brought the race question to the forefront of American polity ( Harris et al. [Eds.] 2019). The historical discrimination of African-American people persisted after the War and continued further into the twentieth century. This shall be discussed further in chapters 4 and 5 against the backdrop of the emergence of Du Boisian sociology at Atlanta University that went on to flag what is now referred to as “Postcolonial sociology” (Go 2016).

While Du Bois continued to elaborate on his sociological approach at Atlanta, he had benefited from his stint at Harvard University and the intellectual companionship of William James and Albert Bushnell Hart (Du Bois 1960; Campbell 1992). With the exception of Chauncy Wright, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., and Charles S. Peirce and other pragmatists were associated with the natural sciences, academic philosophy and intellectual life of the university and different graduate schools (Pearce 2020). The most significant developments in pragmatism were driven

by students and professors as well as those scholars and social activists who did not belong to the university. These students included the likes of Dewey, Du Bois, Jane Addams and Mead who would go on to shape the trajectory of pragmatism in multiple ways. Thus Ruth Anne Rawls in her discussion of the notion of ‘self’ with reference to Du Bois’s writings argued:

It is not surprising that Du Bois’s theory of self should look something like that of G. H. Mead. He had two things in common with Mead. He studied with William James at Harvard, both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student. Mead, James, and Dewey were all associated with American pragmatism. Mead and Du Bois also both studied in Germany during the early 1890s. For Mead, the influence of Wundt was critical in this regard. Du Bois was also heavily influenced by German thinkers, although in his case Weber and Schmoller seem to have been the main influences. It is unlikely that any American thinker spent time in Germany without being influenced by the important criticisms of traditional rationalist, individualist, and positivist assumptions that were being articulated there at the time (Rawls, 2000: 244).

The development of the graduate school in the context of higher education and research contributed to the collaboration between institutions. In this manner, pragmatism came to the foreground of the American intellectual landscape and beyond. One of the major intellectual initiatives of the period was a series of lectures by Durkheim on pragmatic philosophy delivered in 1913-14 (Durkheim [1955] 1983). Over the last few decades, social theorists and Durkheim scholars have highlighted the significance of these debates in the intellectual landscape of Durkheimian thought at large (Joas 1990; Rawls 1997, Gross 1997, Karsenti 2012).<sup>2</sup> Chapter 7 and chapter 8 of the thesis elaborates on a few crucial themes of Durkheim’s lecture on pragmatism.

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<sup>2</sup> These arguments also take us towards how pragmatism was received in a completely different philosophical, institutional and political context. These lectures on the philosophical thought of pragmatism by Durkheim were extremely significant as highlighted by Marcel Mauss as well. The preface to the French edition of 1955 was written by Marcel Mauss. These lectures have remained a central intellectual event for the scholars who engage with both Pragmatism and the writings and thoughts of Durkheim.

At the international level, the phase of the first world war and then the interwar period was crucial in the intellectual development of thinkers that included Durkheim, Russell, Du Bois, Dewey, Ambedkar, Arendt and several others across philosophical schools of thought. For pragmatism and in particular, for Dewey, the period from 1916-1921 was crucial given the global political environment. This not only had to do with the first world war that deeply impacted the thought of most philosophers at the time but also his philosophical and political encounter with Japan and China. Through these encounters, Dewey was able to test his philosophical understanding in the light of the vast sociological and political complexity that had existed at the international level during the first few decades of the twentieth century( Tan 2004; Gronda 2015).

It could be argued that in general, the history of pragmatism includes much of what is referred to as 'American Philosophy' or philosophy, and is concerned with the sociological and political life of the American Nation (Schneider [1946]1963; Ryan 1995). In other words, the conventional understanding of pragmatism limits it to the American context as a philosophical and political intellectual movement. It is true that all those considered 'classical pragmatists' or members of the 'metaphysical club' were born in America and were part of its university and academic life, but their ideas were deeply influenced by different intellectual and philosophical traditions and simultaneously influenced various philosophical and political concerns throughout the twentieth century (White [1949] 1957, 1956; Schwartz 2015). The intellectual and political life of Du Bois and Ambedkar stands out as testimony in the broad tradition of classical pragmatism.

Du Bois's conceptualization of the racial system and the global colour line was based on an understanding of world history that involved colonialism, slavery and imperialism (Du Bois 2017, 2007[1939]; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015). For Du Bois, this shared approach was indicative of the entanglements and connectedness of the world order following which 'racial capitalism' had come into existence (Du Bois 2014[1896] Go 2016; Bhambra and Holmhood 2021; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020). Similarly, for Ambedkar, the philosophical approach of pragmatism and in particular Deweyan pragmatism was an important resource for developing his



ideas about democracy and communicative deliberation in the Indian context. In Democracy Ambedkar found a way to build equality and liberty based on fraternity. He was of the categorical opinion that equality and liberty cannot be sustained without fraternity or to put it radically any society cannot claim to have democracy by merely having liberty and equality. The radical approach to democracy can only be sustained when liberty and equality rests upon the pillar of fraternity. This understanding of democracy in Ambedkar came from his engagement with the philosophical and theoretical framing of social democracy over a period of time, complemented by his reading of the caste system in India as well as the racial system in America associated with colonialism and imperialism throughout the world (Omvedt 2005; Mukherjee 2009; Stroud 2017; Rodrigues 2004, 2017; Garza 2018, 2019 ).

With reference to the history development of pragmatism as a philosophy there was a gap of thirty years between the publication of the early work of C.S. Peirce and a series of lectures in philosophy delivered by William James under the broader framework of pragmatism. These lectures are formally considered as the first statement of a philosophical beginning with Peirce and then James and later included Ludwig Wittgenstein (Murphy 1968; James 1975; Peirce 1992a; Shook 1998; Goodman 2002; Bernstein 2012). William James had first announced his commitment towards pragmatism during these lectures delivered at the University of California in 1898 entitled ‘Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results’<sup>3</sup> (James 2011). James credited Charles Sanders Peirce with the first use of the term ‘pragmatism’ in his essay entitled ‘How to make our ideas clear’ ( Peirce 1878 [1992b]). James had arrived late on the Philosophical scene. He graduated with a medical degree and later entered Harvard University as an instructor in physiology and went on to become a professor of philosophy in 1880 (Cotkin 1994). In the year 1890 he published a two volume work *The Principles of Psychology* (Burkhardt 1983; Evans 1990).

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<sup>3</sup> In the year 1898, this paper was presented to the University of California (Berkeley) Philosophical union. A broader interpretation of the pragmatic maxim is presented by James here, who refers to Peirce as pragmatism's founder.

Among the founding fathers of pragmatism, Pierce, but for a brief period at Johns Hopkins University, worked outside the university, while thinkers like James, Dewey, Mead and Du Bois were faculty at various universities. William James as a professor of philosophy at Harvard University travelled to deliver lectures at several universities outside America as well. He collaborated with the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and his students (Wilshire 1969; Edie 1987; Cotkin 1994).<sup>4</sup> While Dewey was a university philosopher, his philosophical concerns were not limited to the discipline of philosophy at the university but extended to the field of education, where he has remained to this day a pioneer. In the period between his departure from Chicago and joining Columbia, Dewey began to consider ways in which society could be a laboratory for engagement with philosophical theory. The period from Chicago and during the initial period at Columbia university, was crucial from the perspective of pragmatism (Dykhuizen 1964; Mayhew and Edwards 1965). It is during this period Dewey thought of social context to be a testing ground for the correctness of the philosophical understanding of the world.

This attempt to bring together philosophy and politics in America was against existing practices within the highly esoteric discipline of philosophy. The development of American Philosophy, during these years, prior to the political turn to pragmatism, remained isolated from social concerns. Dewey was a pragmatic oriented thinker whose subsequent contribution was to the Political turn. Dewey believed that experimental logic could be extended to the human sciences to gather relevant data from the past to develop an understanding towards the present (Dewey 1920).

Philip Kitcher has argued about Dewey's attempt to challenge the existing notions of philosophy and think of new frameworks to envision philosophy. These arguments of philosophy are based primarily on "Democracy and Education" and "Reconstruction in Philosophy" published during the last few years of the 1920s.

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<sup>4</sup> I have elaborated in detail in the latter part of this chapter and elsewhere in this dissertation in brief about the arguments of Alfred Schütz to highlight the transnational aspect of Pragmatism. Furthermore, some of the fundamental thinking that Pierce and James developed was through interaction and exchange of ideas with European thinkers at the time.

Kitcher writes:

When some discipline seems to be cut off from other areas, when the “literature” it produces is regarded as arcane and irrelevant, they will think it worth asking if that discipline is doing its proper job. Immediately after characterizing philosophy as the “general theory of education,” Dewey buttresses his definition by raising this issue: “Unless a philosophy is to remain symbolic—or verbal—or a sentimental indulgence for a few, or else mere arbitrary dogma, its auditing of past experience and its program of values must take effect in conduct” (Dewey 1997, 328). The danger that a field of inquiry will become a “sentimental indulgence for a few”—or perhaps a site of intellectual jousting for a few—is especially urgent in the case of philosophy. “The fact that philosophical problems arise because of widespread and widely felt difficulties in social practice is disguised because philosophers become a specialized class which uses a technical language, unlike the vocabulary in which the direct difficulties are stated” (Dewey 1997, 328). Two important points are made here: first, philosophical problems emerge from situations in which people—many people, not just an elite class—find themselves; second, the development of technical language is particularly problematic in philosophy. Both these points need to be treated carefully (Kitcher 2011:250).

Dewey’s concerns steered him to develop his social philosophy and ethical framework through the political turn to pragmatism that commenced in his experimental logic in philosophy and philosophy of science. This attempt to locate philosophical thought within particular social and historical contexts were not appreciated within the community of scholars (Dewey 1988 [1929]). Dewey argued that knowledge in modern times has to take into consideration the cultural and historical dimensions in order to judge the actions based on ethical and moral frameworks. The ethical and moral frameworks are crucial frameworks of the judgement of intelligence from Dewey’s perspective (Dewey et al 1917; Dewey 1922).

Dewey's ideas on democratic theory and social reality need to be understood from a dialogical perspective with George Herbert Mead (Mead 1917; Dewey 1931; Mead 1935; Da Silva 2010;

Huebner 2014). Both Mead and Dewey were intellectual collaborators even though the latter had a wider reception (Mead 1934 [1956]; 1929; 1930; Da Silva 2010). Both Mead and Du Bois were students at Harvard University at the same time, in an academic milieu that included William James, Rosaiah Joyce and others (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015; Campbell 1992). During their studies at Harvard University both of them traveled to Germany, which is seen in the intellectual history of Pragmatism and the intellectual development of Du Bois and Mead as a crucial period.<sup>5</sup> Mead was influenced by Wilhelm Wundt while Du Bois engaged with the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber and the German Historical Tradition (Da Silva 2010; Morris 2015; Joas and Huebner 2016).

In Dewey's writings on pragmatism Ambedkar found the archetype of a philosopher and public intellectual (Chakrabarty 2016; Stroud 2017). Dewey's writings became crucial for Ambedkar in developing a critical understanding of Indian Society and social justice (Škof 2013; Garza 2014; Stroud 2017c). This intellectual influence persisted throughout Ambedkar's life. Even though Ambedkar did his Ph.D in Economics and moved to Europe for his further studies, his engagement with pragmatism and John Dewey deepened with time, particularly during his participation in preparing the Indian constitution during the late 1940s (Maitra 2013).

The history of pragmatism has paid little attention to the experiments in pragmatic thought undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century especially through extensive writings of B.R. Ambedkar. During this period he participated in a wide range of issues especially in the grand experiment of Indian democracy that was unfolding. This has been highlighted in the existing writings on Ambedkar (Ambedkar 1919 [2014]; Zelliott 1969; Jaffrelot 2005; Rao 2009 Newbigan 2013). This wide reach of pragmatism in late colonial India through the writing of B.R. Ambedkar takes us to the ideas of Randall Collins propounded in *The Sociology of Philosophies* especially in the context of how ideas operate within any academic and intellectual

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<sup>5</sup> Aldon Morris writes “ In the late nineteenth century it was customary for elite social science scholars to attend universities in Germany to study with the world's greatest social scientists who were in the vanguard of the newly emerging social sciences. Du Bois was aware of this custom and decided that he would study at the University of Berlin to obtain the best education possible” (Morris 2015:229).

network.<sup>6</sup> Ambedkar's engagement with pragmatism remains an intense social scientific and philosophical quest.

### **Philosophical and Epistemological Approaches and Influences on Classical Pragmatism**

Pierce states that the word 'Pragmatism' ( or "Pragmaticism") comes from the writings of Kant. Thus with regard to James's term "practicalism", Peirce discussed his preference for 'Pragmatism' in the following passage of his lecture "What Pragmatism is".

"For this doctrine he invented the name pragmatism. Some of his friends wished him to call it practicism or practicalism (perhaps on the grounds that {praktikos} is better Greek than {pragmatikos}). But for one who had learned philosophy out of Kant, as the writer, along with nineteen out of every twenty experimentalists who have turned to philosophy, had done, and who still thought in Kantian terms most readily, *praktisch* and *pragmatisch* were as far apart as the two poles, the former belonging in a region of thought where no mind of the experimentalist type can ever make sure of solid ground under his feet, the latter expressing relation to some definite human purpose. Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose; and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name pragmatism" (Peirce 1905 [1965]: 161-181).

From a Kantian perspective, Peirce was right in his thinking that the term 'Pragmatism' was much more in resonance with his philosophy rather than the term 'practicalism' and 'practicism' (Dewey 1916; Wiener 1946; Legg and Hookway 2008; Willaschek, 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> The significant ideas from the perspective of the sociology of ideas are often those intellectual histories which are carried translocally. The sociology of ideas views serious limitations in understanding knowledge as a completely local construction. This understanding of knowledge formation as a complete local construction often ignores the context beyond the local both at the point of origin or even at later stages of knowledge formation including reception and further dissemination. But another branch of sociology, specifically sociology of science has an open wide spectrum of observation on this aspect which essentially becomes extremely crucial from the perspective of the sociology of ideas. Sociology of science has contributed significantly to our understanding of individuals, groups, networks, institutions and how they are discussed beyond the context of origins.

For almost twenty three years Kant had offered a lecture course on anthropology every winter semester along with a lecture course on physical geography every summer to broaden the knowledge of both nature and humanity. Kant had thought this course to be an introductory one but after his retirement from teaching in 1796 he decided to publish the notes prepared for these classes (Wilson 2006).<sup>7</sup> ‘Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view’ contained empirical psychology following this determined thinking that metaphysics had nothing to contribute to psychology in its current status of ‘rational psychology’ (Mischel 1969). The text also reflects Kant's ‘empirical ethics’ following which knowledge is significant and crucial for actual human life (Munzel 1991). This knowledge is necessary for the application of categorical imperative in the life of the society as ‘citizens of the world’. Kant thought of anthropology in pursuit of this question: “What is human being”? Kant’s purpose was to train students to become ‘citizens of the world’ through through these two courses on anthropology and physical geography in particular (Wilson 2006).

As Wilson in her study of Kant’s anthropology from a historical and philosophical perspective states:

“Kant’s Pragmatic Anthropology, on the other hand, does not concern itself with “what nature makes out of the human being,” but “what the human being, as a freely acting being makes, or can and should make of itself.” Kant does refer to anthropology as a science, though it has difficulty in becoming so. It is empirical, teleological, and ethical and must therefore have an empirical methodology as well as a rational methodology. Anthropology is empirical in so far as its method is based on observations, teleological in that the maxims of teleology are presupposed and used reflectively, and ethical and rational in so far as those observations and reflections are subordinated to the ethical final ends of human existence (Wilson, 2006:24)”.

The reflection on ‘empirical ethics’ in ‘anthropology from a pragmatic point of view’ has been associated with ‘practical anthropology’. Thus the empirical aspect of ethics is often understood as ‘practical anthropology’ in Kantian terms. This had a symmetrical understanding with empirical physics and was considered to be “philosophy insofar as it is based on grounds of

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<sup>7</sup> It has been stated that this was one of the most popular courses of immanuel Kant even though he charged a fee from the students who had joined the course. This is evident from the description and students notes available so far.

experience”. This “practical anthropology” as a doctrine of knowledge is systematically formulated that exists “either in a physiological or in a pragmatic point of view.” The physiological knowledge is concerned with the question: “What nature makes of the human being”? The pragmatic point of view is concerned with the question- What human as free acting beings makes of “himself or can and should make of himself”. In the physiological sense, there is a mere observer who lets nature run its course. As a mere observer one ponders about the natural phenomenon, “what the causes of the faculty of memory may rest on, speculate over the traces of impressions remaining in the brain” (Immanuel Kant cited by Cohen 2017: 259). From the pragmatic point of view, one is concerned with what has been considered to vitalize or obstruct the memory. The concern to give life to memory and also to take into consideration the aspects of obstruction requires the knowledge of the human being. Thus, this pragmatic point of view takes us to the question of: ‘What is a human being?’ Thus the most important purpose is to apply the acquired knowledge for the human beings-as human being is his own ultimate end (Kant 1999).

As Kant stated:

The sum total of pragmatic anthropology, in respect to the vocation of the human being and the Characteristics of his formation, is the following. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to cultivate himself, to civilize himself, and to moralize himself by means of the arts and sciences. No matter how great his animal tendency may be to give himself over passively to the impulses of comfort and good living, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by actively struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature (Kant 229-230: 2006).

It has been argued that Kant’s ‘pragmatic anthropology’ is not philosophy and it came out of ‘empirical psychology’ (Wilson 2007). But this has been critiqued on the ground that Kant himself argued that anthropology itself is a cosmopolitan philosophy. Even though it is not a type of scholastic philosophy or critical philosophy, it is a type of philosophy (Kuehn 2001; Jacobs and Kain 2009; Lorini and Loudon 2018). It is important here to emphasize the Kantian notion of

‘pragmatic’ to develop the understanding that Kant's concern is central to provide philosophical foundations to anthropology and even anthropological foundations to philosophical approaches (Wilson 2007). Kant’s “pragmatic point of view” also has to be situated in the broader schema of his thoughts. Kant’s schema to understand human beings as “pragmatic anthropological” beings is also centred on the dichotomous understanding of human beings being as good or/and evil and also character and wisdom. The situatedness of these thoughts in “Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view” has been considered significant in the evolution of Kantian thought since his inaugural dissertation in 1770 and then Critique of Pure Reason, Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science, Metaphysical Foundations of Psychology. The purpose is to argue that how “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view” is reflective of significant development in Kant’s thought during the course he taught to his students over a period of around twenty years (Kant 2006; Wilson 2006).

For Peirce, Kant’s “Pragmatic anthropology” is “practical ethics”. Historians of ideas and philosophers have argued that although William James initially in his address to the university students in 1898 used the word “pragmatism”. But both Peirce and James are in agreement that it was the former who coined the term (James 1922;1975). In its initial usage by Peirce, pragmatism referred to a method and a maxim to seek clarification of the meaning of terms, concepts and ideas. Pragmatism as a philosophical system sought to detect claims that are considered to be devoid of meaning. Thus the aim was to understand how the meaning-making process at the ideational level contained within its formation the pursuit of action. In other words the meaningfulness of theories, ideas and concepts are constitutive of the logic of action in their formulations. Therefore, if the resultant mode of action conceivable in the formation of two separate sentences does not vary then their meaning is the same.

As Peirce argued that the meaning of the claim could be deciphered in the following manner:

“ In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception;



and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception” (Peirce 1905 [1965]: CP 5.9).

Thus, from Peirce’s perspective:

Pragmatism was not a theory which special circumstances had led its authors to entertain. It had been designed and constructed, to use the expression of Kant. It had been designed and constructed, to use the expression of Kant.....so, in constructing the doctrine of pragmatism the properties of all indecomposable concepts were examined and the ways in which they could be compounded. Then the purpose of the proposed doctrine having been analyzed, it was constructed out of the appropriate concepts so as to fulfill that purpose. In this way, the truth of it was proved. There are subsidiary confirmations of its truth; but it is believed that there is no other independent way of strictly proving it. . . .(Peirce 1974: 5.5)

But first, what is its purpose? What is it expected to accomplish? It is expected to bring to an end those prolonged disputes of philosophers which no observations of facts could settle, and yet in which each side claims to prove that the other side is in the wrong. Pragmatism maintains that in those cases the disputants must be at cross-purposes. They either attach different meanings to words, or else one side or the other (or both) uses a word without any definite meaning. What is wanted, therefore, is a method for ascertaining the real meaning of any concept, doctrine, proposition, word, or other sign. The object of a sign is one thing; its meaning is another. Its object is the thing or occasion, however indefinite, to which it is to be applied. Its meaning is the idea which it attaches to that object, whether by way of mere supposition, or as a command, or as an assertion (Peirce cited by Thayer[Ed.] 1982: 51)

From Kitcher’s perspective, the significance of the contextual approach for classical pragmatists was not about any approach towards semantics or even a verificationist approach to meaning but for them, it was primarily about how a philosophical approach can enhance our understanding of the world *vis-à-vis* concerns that matter to people. Philip Kitcher points out that William James and John Dewey wanted to change the outlook of philosophy primarily by moving away from “insignificant questions . . .” (Kitcher 2012: xii). Both James and Dewey were sceptical about the

timeless philosophical problems that preoccupied scholars and thinkers in every generation. The thought that philosophical thinking is restricted to a few is deeply problematic for Dewey. After almost a century of his writings, we can argue this social approach towards epistemology remains a unique defining feature of the Deweyan strand of thinking and pragmatism at large. Thus one of the significant purposes of the dictum of “reconstruction of philosophy” was to think with the public or even to reason about the world in the realm of the public. According to the Deweyan perspective, it is always a dangerous idea to confine the philosophical approach within a few across societies (Dewey 1920). Underlying these notions is the democratic ethos which is a fundamental feature of any scientific inquiry and then how these scientific facts are also considered as moral facts in the societal domain (Dewey 1925 [1988]).

Dewey was a crucial figure addressing the human sciences or philosophical thought but also mattered significantly for the scientific thinkers of his age. Thus, the context of ‘scientific democrats’ and their formulation and understanding of science’s political promise was true for the human sciences at that point. He had become the public voice of their democratic conscience and someone who continued to believe in the historic vocation of science (Jewett 2012).

Andrew Jewett writes:

“On the question of science’s relation to the public, Dewey spoke for the majority of interwar human scientists, including those who ignored his deliberative understanding of democratic practice...Dewey mattered so much to the scientific thinkers of his age because he became the public voice of their democratic conscience, calling them back to what they considered their public responsibilities through his writings and personal example” (Jewett 2012:11).

“Dewey stood for the expectation that science and morality would fuse in a unified, post-Christian, and intrinsically democratic public culture” (Jewett 2012:12).

The public culture of science here did not mean augmentation of the nation's knowledge for the whole of society. The purpose was to articulate a language of thoroughgoing cultural change on

the lines of scientific virtue-based not only on empirical claims but also on ethical and moral claims. This is to say that political action could not operate successfully with merely having technical knowledge often believed to be equivalent to scientific values. On the contrary, the citizenry needs to be provided with social and political conditions that would allow them to develop scientific values. These scientific values would guide the citizenry's assessment of specific scientific claims and assertions (Ezrahi 1990). These ideas of John Dewey resonated with some of the earlier ideas of Peirce about the complex relationship between concepts, the and criterion of truth and concept and criterion of belief. Dewey here is significantly responsible for the cultural and political turn of the philosophical thought of pragmatism. And thus this quest of Dewey showed how the ethical and moral values of the scientific realm could be propounded in the democratic theory and polity (Dewey 1916 [2007]; Dewey 1939; Siegfried 1999; Westbrook 2015).

Both William James and Dewey had drawn from a newly developed understanding of human psychology that recognized the non-rational motives in human behaviour. Thus, this new approach to knowledge was based on developments in psychology, informed by the writings of Peirce, especially his criterion of truth as a matter of consequence (Dewey 1911[2008]; James 1909[1975] Haack 1976; Kitcher 2012).<sup>8</sup> The aim was to move away from the framework of common sense understanding of the world. This was expected to help in promoting consensus among competing realms of thoughts. This move of James and Dewey was also on the lines of positivists but unlike positivists, they focused more on the ethical and communicative side of scientific practices (Dewey 1910; Hook 1950; Popp 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> This knowledge movement based on new psychology by James and Dewey in particular provided a critique to the common sense framework that was earlier supported by 'scientific democrats'. The 'scientific democrats' had thought that the common sense framework would make it possible to reach consensus primarily among the radically opposed perspectives. But this did not work when it came to the relationship between science and religion and utterly failed when it came to the relationship between the state and the economy. The religion argument is in specific reference to the 'Darwinian revolution' and the state-economy association is in reference to the 'Gilded Age' in America towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Habermas too reminds us about the ethical and communicative approach of pragmatism in his text “Peirce's Logic of Inquiry: The Dilemma of a Scholastic Realism Restored by the Logic of Language”:

Peirce does not succumb to the objectivist attitude of early positivism. This may have been due in part to his familiarity with the philosophical tradition, especially with late Medieval Scholasticism and with Berkeley and Kant. But the crucial factor was his reflection on the basic experience of positivism, which motivated his thought from the very beginning. The methodically secured progress of natural-scientific knowledge had given Kant occasion to investigate the transcendental conditions of knowledge as such; it had led Comte and the positivists to identify all of the knowledge with science. Peirce was the first to gain clarity about the systematic meaning of this experience. Scientific progress does not only motivate us psychologically to take science seriously as the exemplary form of knowledge, it is itself the exemplary feature of science. The intersubjectively acknowledged cognitive progress of the theoretical natural sciences is also the systematic feature that distinguishes modern science from other categories of knowledge” (Habermas 1968[2015] ; 88).

Habermas further argued:

“What separates Peirce from both early and modern positivism is his understanding that the task of methodology is not to clarify the logical structure of scientific theories but the logic of the procedure with whose aid we obtain scientific theories. We term information scientific if and only if an uncompelled and permanent consensus can be obtained with regard to its validity. This consensus does not have to be definitive but has to have a definitive agreement as to its goal. The genuine achievement of modern science does not consist primarily in producing true, that is correct and cogent statements about what we call reality. Rather, it distinguishes itself from traditional categories of knowledge by a method of arriving at an uncompelled and permanent consensus of this sort about our views (Habermas 1968 [2015] 88)”.

The ethical and communicative features were later translated in the realm of the social and political. The idea was that ethical and communicative processes required a mutual and shared

understanding of social and political truths. Thus the notion of truth holds a significant position as a fundamental tool in the meaning-making process of the world. Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey considered all forms of scientific truths as human creations (Misak 1994; Habermas 1995). For pragmatists, the notion of scientific inquiry is embedded in ethical behaviour. This is to state that scientific inquiry is both the result and instrument of ethical behaviour. What is crucial here is to understand the “pragmatic criterion of truth” inaugurated by the philosophical school of pragmatism beginning from Charles Sanders Peirce (Haack 1976).

The idea of thinking in the public realm deeply resonated with Dewey’s approach towards the empirical realm in order to understand and reconstruct the knowledge about this world. This empirical framework based on the experiences of human beings is central to the theoretical and philosophical reconstruction in pragmatism. Therefore for Dewey or even other classical pragmatists, the purpose was to move away from the ‘spectator theory of knowledge’ which remains central to the next generation pragmatists like Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty and Richard Bernstein ( Dewey 1949 [1960]; Macpartland 1945; Rorty 1982; Kulp 1986). Since the early days of classical pragmatism, there was opposition to the ‘spectator theory of knowledge’.

Patrick Baert has highlighted this opposition against ‘spectator theory of knowledge’:

His [Richard Rorty] *Consequences of Pragmatism* elaborates on this view, and shows it to be indebted to pragmatist philosophers such as William James and especially John Dewey. Like James and Dewey, Rorty suggests that we forsake philosophical debates if they do not have visible consequences; he targets especially what he sees as pointless arguments about the inner nature of things, which fail to yield any way of deciding between the competing views. Rorty believes that it would also be better if we dropped the numerous attempts at defining truth or presenting theories of truth if by truth is meant something unconditional or a correspondence to an absolute reality. Taking a leaf out of James’s book, he maintains that we should retain a notion of truth only if it is defined in terms of successful consequences. Rorty urges that we abandon the ‘spectator theory of knowledge’, according to which knowledge is about representing the essence

of an outer world; it is highly misleading to conceive of knowledge as mirroring the inner nature of the external realm. Like Dewey, he suggests that we treat knowledge as a type of action, as a way of meeting our desires. Denouncing the conspicuous position of epistemology in contemporary philosophy, Rorty proposes instead an edifying form of philosophy, partly inspired by Gadamer's hermeneutics, in which we no longer search for atemporal foundations, but redescribe ourselves in conversation with others (Baert 2005b: 126).

A significant premise of the 'spectator theory of knowledge' is to think of knowledge acquisition as a way to "represent the inner nature of an outer world as accurately as possible". Pragmatists made a significant attempt to shift from this approach to knowledge formation often considered as a 'representationalist view of knowledge'. Pragmatism intended to move away from this representationalist approach to knowledge from the heydays of classical pragmatism whose and echoed in the neo-pragmatism in the second half of the twentieth century as well as in the work of Jürgen Habermas and Luc Boltanski in particular (Habermas 1968, 1991, 1995; Boltanski 2011; Susen and Turner 2014). For pragmatism, the source of the anti-representationalist view came from the writings of Darwin in particular (2007 [1910]; Picardi 2011; Godfrey-Smith 2019). Both Dewey and Mead thought of philosophy as a form of knowledge acquisition. From Pierce onwards, pragmatism found its ideational sources in the experimental sciences. This approach adopted by Peirce furnished a criterion of truth. Thus knowledge always remains a project in the making rather than arriving at a conclusive set of theories. Thus the broader purpose of knowledge shall be about coping with the world and not limited to mirroring the world (Rorty [1979] 2009). The fundamental feature of coping, rather than copying, is perhaps the most central and defining aspect of how pragmatism was conceptualized by Dewey, Mead, Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar and Jane Addams and how it influenced the classical American Anthropology founded by Franz Boas at the Columbia University.

Pragmatism not only moved away from the traditional notion of philosophy often solely concerned with the transcendental realm. In particular, it critiqued various atemporal forms of truth-seeking projects dealing with timeless entities. Pragmatists often remained antagonistic towards any transcendental form of inquiry "that supposedly grounds aesthetic, ethical or

cognitive claims” (Baert 2005b: 129). For a long time philosophers predominantly followed transcendentalism as a significant form of enquiry. On the other hand, non-philosophers were able to think historically and articulate a cultural specific understanding of societies but for philosophers, for a long time, the question of atemporal truth was of significant concern. Darwinian evolutionism, for pragmatists, was not limited only to an anti-representationalist view of knowledge but also inspired them for truth-seeking *vis-à-vis* an approach to knowledge that was anti-foundational at its core. For a long time philosophers' search for a particular kind of truth to be the only way to view the world has been considered legitimate (Baert 2005b: 129).

Mead, Du Bois, Addams, Dewey and Ambedkar can all be considered central practitioners of classical pragmatism as social philosophers who viewed a few defining characteristics of human society through this lens where knowledge formation is an integral aspect of human action, particularly with regard to how it is performed in concert with a discourse based on reasoning in the public sphere. The common trajectory that would bring their pragmatism together is that ideas or ideational processes are communicative processes. This communicative aspect is central to the pragmatist approach to a social theory of democracy especially with reference to the question of ways and means (McCarthy 1996; Frega 2019). How do we move away from a deterministic approach to knowledge constructions and theoretical formation which often limits our action or in the Arendtian sense doesn't allow us to understand the pluralistic nature of human behaviour (Arendt 2013 [1958])?

The notion of human action as a form of ideational and communicative processes was central to the pragmatist thinking about the social theory of democracy. This social theoretic framework towards democracy was a metanarrative discourse within classical pragmatism that would provide some form of order and deliberative participation of the public. Though Dewey was already concerned with the question of democratic theory during his early days at Chicago, his approach and perspectives changed significantly from the late 1920s onwards at Columbia University ( Westbrook 2015). Mead as his intellectual collaborator from Chicago was crucial to

Dewey's reflection on democracy. The engagement with democratic theory at Columbia University continued till the end of Dewey's life.

The metanarrative discourse of social democracy in classical pragmatism admitted a form of order and deliberative participation on the part of the public. Classical pragmatism argued that certain forms of values and ethos are required for the functioning of democratic polity and this idea was as old as philosophy and remained central to Aristotelian philosophy. This reflection of a democratic polity manifests itself in the thought of modern thinkers particularly Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill and others in the broader republican tradition (Pettit 1997; Honohan 2003; Maynor 2003; Frega 2019)

The underlying argument here is that these theories of political democracy share an approach premised on certain virtues that are prerequisites for the functioning of democracy. This understanding of the concept of democracy not only dominated but also limited its scope within the realm of political philosophy. According to this view, democracy is a representative form of government chosen by the people which means that when the government is chosen by the people then democracy exists in society. Pragmatism argued that this synonymy of democracy with any representative government based on popular and universal suffrage and periodic elections is incomplete, problematic and limited (Dewey 1888; Cooley 1909). This view of democracy doesn't allow for a paradigmatic normative Status for democracy. In political philosophy, this understanding of the concept of democracy was restricted to the description of democracy as a form of government.

Dewey argued about the normative dimension of democracy based on the two factors:

“The two elements in our criterion both point to democracy. The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations



produced by varied intercourse. And these two traits are precisely what characterize the democratically constituted society” (Dewey 1916: 92).

For pragmatist thinkers, this paradigmatic normative status for democracy became a crucial point of departure from existing political theory that confined itself to political institutions and state formation projects. Classical pragmatists focused primarily on the social significance or the question of the social in their approach towards democracy. This was addressed by a generation of pragmatists which include Josiah Royce, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Jane Addams, W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar, Charles Horton Cooley, Mary Parker Follett, Arthur Bentley, Sidney Hook. This question on social democracy also includes an anthropologist at Columbia University-Franz Boas who entered into discussion with the pragmatists on democracy, social justice and racism (Colón and Hobbs 2015).

### **Classical Pragmatism and Social Theory of Democracy**

The above section is primarily based on the centrality of social democracy and its manifestation in the everyday life of the society, community and the individual where the communicative approach was one of the central tenets (Dewey 1888, 1916; Cooley 1909; Collins 2011; Putnam 2011; West 1989; Frega 2010, 2019 ). This understanding of democracy is not limited to the institutional understanding of democracy. Cosmopolitanism and openness as democratic virtues were emphasized by Charles Cooley, Jane Addams, W.E.B. Du Bois, George Herbert Mead and B.R. Ambedkar. Hannah Arendt would later clarify the meaning of cosmopolitanism as an “enlarged mentality” (Arendt cited by Frega 2019:137). Thus by extending oneself beyond one's immediate circle of acquaintances, one is maximizing one's creative potential. The idea of cosmopolitanism and “enlarged mentality” was seen to prevail across societies and acknowledged the presence of a plurality within the social and political realms. This is also to highlight categorically that this cosmopolitanism becomes more of a necessary criteria as the pluralistic dimension of societies enhances (ibid).

Pragmatism argued for a normative view of democracy whose full realisation is possible only when it is able to engage with socio-political realities beyond the political institutional framework. The social and political institutions/interests groups that comprise any society are required to engage with the normative dimensions of the social and political life of the society. The recognition of the normative dimension of social and political life has been categorised as the “social ontology of democracy” (Frega 2019: 89-91).

For Mead and Cooley at the sociological level and for Dewey primarily at the political and philosophical level the engagement with the “social ontology of democracy” clarifies the democratic principles of basic and local interactionist groups that often are complex, hierarchical and authoritarian in nature. Both Mead and Cooley viewed societies as dynamic and complex social groups that operate both through structuration and destructure (Schubert 2006). In the interactionist perspective, the social ontology of democracy engages with how local forms of social ties are reflected in patterns of social interaction in everyday life. Both Cooley and Dewey engaged with the ‘democratic paradox of modernization’. This paradox refers on the one hand to how “face to face” communicative practices and relations are necessary for the formation of a democratic ethos at smaller local levels. Modern societies, however, are compelled through a variety of factors to function and condition within larger social and political institutions that may quite often be irrelevant to the local and immediate units (Frega 2019). The democratic method advocated by pragmatism at large takes into consideration the social life of individuals and groups at all social and political levels thus engaging not only with a formal system of rules and conduct but also habits, customs, culture and institutions that form the fundamental structure of the society. The habits of the individuals and groups have to be based on the social dimension of democracy as a shared value in human societies. Dewey considered this as the first commitment to a democratic ethos or following “the method of democracy” (Frega 2019:119). This dimension of cultivating communal and shared habits has been emphasized by pragmatists as ‘epistemic’ (Dewey 1988). It is this dimension of democracy wherein epistemic habits reject hierarchical and authoritarian forms of social integration. This rejection is based on an individual's capacity to fix

their beliefs following the “experimental method” and not by relying upon non-rational methods of any kind.

Frega has argued that:

Emphasis on the epistemic dimension of democracy was a standard argument in the pragmatist tradition since Peircean claims in support of the general diffusion of the “laboratory habit of mind”, and is consonant with the enlightenment tradition of faith in the emancipatory function of reason. This epistemic understanding of democracy is, however, very distant from the kind of rationalist interpretations of democracy to which contemporary political philosophy has accustomed us (Frega 2019: 138).

What becomes significant is thus the argument placed by classical pragmatism to restructure the societal and cultural structures *vis-à-vis* democratic virtues. Thus the primary normative feature of democracy is building society from the small group level starting from family to the community to local organizational associations of society to make it more coherent and consistent for democratic discourses and discussions rather than merely looking at broader political institutions for democratic order and the functioning of society. This is not to say that classical pragmatists viewed a complete separation of the social and the political realm in their account of social democracy. They argue that democratic stability is not possible if it restricts the realm of the political and ignores the social realm. The success of political democracy would be anchored in its rootedness in the social lives of the people. This argument became a central concern for John Dewey, B.R. Ambedkar and W.E.B Du Bois (Mukherjee 2009; Zene 2013; Kumar 2015; Gooding-Williams 2009; Du Bois 1935[2017]). The same echoes in the writings of Hannah Arendt. The purpose is not to include her within the history of pragmatism but to argue that a few central concerns associated with the reflections of the pragmatists on democratic theory intersect with Arendt's thought particularly after she moved to America (King 2015). This is also to highlight how the intellectual and political concerns of Arendt fundamentally changed after being stateless for almost a decade in the aftermath of the rise of Nazism in Germany (Benhabib 2003; Young-Bruehl 20014 [1982]).

## Political Philosophy and the Social Ontology of Democracy

Richard Bernstein has recently noted that the notion of public has equal importance in the political thought of “*Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and John Dewey, were deeply concerned about the character and fate of political public life in the contemporary world. The public—especially the political significance of the public sphere or public space—stands at the very center of their thinking. Each feared the real possibility of what Dewey called the “eclipse of the public”*”(Bernstein 2012: 767). This concern for public sphere bring together critical theory, Pragmatism and existential philosophy. According to each of these thinkers and schools of thought, the concept of 'public' has special significance because of its link with democracy, which all three thinkers explain in terms of the emancipatory potential of reason. Dewey is now widely regarded as a precursor of critical theory, and his concept of democratic publics is currently integrated into the genealogy that stems from Arendt to Habermas to Honneth and beyond (Benhabib 1997).

There is a similar understanding that animates the work of Robert Gooding and John Plamenatz. For example, Plamenatz discusses why Hobbes or Machiavelli or Rousseau adopted a specific form of writing (Gooding-Williams 2009; Plamenatz 2012). What were the social and political and cultural conditions existing in any particular society and the debates and controversies which were at the forefront at the time? But this is not to say that every explanation of their ideas needs an understanding of the social and the political. The writer or theorist who discusses these ideas need not be totally dependent on the context of the emergence and development of these thoughts and the context should be highlighted whenever it is required. Robert Gooding-Williams discusses different traditions in political theory in order to argue for an Afro-American tradition of political theory (Gooding-Williams 2009). From the perspective of the sociology of ideas these broad strands in social sciences help us to understand how both the context of ideas and transcending the context becomes significant in the formation of ideas which often provide them universalistic features.

The context of political theories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were primarily rooted in the realm of theology. Though this theology was different from the theological doctrines of the middle ages. It has been argued that both the Protestants and Catholics were affected by the changes in these centuries but certainly not to the same degree. These thinkers were broadly concerned with the problem of definition as a significant approach to develop their understanding of the existing state of affairs. Both John Plamenatz and John Dunn have highlighted and discussed these questions. These questions include “What is the Church?”, “What is temporal power?”, “What purpose do they serve?”. These questions predominantly were prerequisites to understanding the nature and present condition of ‘man’, in effect to understand: “What is the nature of ‘man’”(Dunn 1996; Plamenatz 2012)? The question crops up in the writings of philosophers and political theorists across the centuries and across several traditions of political theory including contractarian traditions (Dunn 1996). It is only with the emergence of a critical understanding of the political as a consequence of modernity and its concomitant implications that the the ‘social’ comes to the forefront This paradigmatic turn towards the social in the nineteenth and particularly twentieth century discussions of the contractarian tradition became a central discourse. This is also evident in the concept of justice formulated by John Rawls.<sup>9</sup>

As John Dunn writes:

The idea of a contract or agreement has played a central role in the political thinking of the western world over two main periods and in relation to two principal issues. In the first of these periods, the epoch of early modern natural law thinking, the idea of a contract served as the main intellectual device for analysing the grounds, scope and limits of political obligation: the duty of subjects to obey the constituted authorities of the political community to which they belong. In the second, in the American political philosophy of the last three decades, it has served instead principally to analyse the standard of justice in the distribution of the costs and benefits of social

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to revisit John Rawls’s Dewey lectures published as ‘Political Liberalism’ for an in-depth understanding or the recognition of the social from a contractarian thought perspective in twentieth century political thought (Rawls 2005).

membership. The precarious bridge between these two preoccupations was provided by the eighteenth-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (Dunn, 2012 :39).<sup>10</sup>

But the purpose of pragmatism was not to turn back on these political theories but to understand how they continued to permeate current political practices of the time and their reception. Pragmatism as a philosophical school of thought made a significant attempt to understand the social and political realms with an action oriented approach in philosophical thinking. The attempt to understand the paradox and dichotomies that existed in the realm of the political and the social was a paradigmatic shift from the existing status and quest of philosophy, especially with regard to foundationalism and a correspondence theory of truth. This paradigmatic shift allowed the pragmatists to develop a new democracy particularly *vis-à-vis* a critical understanding of political democracy. This is also to argue that the advent of modernity and its circulation through knowledge movements probably came late to the discourse of human affairs, of the social and political and moral realm unlike for example the realm of the scientific discourses along with the quest to understand the natural world as a central concern for the natural sciences. This is also to highlight the context of how this originary moment of pragmatism's engagement with the social and political phenomena inspired in the early phase the imagination and contribution towards the making of social sciences during its heydays.

The tradition of political theory historically lacked the ability to acknowledge the social as an independent concept, which is separated from the polis- as a constructed and constituted phenomena. John Dunn categorically states that "Human beings are not naturally compelled to live in a polis" (Dunn 2012). But the earlier and primitive forms of associations based on kinship, blood relations, through family or lineage ties of a monarchical or feudal kind are always an obstruction to the realm of the polis. And it is only in the realm of the polis that human

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<sup>10</sup> In the Context of Liberty of Conscience and toleration, Plamenatz states that Freedom as an idea was not unique only to Europeans but it is as much Asian or African as it is claimed to be European. The moment it is understood only in the context of Europe then it gets provincialised. He States that " Europeans are merely being provincial when they claim that Freedom is now thought desirable in Asia and Africa only because the Europeans have taught other peoples to know and desire it. The world now speaks of freedom much as the Europeans first learned to speak of it; the modern vocabulary of freedom is largely European. But freedom, though it now wears European dress, is not therefore peculiarly, or even originally, European" ( Plamenatz 1963 :45).

beings could possibly fully realize their human characteristics. The advent of modernity has allowed us to critically understand the 'traditional' as well as modern political theory.

For example, political theory in its lack of recognition of the social did not find it necessary to empower the works of Mary Wollstonecraft which were unearthed from the clutches of history through the recognition of the social as the continuation of such associations based on primitive notions of kinship and formation of societal relations in modern societies. The purpose of pragmatism was to inspire social theory to unearth the realm of the social and bring it to the forefront. The purpose has been to make it possible for the polis to be deeply rooted in democratic virtues. This is again to reiterate that the formation and deep rootedness of the political realm in democratic virtues fundamentally rest upon the democratic virtues embedded in the realm of the social (Wollstonecraft 1792[2014]; Taylor 2003).

## Chapter 3

### **The Interlocutors, Pathways and Trajectories: W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar and Hannah Arendt**

#### **Introduction: Social Science and History**

The relationship of the different genealogies of emancipation among the disciplines of the social sciences can be situated within the framework of the internationalisation of the social sciences in the twentieth century. This discussion also takes into account how ideas and concepts have moved with individuals who travel, migrate or seek refuge or at times remain in exile at the cultural level (Mannheim 1929 [2013]; Bourdieu 1999/1989; Burke 2000; Sapiro et al 2020; Heilborn et al 2008). The purpose is to develop a critical and parallel understanding of the history of the philosophy of social sciences. This examination is primarily based on the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Hannah Arendt and B.R. Ambedkar. The formation of ideas are often influenced by their circulation and also through intellectual exchanges across time and space and it is in this context authors are considered to be sociological forces (Santoro and Sapiro 2017). The circulation of ideas across transnational, cultural or disciplinary frameworks are often based on a shared set of preferences. This chapter engages with the interlocutors and networks of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt. The pathways of the movement of ideas will take us through the history of pragmatism (Mills 1964; Joas 1993; Bernstein 1978, 2015, 2017; Stroud 2019) as well as the history sociology in America (Morris 2015; Abbott 1999, 2016; Rabaka 2010; Calhoun 2007), in addition to the reception of Karl Mannheim and his project of sociology of knowledge in German Intellectual circles (Baehr 2010; Arendt [1930]1994 )<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This review essay of Arendt was first published in German: Arendt, Hannah, (1930) 1982. "Philosophie und Soziologie." Pp. 515–530 in *Der Streit um die Wissenssoziologie*, vol. 1, edited by Volker Meja and Nico Stehr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. The text was then translated into English: Arendt, Hannah, (1930) 1994. "Philosophy and Sociology." Pp. 28–43 in *Hannah Arendt: Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn and translated by Robert and Rita Kimber. New York: Harcourt, Brace.



In the twentieth century the writings of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt contributed significantly to our understanding of the “human condition” but have remained quite marginal to the philosophical and social scientific understanding (Ambedkar 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, [1993/2014]; Arendt 2013[1958]; Du Bois 2007 [1899]) . Thus, the writings of Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar act as a “sociological force” to develop a critical approach towards the history of philosophy of social sciences. The sociological, historical and philosophical engagements of these three thinkers were based on different historical, political and intellectual experiences. They raise a few fundamental questions about the “human condition” in the twentieth century that allowed them to transcend their immediate historical and intellectual contexts, to think about the wider project of human emancipation based on ideas of our common belonging to this world (Du Bois 1897, 1898, 1899 [2007] ; Ambedkar 1989 [2014]a, 1989 [2014]b; Arendt 1963 [1994], 1969 [1973], 1978).

Their writings date back to the first half of the twentieth century when the social sciences were entering a new phase in their evolution. In the previous chapter we discussed in some detail both the historical context of the social sciences and pragmatism. The initial writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar reflect several disciplinary backgrounds. The pluralistic philosophical and methodological premises are informed by their initial training with pragmatist philosophers (Muller 1992; Taylor 2004; Galude 2007; Ambar 2019; Stepanenko 2019; Stroud 2017a, 2017b, 2019). On the other hand, Arendt’s intellectual trajectory commenced in 1924 when she arrived at Marburg and was influenced by Martin Heidegger who had recently been appointed Professor. Later she moved to Heidelberg to write her dissertation with Karl Jaspers. These philosophical influences along with her experiences as a child of jewish origin remained significant in Arendt’s thinking in America as well (Habermas and McCarthy1977; Young-Bruehl 1982 [2004], Canovan 1994, Benhabib 2000).

Even though the writings of these three thinkers approach their problematics and research concerns differently they are all linked in their concern for democracy.<sup>2</sup> Their purpose is to

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout Durkheim's work, we observe a convergence of various social science disciplines both at a conceptual and methodological level, as well as in relation to the different philosophical frameworks these distinctive

redefine the meaning-making process for the radical construction of democratic virtue. The intent is to provide a philosophical content for the reconstruction of a democratic society. The action of theorising cannot be considered to be solely an academic/research pursuit. It attempts to lay down paths for a just and better world. Thus, theory is essential for the process of creating a democratic society as Habermas envisioned in the 'Introduction' of his text *Theory and Practice* published in 1971 [1973].:

“ The Theory specifies the conditions under which the reflection on the history of our species by members of this species themselves has become objectively possible; and at the same time it names those to whom this history is addressed, who then with its aid can gain enlightenment about their emancipatory role in the process of history. The theory occupies itself with reflection on the interrelationships of its origin and with anticipation of those of its application, and thus sees itself as a necessary catalytic moment within the social complex of life which it analyzes as integral interconnections of compulsions, from the viewpoint of the possible sublation-resolution and abolition-of all this” (Habermas 1971 [1973]: 1-2).

Habermas sets out two conditions for a theory of society that is envisaged with practical consequences. Social theory as an objective framework questions the historical possibilities of political intervention and identifies those who struggle for emancipation. Habermas emphasizes the social action of those actors whose political intervention is central to the project of this emancipation. The practical consequences of theory signify the departure of Habermas from the Frankfurt school or could be considered to be a convergence point of critical theory and pragmatism. Habermas brought together the idea of critique to achieve social change, to seek emancipation both for and through the democratic tradition.

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disciplines under the umbrella of social sciences aspire to follow. Durkheim also showed that at times disciplines like sociology, history or psychology might require to develop understanding of each other to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the answers they are looking for. In 'Rules of Sociological Method', he writes “ History is necessary for sociology to understand the successive formation of social institutions: “in the order of social realities, history plays a role analogous to that of the microscope in the order of psychical realities” (Durkheim 1982: 246)

It is in the democratic tradition Roberto Freag has brought together pragmatism, French Tocquevilleanism and critical theory in his book- *Pragmatism and the Wide View of Democracy*’ for a coherent pluralistic and interdisciplinary framework. This framework is significant to develop a ‘social theory of democracy’ whose reception was minimal in the twentieth century in comparison to other political theory or political philosophy debates on democracy (Freaga 2019). The purpose of this construction is to understand the complex and deep entanglements and threats to democratic institutions/discourses (or structures) that “plagues contemporary social life” (Freaga 2019: vi).

For this, we need to bring back the question of “social democracy” at the centre stage of our contemporary political and academic life. We certainly need to bring together our shared and inadequately questioned understanding of democracy as a political system that would provide the space for thinking of a new interpretation of the meaning of democracy and its project. For Freaga, the most important contribution of the philosophical school of pragmatism is to the idea of “social democracy”. Moreover, the entanglement of pragmatism with political theory is crucial in reclaiming normative categories such as justice and non-domination (Dewey 1888, 1916; Westbrook 2015; Mukherjee 2009; Maitra 2013; Freaga, 2019).

It would also be important to critically understand that social theory *vis-à-vis* democratic virtue is deeply entangled with the central questions of “What is?” and “What ought to be?”. These concerns have been central to sociology since its inception and in particular with reference to Weberian understanding of the knowledge systems (Gouldner 1962) . Social theorists view themselves as part of the democratic tradition as well as the political processes to achieve different goals. When these goals are directed from the present towards an immediate future we see the emergence of a “technocratic view of the social sciences”. In this “technocratic view”, the social sciences are also made to appear neutral i.e. ‘value-free’ (Baert and Shipman 2009). Democratic virtue also informs us about the critique of a separated view of both the present and history. For a long time, both views were considered governed by different intellectual approaches following different philosophical and methodological frameworks. G.H. Mead in his

book *“The Philosophy of the Present”* argued that both the views require a reconstruction primarily to develop a historicist approach to read and understand the present. The primary concern of Mead in this regard was to explore texts and ideas from the past in the light of the present; Any reading of the present by completely ignoring history will often result in a ‘technocratic view’ of society through a similar formation of social sciences and other humanistic disciplines (Mead:[1932]2002). Koopman argues that pragmatists understand things to be “historically situated and temporally conditioned” (Koopman 2010: 690).

Koopman writes about pragmatism’s engagement with historicism:

....pragmatism’s approach to traditional philosophical subject matter: pragmatists theorize concepts such as truth and meaning in ways that prioritize historical context in our ascriptions of truth and interpretations of meaning. Another way of stating this point is as a kind of sociological observation: pragmatists are often described as attempting to reconstruct philosophy in light of evolutionary theory’s emphasis upon contingent change, and this results in a thoroughgoing philosophical historicism (Koopman 2010: 690).

He highlights pragmatism as locating ideas and thinking about the philosophical domain as a transitional process and thus also in the realm of human experience. It is possible to argue that pragmatism is a philosophy of process (Koopman 2015). These ideas initially resonated in one of James’s earlier papers entitled “The Stream of Thought” that appeared in *“The Principles of Psychology”* (James 1890 [1983]). The pragmatists insisted that the historical investigation of any body of thought was salient to the understanding of human societies as well as the human sciences. The pragmatist engagement with experimental logic had a significant impact on Mead, Du Bois, Dewey and Ambedkar.

At the same time the developments in social sciences in Germany were of a contrasting nature. These were central to the development of Hannah Arendt’s earlier response to the “sociology of knowledge” of Karl Mannheim. Both Max Weber and Karl Popper advocated this instrumentalist view of social sciences. Weber did not believe that social scientific knowledge should follow the

entanglement of the approach of- ‘What is?’ and ‘What ought to be?’ or any strong normative commitment. Weber did not agree with the framework of value-judgements in his view of knowledge construction ( Weber 1904 [2012], 1958 [1917]; Popper 1934 [1959], 1963 [1991]; Gouldner 1962; Giddens 1971, 1976, 1979; Shapin 2019).

This dichotomy of ‘What is?’ and ‘What Ought to be?’ has remained central to social theory in the twentieth century. Weber insisted on the idea that it is not possible to infer the ultimate goals of our research (Weber 1904 [2012], 1958 [1917]). Moreover, like our values, judgements should not interfere with our research. Thus in context of these ideas of Weber and Popper, Beart has argued:

Max Weber and Karl Popper have articulated and defended this technocratic view. Weber was anxious to distance himself from the Marxist tendency to blur what is and what ought to be. He insisted that we cannot infer ultimate goals from our social research, just as our values should not interfere with our research. In a similar fashion, Popper.....was particularly keen to distance himself from grand-scale social changes and to promote piecemeal engineering in which the social sciences would occupy a crucial role. The social sciences would enable us to act with caution and to change things incrementally and responsibly. Popper’s opposition to the diachronic ‘big picture’ of historicist grand theorists (like Marx) was complemented by Friedrich Hayek’s opposition to the synchronic ‘big picture’ of political central planners. The dispersion of knowledge among individuals meant, in the ‘Austrian’ view, that experts could never build up a comprehensive picture capable of centrally coordinating society.....; and that social scientists could never achieve the separation between objective fact and subjective value that natural scientists had credibly claimed. “The reason for this is that the object or the ‘facts’ of the social sciences are also opinions – not opinions of the student of the social phenomena, of course, but opinions of those whose actions produce the object of the social scientist...”(Beart 2009:18).

Both Weber and Popper believed that social sciences would allow us to contribute incrementally and responsibly to ‘social engineering’ in a more careful fashion. Popper opposed the diachronic ‘big picture’ of historicist grand theorists. This was complemented by Friedrich Hayek’s

opposition to the synchronic ‘big picture’ of political planners and the logical positivist at the Vienna School (Baert 2005b).<sup>3</sup>

Popper who initially began as a Philosopher of natural sciences thought of scientists as individuals, unlike Kuhn who provided a sociological and historical explanation of scientists not merely as individuals operating in a sociological or historical vacuum. Popper’s work ‘The Open society and its enemies’ published in 1945 reflected a misapprehended and limited understanding of Karl Mannheim’s ‘Ideology and Utopia’ and the project of sociology of knowledge. This is also formative. period to understand the early reception of sociology of knowledge. Popper’s understanding of the sociology of knowledge comes down to an extremely constrained view of sociology, psychology and the sociology of knowledge (Popper 1945[2020]: 420). Nevertheless, certainly, Popper’s interpretation should not be read as his own but part of a wider understanding and reception of sociology of knowledge at that time (Shils 1995). Both Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt responded to Mannheim’s challenge (Arendt 1930 [1994]; Baehr 2010:3). Arendt, who had finished her doctoral thesis on “*Love and St. Augustine*” the previous year, was yet to come to terms with sociology’s broader discipline in her own writings (Arendt 1929 [1996]). But then she had attended some of the Heidelberg seminars as part of the summer courses during the year 1927-28. These seminars included “The History of Political Thought I. Conservatism” and then “The Social Significance of Philosophy in the nineteenth century” and another seminar which was titled “Social History and History of Ideas: Early Liberalism in Germany” (Baehr 2013: 4-5). Arendt argued that Mannheim’s approach to philosophy through the sociology of knowledge was a complete failure (Baehr 2010). she thought that any attempt to free sociology of knowledge itself from sociologism would also fail. For both Arendt and Jaspers of them sociology (in particular sociology of knowledge) remained “an unmasking pseudo-science” (Baehr 2013:17).

Her subsequent writings concern the socio-political and historical situation and the socio-political aspects of experience though not directly in the language of sociology of

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Baert further argues about the complexities involved in the “technocratic view” of the social sciences.

knowledge and social sciences. Like Arendt and Jaspers, Popper also had huge differences with Mannheim and his approach to knowledge of sociology. He argued that both Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim continued in different ways the tradition of ‘social determination of scientific knowledge’.

Popper argued:

Kant gave up the untenable ideal of a science which is free from any kind of presuppositions.....He made it quite clear that we cannot start from nothing, and that we have to approach our task equipped with a system of presuppositions which we hold without having tested them by the empirical methods of science; such a system may be called a ‘categorical apparatus’. Kant believed that it was possible to discover the one true and unchanging categorical apparatus, which represents as it were the necessarily unchanging framework of our intellectual outfit, i.e. human ‘reason’. This part of Kant’s theory was given up by Hegel, who, as opposed to Kant, did not believe in the unity of mankind. He taught that man’s intellectual outfit was constantly changing, and that it was part of his social heritage; accordingly the development of man’s reason must coincide with the historical development of his society, i.e. of the nation to which he belongs. This theory of Hegel’s, and especially his doctrine that all knowledge and all truth is ‘relative’ in the sense of being determined by history, is sometimes called ‘historism’ (in contradistinction to ‘historicism’, as mentioned in the last chapter). The sociology of knowledge or ‘sociologism’ is obviously very closely related to or nearly identical with it, the only difference being that, under the influence of Marx, it emphasizes that the historical development does not produce one uniform ‘national spirit’, as Hegel held, but rather several and sometimes opposed ‘total ideologies’ within one nation, according to the class, the social stratum, or the social habitat, of those who hold them (Popper 1945[2020]: 421).

Popper categorised the sociology of knowledge as “passivist theory of knowledge” in contrast to Kant’s theory of knowledge. He believed that the “activist theory of knowledge” is a more coherent approach for the construction of knowledge. The human mind is not a silent receptor of sense-experience but involves experiencing, searching, comparing, generalizing and unifying these separate activities in the making of knowledge (Popper 1945 [2020]: 420-421). As distinct

from Kant's theory of knowledge Popper argued that the sociology of knowledge was the continuation of the Hegelian project.

G.H. Mead, who developed his knowledge under the broader framework of pragmatism, raised concerns about the socio-historical conditioning of knowledge. Mead's thought corresponds with Mannheim's 'Sociology of Knowledge' in a significant manner. For them a historical reconstruction is essentially required to clearly understand the situatedness of several aspects of the social, economic, political and cultural domain of a philosophical system of thought. This way of thinking about knowledge informed the work of Du Bois and Ambedkar and pragmatic inspired thinkers like Jane Addams, Charles Morris Sidney Hook and later C.W. Mills (Addams 1902 [2013]; Mills 1964; Muller 1992; Taylor 2004; Galude 2007; Hook 2008; Ambar 2019; Stepanenko 2019; Stroud 2017a, 2017b, 2019).

Da Silva states that "Mead's methodological approach to the history of science and of philosophical ideas, albeit founded upon his "philosophy of the present," is far from "presentism," in the sense it is not an anachronistic study of the past in the light of the present. Indeed, when Mead asserts, in 'The Philosophy of the Present', that the "pasts that we are involved in are both irrevocable and revocable" he is referring to the fact that, on the one hand, past events cannot be lived over again, but, on the other hand, when they become known by us in the present their structure changes accordingly" (Mead, [1932]2002: 36).

For example in Mead's account of the emergence of Greek philosophy it is the realm of the social, economic and cultural that feature prominently in the explanation. Mead seeks to understand how Greek society was composed of social, political, economic and cultural relations between different groups. Mead's historical construction proceeds along the sequence from cultural to commercial and then to the colonies and political organization in order to situate the origins of Greek philosophy. In conclusion Mead significantly emphasizes the idea that "every philosophical system must represent the psychological attitude of the people of its time, and that



it is impossible to do justice historically to it without reading it in terms [of the social conditions that gave rise to it]]” (Mead, 2011:143).<sup>4</sup>

The pragmatist had a sincere and deep engagement with the writings of Darwin that had repercussions on their approach to the social and political world. John Dewey published his book ‘The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy’ in 1910. Though this was not the first engagement of Dewey or anyone working within the philosophical thought of pragmatism. Darwin's “ *On the Origin of Species*” influenced Charles Sanders Peirce and William James and both translated ideas of biological evolution into the realm of the social, psychological and political. Lewis’s attempt had been primarily to highlight Boas’ approach to philosophy of science and then towards human nature, culture and anthropology within the larger rubric of human experience. The intellectual and philosophical component of Boas’s thought was similar in many ways to the American philosophers of his time which included William James, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and George Herbert Mead. In addition to Darwinism, American philosophical thought was also influenced by German intellectual thought of the time. Boas completed his studies in Germany and later migrated to America. It is certainly possible to see him among the giants of American academic and intellectual life which included in particular pragmatist philosophers like William James, George Herbert Mead, G. Stanley Hall, Josiah Royce, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, Anna Julia Cooper and several others.

Herbert Lewis writes:

Boas and his American counterparts were exposed to the powerful German historicist tradition derived from Johann Gottfried von Herder and Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt (Iggers 1983, Bunzl 1996), to the revival of the thought of Immanuel Kant by the so-called Neo-Kantians (among them Kuno Fischer, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Wilhelm Dilthey), and to developments in academic psychology led by Hermann von Helmholtz, Gustav Fechner, and

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<sup>4</sup> The Unpublished works of GH Mead was published By Filipe Carreira Da Silva in 2011 titled ‘G.H. Mead: A Reader’.

Wilhelm Wundt. The Americans and Boas brought these ideas back to Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Clark, Chicago, Columbia, Michigan, and Berkeley.

There were more direct links between Boas and the pragmatists, but the extent of their direct mutual influence is still unclear. Murray Leaf traces connections between Boas and Mead (1979:188–90), and Boas and Dewey were colleagues and academic and political allies for almost 40 years at Columbia University, teaching a seminar together at least once (Ryan 1995:166). James delivered some of the lectures for his Pragmatism at Columbia in January 1907, and the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, deeply engaged with problems raised by the pragmatists, was edited at Columbia. There were a number of other like-minded faculty there, “politically progressive, friendly to science, skeptical of appeals to fixed and eternal truths or fixed and eternal values, biased toward cultural analysis rather than abstract analytical categories of classical and neoclassical economics” (Ryan 1995:166).

Boas’ students like Alexander Goldenweiser, Robert H. Lowie, Paul Radin, and Alexander Lesser were influenced directly by pragmatist thought and particularly by John Dewey (Lewis 2001). Both Boas and Dewey gave primacy to the realm of ‘experience’ and how the context of ‘experience’ has been considered in the realm of the western intellectual thoughts at the time. This was at a time when western (American-European thought) academia was engaged in developing a philosophical and methodological critique of positivism. This shift from positivism was crucial for both pragmatism and Boasian anthropology.

### **Social Sciences and Race: W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Boas and the Battle Against Racism:**

The presence of Boas is also significant for Du Bois’ academic and political project to develop democratic voices against the racial order. Thus Aldon Morris writes:

“The intellectual engagement at the 1906 conference between Du Bois and Franz Boas, the Columbia University anthropologist considered to have engineered a paradigmatic shift regarding race in the social sciences, reveals the impact of the scintillating exchanges on conference participants. While attending that conference, on the theme “Health and Physique of the Negro American,” Boas delivered a stunning commencement address to the Atlanta University

graduates challenging them to reject claims of black inferiority. Boas stated that ancient Africans had shown inventive genius in constructing stupendous kingdoms featuring technological breakthroughs that lifted human civilizations to new heights. He beckoned the graduates to follow in the footsteps of their African ancestors and achieve greatness because history had proven they were not inferior to the white man. This was, indeed, an unorthodox race message boldly espoused in Jim Crow Atlanta” (Morris 2015: 81).

In response to this experience with Franz Boas, Du Bois wrote:

I remember my own rather sudden awakening from the paralysis of this judgment taught me in high school and in two of the world’s great universities. Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to a graduating class: You need not be ashamed of your African past; and then he recounted the history of the black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard and I came then and afterwards to realize how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted” (Du Bois cited by Aldon Morris 2015: 82).

The coming together of Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois pioneered a crucial paradigmatic shift to engage with the question of ‘race’ in the academic and intellectual world of social sciences. Morris has argued that Du Bois did not receive any credit for this shift. For example, Francille Wilson has argued that Du Bois pioneered social sciences not only through his research but also through significantly training black social scientists (Wilson 2006). In a similar manner, Earl Wright II has argued that Du Bois formed the first school of sociology in America (Wright II 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2009). Du Bois also established the first sociology laboratory at Atlanta University. Rabaka has argued that Du Bois’s approach towards sociology confronts the boundaries of social sciences and embraced a broad range of social sciences disciplines like political science, economics, psychology, geography as well as natural sciences, literature and humanities (Rabaka 2010). Du Bois’s quest for interdisciplinarity and in particular his thinking to bring “natural scientific knowledge and the influence of physical environs into his social science, intertwining each with his broader intellectual and political aims” from the perspective of critiquing the racial order offers a complete understanding (Besek et al 2020:144). Itzigsohn and

Brown address two questions in their book *“The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line”*:

“What was Du Bois’s sociology, and what are its implications for the present?” (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020: 1)

They further state:

The discipline is belatedly starting to acknowledge the fact that Du Bois was one of the founders of sociology. Whereas Marx gave primacy to class, Weber to rationalization and bureaucracy, and Durkheim to solidarity and social order, Du Bois regarded race, racism, and colonialism as central to the construction of the modern world. For Du Bois, race was both the by-product and a central element of the cultural and economic organization of racial and colonial capitalism; it erected an in- tangible yet very real barrier: the “color line.” It is from this premise that Du Bois’s entire sociological program emerged. However, he did not just propose a sociology of race. For Du Bois, race was not a subfield of the discipline. Rather, he developed a sociological approach that puts racism and colonialism at the center of sociological analysis, contending that they were the pillars upon which the modern world was constructed. In this way, W. E. B. Du Bois was a theorist of racialized modernity.

We undertook this endeavor because we believe that Du Bois’s work is of critical importance to the discipline of sociology, not only to redress the history of the discipline or for intellectual reparations purposes but because his sociology is deeply relevant to the present (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020: 1-2).

Du Bois had an intellectual and academic bond with Franz Boas and Ambedkar became part of this philosophical and intellectual milieu and operated within this framework not only during his Columbia days but also at LSE. During the next three decades, Ambedkar's thought bears the signature of the lessons learnt at Columbia University from John Dewey and Alexander Goldenweiser. Ambedkar too recognised the significant influence of the consequences of Darwin’s theory primarily in the critique of long-standing theological and religious rigidity and

in opposition to the social and political emancipation of the human mind (Ambedkar 1987 [2014]: 9).

Lewis points out that Columbia University had organized a lecture series entitled “Charles Darwin and his influence on science” in 1909. Dewey and Boas were in the department of philosophy and anthropology respectively and delivered lectures as part of the series. Dewey’s lecture was entitled “Darwinism and Modern Philosophy” and Boas’ lecture was entitled “The Relation of Darwin to Anthropology” (Lewis 2001: 387). And in the next year, Dewey published *‘The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought*. Boas’s essay remains unpublished and he never published a separate work on Darwin but the influence of Darwin was significant for Boasian anthropology and rejection of race as a social and cultural entity.

Du Bois’s understanding of the world was based on his understanding of the natural sciences encompassing even the works of Charles Darwin. The most important question of the twentieth century i.e. race was not understood only in the social and historical sense but also in relation to natural laws and biological anatomy. Du Bois published *‘The souls of Black Folk’* in 1903. The book was a major critical response to the Jim Crow laws that further exacerbated the racial segregation faced by African-Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. The book announced Du Bois’ arrival as an ‘Afro-modern’ thinker deeply engaged with the question of African-Americans. *The Souls of a Black Folk’* is a work in political theory addressing white supremacy and racial apartheid in America. An article published in 1905 ‘Sociology Hesitant’ reflects his [Du Bois] strong critical view specific to the history of sociology and positivism. Though the document was written by Du Bois in 1905 it was first published in 2000 and is available at the W.E.B Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Du Bois 1905 [2000]). Writing about his text ‘Black Reconstruction in America’, the historian of the reconstruction era Eric Foner has stated the following:

In 1935, the black activist and scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois, published *Black Reconstruction in America*, a monumental study that portrayed Reconstruction as an idealistic effort to construct a

democratic, interracial political order from the ashes of slavery, as well as a phase in a prolonged struggle between capital and labor for control of the South's economic resources. His book closed with an indictment of a profession whose writings had ignored the testimony of the principal actor in the drama of Reconstruction—the emancipated slave—and sacrificed scholarly objectivity on the altar of racial bias. “One fact and one alone,” Du Bois wrote, “explains the attitude of most recent writers toward Reconstruction; they cannot conceive of Negroes as men.” In many ways, *Black Reconstruction* anticipated the findings of modern scholarship. At the time, however, it was largely ignored (Foner 2002: 14).

The concern here is to focus on the formative years of Du Bois' scholarship and its impact on his later scholarships. This scholarship does not include only the philosophical and sociological dimension but also his cultural, historical and political understanding of the America of his time. Du Bois was awarded his PhD in 1895 and became the first African-American to be awarded a doctoral degree at Harvard University and he went on to establish the first scientific school of sociology at Atlanta University, historically a black institution of higher learning.. His autobiography was published in 1940 entitled '*Dusk of Dawn: An Autobiography of Race*'. The book covers the life he lived and how he chose to live that life, his thought, words and actions..

In his own words:

My life had its significance and its only deep significance because it was part of a Problem; but that problem was, as I continue to think, the central problem of the greatest of the world's democracies and so the Problem of the future world. The problem of the future world is the charting, by means of intelligent reason, of a path not simply through the resistances of physical force, but through the vaster and far more intricate jungle of ideas conditioned on unconscious and subconscious reflexes of living things; on blind umeason and often irresistible urges of sensitive matter; of which the concept of race is today one of the most unyielding and threatening. I seem to see a way of elucidating the inner meaning and significance of that race problem by explaining it in terms of the one human life that I know best.

I have written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds which

were mine. If the first two books were written in tears and blood, this is set down no less determinedly but yet with wider hope in some more benign fluid. Wherefore I have not hesitated in calling it "Dusk of Dawn"( Du Bois 1940[2007]: xxxiii).

According to him, the significance of his life is tied to a problem that did not merely define the past but was also a problem that the “greatest of world democracies” are facing and also has serious implications for our future. The autobiography seeks to relate his life to his project to understand the problem of race (Du Bois 1940 [2007]). Dan Green and Robert Wortham argue that the sociological approach developed by Du Bois between 1896 and 1914 contributed significantly to the formation of the discipline of sociology in a decisive manner (Green and Wortham 2015). His PhD thesis publication in 1896 entitled *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* was the first study of its kind to discuss in historical detail the history of slavery of the African-American people (Du Bois 1896 [2014]). In 1899 he published his work *The Philadelphia Negro* and in 1903 *The Souls of the Black folk* (Du Bois 1899 [2007]; 1903[2007]). These major publications and his articles in several research journals and political fora was a unique and rare achievement. A closer view of his academic life and politics help us understand that Du Bois was a scholar of both words and actions (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

Itzigsohn and Brown write:

There are two things about Du Bois’s life that are important to emphasize. The first is that he was both a scholar activist and an activist scholar. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it, “It was never possible to know where the scholar Du Bois ended and the organizer Du Bois began.” For Du Bois there was no contradiction between these roles. During his lifetime, he was always a scholar, a public intellectual, an activist, and an organizer. His scholarship was dedicated to dismantling the “color line,” a term that he used to refer to the centrality of racialization and race in structuring social relations, and his activism drew from and informed his scholarship.

The second point to emphasize is that Du Bois’s life and scholarship were, on the one hand, profoundly rooted in the African American experience and at the same time deeply global and decolonial in their aims. Du Bois’s thinking and activism were rooted in the experience of American racism. He learned a bit about the color line in Great Barrington, the small town in

western Massachusetts where he was born, and a great deal at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he began his undergraduate studies in 1885. Much of his activism was focused on achieving political and civil rights and economic opportunity for African Americans in the United States. At the same time, and starting very early on during the time he spent at the University of Berlin (1892–94), he understood that the color line was a global structure. From then on he became a global thinker and a global activist fighting against colonialism and for freedom and equality for all people of color and colonized people around the world (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 3).

Thinking does not only consist of thinking about ideas but also materializing them in the arena of action. This aspect of thinking which is embedded in action is also central to the thought of both Ambedkar and Arendt. Du Bois's stature as a public intellectual was shaped by his social and political activism, and this ideation had its sources in the broad spectrum of research in social sciences and his engagement with the natural sciences.

The broad spectrum of his scholarly training dates back to the time spent at Harvard University. The Harvard of 1888 was an extraordinary place and Du Bois certainly had landed in the company of thinkers who were in the process of thinking of disciplinary frameworks from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards – these included the psychologist William James, George Herbert Palmer in ethics, Josiah Royce and George Santayana in philosophy, Nathaniel Shaler a geologist who deliberated upon the theory of evolution and moral philosophy and Du Bois's supervisor, the historian Albert Bushnell Hart, considered as one among the founding figures of historical studies in America (Du Bois 2007[1940]:19). George Herbert Mead was also a student at Harvard University at the same time. Huebner points out that Mead participated in significant academic conversations on science and philosophy in courses with Josiah Royce, George Herbert Palmer and William James (Huebner 2014). Anne Warfield Rawls states that both Du Bois and Mead seem to share an understanding of the notion of the 'Self' (Rawls 2000).



Rawls has argued that:

The difference between Mead's "taking the role of the other" and what Du Bois describes as "looking at one's self through the eyes of others," is that the White American takes the role of the White other toward the self without any fundamental contradiction and thus essentially without being aware of doing so. White Americans do not take the role of Black Americans toward themselves. African Americans, on the other hand, because of the essential inequality and incompatibility between the two communities, are forced to take the role of White others toward themselves and are as a consequence uncomfortably aware of looking at themselves through the veil. The African American self is, according to Du Bois, because of this twoness, incomplete. He argues that the paradox of having a self reflected back through the veil of color, the conflict between the two views of self and the different moral and cultural commitments that they reflect, account for this incompleteness.

The African American, according to Du Bois.....is always torn in two directions, held accountable to two communities, two sets of values. He describes this as a fundamental conflict between the two social forms and the resulting conflict between the values of the two communities, not as a conflict between the values accorded to social roles within a single community (Rawls 2000: 244)

The discussion on theories of the self at the turn of the twentieth century remains central to the foundational understanding of social theory even in contemporary times. Du Bois argued that the people of colour experience the incompleteness of the self as they have been forced to live behind the veil. The process of the formation of self-consciousness behind the veil develops has a different trajectory. Rawls elaborates that in making this argument on the notion of self-consciousness, Du Bois develops an argument that shifted away from Mead's conceptual trajectory i.e.-"taking the role of the other" to engage with self-consciousness (Rawls 2020). Du Bois believed that the African-American's self-consciousness gets determined in two ways. At first, their self gets determined when they take the role of others in the community. Subsequently, the alienation of the fashioned self from the imagined other creates the momentum towards a realization of the fashioned self. They take their role from those behind the veil towards realizing their self. From Rawls's perspective, there are two common features Du Bois and Mead share

based on their disciplinary and institutional context. Both Mead and Du Bois studied with William James as undergraduate and graduate students. Both of them also studied in Germany during the early 1890s. And they were heavily influenced by certain German thinkers of the time. For Mead, the influence came from Wundt and for Du Bois, it was Max Weber and Schmoller (Rawls 2020). Itzigsohn and Brown write about Du Bois' experience in Germany:

A scholarship he received during his graduate studies led to a year and a half in Berlin. At the time Germany represented the peak of the academic world, and Du Bois remembered with irony how he “derived a certain satisfaction in learning that the University of Berlin did not recognize a degree even from Harvard University, no more than Harvard did from Fisk.” At the University of Berlin, he spent time with the *Verein für Socialpolitik*, a group of scholars who addressed social policy issues. It was in this group's meetings that he became acquainted with the German sociologist Max Weber. Du Bois was particularly influenced by the work of Gustav Schmoller, who advocated an inductive empirical approach to the analysis of social problems.<sup>6</sup> Schmoller's inductive empiricism was a third intellectual influence on Du Bois, and its imprint can be seen in his empirical research program (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020:4-5).

At the time, the criticism of traditional rationalist, individualist and positivist premises were prominent in German academic thought and this would have influenced any American thinker in Germany then. This also coincided with the revival of Hegel's writings in Berlin and Germany at large as well as in America during this period. The revival of Hegel's thought in America was evident during Dewey's student days at the John Hopkins University when he enrolled in philosophy courses with George Sylvester Morris. Morris was a professor of philosophy at

University of Michigan.<sup>5</sup> He had been visiting John Hopkins every year between 1878-1884 to deliver lectures on the theme of the philosophy of history (Martin 2003).

### **Freedom of the Mind: The Formative Years of Ambedkar**

Ambedkar was at Columbia University in 1913 and had embarked on a different kind of educational and research experience. He enrolled in courses in various branches of the social sciences and philosophy even though he was awarded a Ph.D. from the department of economics. He studied philosophy with John Dewey and to be specific attended three of his classes. These classes were Philosophy 231: Psychological Ethics & Moral and Political Philosophy<sup>6</sup>, Philosophy 131: Moral and Political Philosophy<sup>7</sup>, Philosophy 132: Moral and Political Philosophy.

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey studied Science of knowledge, History of Philosophy in Great Britain and Hegel's Philosophy of History and then in the second year- a seminar on Spinoza's ethics and History of German Philosophy with special reference to the movement from Kant to Hegel. This is not to state that Dewey had an untroubled journey with philosophy as a discipline. His movement and maturation in the realm of philosophy also caused serious dissatisfaction during his graduate days at the John Hopkins University. Dewey was aware of the lack of administrative support for philosophy and even President Daniel C. Gilman of the John Hopkins University tried to dissuade Dewey from majoring in philosophy. This suggestion had come as a gesture of friendship from President Gilman. He studied different courses like The theory of State, International Law, Institutional History, sources of English history, comparative constitutional history, American Institutions and American Economics. From Dewey's perspective these courses did not probe deeply into the facts to give a rigorous philosophical interpretation. These courses could not provide a philosophical perspective of their subject as Dewey would have desired. Dewey's purpose was to study philosophical logic, the different forms of knowledge - their origin and development, their interconnectedness and comparative understandings as embodiments of truth. Dewey felt disappointment in the course on logic by Charles S. Pierce. He believed that Pierce's account of logic gives an account of the methods of physical sciences primarily in mathematical form rather than being philosophical. Almost two decades later Dewey would realize the significance of Pierce's philosophical logic that formed the basis for his own work.

<sup>6</sup> The description of the course: "Philosophy 231: Psychological Ethics & Moral and Political Philosophy" by John Dewey: It will consist of an analysis of conduct and character from the standpoint of social psychology. The formation through the influence of the social environment of biological impulses and wants into moral affections, beliefs and judgments, together with the genesis of the self as an agent will be considered. Typical Ethical theories (as the Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Scholastic, Kantian, and Utilitarian) will be discussed so far as their psychological factors are concerned, the extra hours being given to this phase of the subject.

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html>

<sup>7</sup> The description of the two courses: "Philosophy 131: Moral and Political Philosophy & Philosophy 132 Moral and Political Philosophy". Two full courses. The first half-year will consider the moral problems of the national state in relation to the individual on one hand and to general social relations, including international forms of association on the other. The second half-year will consider the moral problems connected with law.

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html>

Ambedkar's engagement with Dewey lasted a lifetime. During this period he was interested in a variety of subjects. By the time Ambedkar finished his studies at Columbia University he was well acquainted with the discipline of philosophy. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's arrival at Columbia was concurrent with intellectual struggles raging within sociology and anthropology (Garza 2018). These disciplines were yet to firmly establish themselves in American academia (at least the way we understand them today). Unlike what was happening in European Social sciences at the time, American Sociology and Anthropology were in the process of institutionalization, which meant that the boundary between psychology, history or politics was still being drawn. The intellectual path of Ambedkar coincides with Du Bois's intellectual and political struggle in the social sciences in America. Ambedkar's presence in the American academic and intellectual milieu coincides with a period when the social sciences were passing through a transitory phase and the future was still uncertain. This encounter proved influential towards the later part of Ambedkar's life when he became a significant figure during the last few decades of British Colonialism in India. His struggle for the emancipation of the "untouchables" remains at the forefront of all his political struggles. He continued to critically engage with the question of democracy in India even after independence and the adoption of the constitution. In a lecture delivered in 1956, Ambedkar argued:

Is there democracy in India or is there no democracy in India? What is the truth? No positive answer can be given unless the confusion caused by equating democracy with Republic and by equating democracy with Parliamentary Government is removed.

Democracy is quite different from a Republic as well as from Parliamentary Government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society.

What does the word 'Society' connote? To put it briefly when we speak of 'Society', we conceive of it as one by its very nature. The qualities which accompany this unity are praiseworthy community of purpose and desire for welfare, loyalty to public ends and mutuality of sympathy and co-operation.

Are these ideals to be found in Indian Society? The Indian Society does not consist of individuals. It consists of an innumerable collection of castes which are exclusive in their life and have no common experience to share and have no bond of sympathy. Given this fact it is not necessary to argue the point. The existence of the Caste System is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy (Ambedkar 2018:241).<sup>8</sup>

Ambedkar's understanding of philosophical systems developed in the West primarily through the three courses which he enrolled for with John Dewey at Columbia University. Dewey had joined the department of Philosophy and Psychology at Columbia University in 1905. An already established thinker in Philosophy and Psychology he went on to become an important member of a group of thinkers who significantly shaped twentieth century thought and politics. These thinkers included the anthropologist Franz Boas and his student, the economist E.R.A Seligman, the political scientists John Burgess and Charles Beard, the historians James Harvey Robinson, William A. Dunning, and James Thomas Shotwell and the sociologists Robert M. Maclver. Gabriel Torres-Colon and Charles Hobbs have pointed out the profound similarities in the intellectual pursuits of Boas and Dewey. In 1914-15 Boas and Dewey co-taught a seminar at Columbia University. Students of the Boasian school were influenced by John Dewey (Colón and Hobbs 2015: 142). The intellectual and political projects of Boas and Dewey reciprocated and complemented each other. Boas and Dewey were important influences on Ambedkar's academic life when he joined Columbia in 1913, and this influence is reflected in his later thinking as well. The influence can be observed even in later intellectual life and political projects of Ambedkar. Despite his training as a political economist, Ambedkar engaged in various branches of the emerging social sciences (Rodrigues 2017; Omvedt 2017).

Discussing Ambedkar's academic and intellectual life Omvedt writes "He was a student of America's most famous philosopher, John Dewey, but it was under the guidance of Professor Edward Seligman, an economist, that he was awarded his MA in 1915 and submitted his

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<sup>8</sup> This was the lecture given by Ambedkar for Voice of America. In this interesting lecture, Ambedkar delineates the prospects of democracy in India. The mere existence of a republic and parliamentary democracy is not sufficient to make a democracy but requires doing away with inequalities of various kinds in a society in which caste predominates.

dissertation for his Ph.D in 1916” (Omvedt 2017). Ambedkar presented his paper “Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development” at an anthropology seminar on 9th May 1916<sup>9</sup> at the an anthropology seminar which was taught by anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser. Alexander Goldenweiser was a student of Franz Boas who studied and taught at Columbia University and later established the Anthropology department at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. The paper reflects the insights of Boasian anthropology and Deweyan pragmatism. Ambedkar was deeply aware of the newly emerging critique of the positivist understanding of the social sciences. Positivist thought based on the idea of natural laws offered explanation or even justification “that would fit any given society despite specific contexts or cultures (Chairez-Garza, 2018:1)”. Theories of the social sciences drawing upon positivist methods and ideas of social evolutionism justified ideas of racial superiority. But at the turn of the twentieth century, this understanding was challenged by scholars like Boas, Dewey and Mead. Ambedkar adopted the language of Boasian anthropology and Dewey’s psychological and philosophical mode of thought to argue that the caste system was not fixed or hereditary (Garza 2018). Within this framework, the caste system was understood as a cultural problem that could be challenged and eradicated.

Ambedkar enrolled for two courses in anthropology in the academic year 1915-16 and each course was part of a series entitled “Anthropology 137-138: General Ethnology: Technology and Primitive Man” and “139: General Ethnology: Types of Primitive Religion and Mythology--Soc. Org”; “140: General Ethnology: Types of Primitive Religion and Social Organization and Anthropology”.<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar also engaged with the writings of French Sociologist Gabriel Tarde in developing his paper “Caste in India”.

Ambedkar argued:

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<sup>9</sup> Please see: URL: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt\\_ambedkar\\_castes.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html)

<sup>10</sup> Please see the details of Ambedkar’s coursework at Columbia University.

URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html>

This sub-division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes. The question is: were they compelled to close their doors and become endogamous, or did they close them of their own accord? I submit that there is a double line of answer: Some closed the door: Others found it closed against them. The one is a psychological interpretation and the other is mechanistic, but they are complementary and both are necessary to explain the phenomena of caste-formation in its entirety.

I will first take up the psychological interpretation. The question we have to answer in this connection is: Why did these sub-divisions or classes, if you please, industrial, religious or otherwise, become self-enclosed or endogamous? My answer is because the Brahmins were so. Endogamy or the closed-door system, was a fashion in the Hindu society, and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous castes. It is "the infection of imitation" that caught all these sub-divisions on their onward march of differentiation and has turned them into castes. The propensity to imitate is a deep-seated one in the human mind and need not be deemed an inadequate explanation for the formation of the various castes in India. It is so deep-seated that Walter Bagehot argues that, "We must not think of . . . imitation as voluntary, or even conscious. On the contrary it has its seat mainly in very obscure parts of the mind, whose notions, so far from being consciously produced, are hardly felt to exist; so far from being conceived beforehand, are not even felt at the time. The main seat of the imitative part of our nature is our belief, and the causes predisposing us to believe this or disinclining us to believe that are among the obscurest parts of our nature. But as to the imitative nature of credulity there can be no doubt" (Physics and Politics, 1915, p. 60). This propensity to imitate has been made the subject of a scientific study by Gabriel Tarde, who lays down three laws of imitation. One of his three laws is that imitation flows from the higher to the lower or, to quote his own words, "Given the opportunity, a nobility will always and everywhere imitate its leaders, its kings or sovereigns, and the people likewise, given the opportunity, its nobility" (Laws of Imitation, tr. by E. C. Parsons, 2nd edition, p. 217). Another of Tarde's laws of imitation is: that the extent or intensity of imitation varies inversely in proportion to distance, or in his own words "The thing that is most imitated is the most superior one of those that are nearest. In fact, the influence of the model's example is efficacious inversely to its distance as well as directly to its superiority. Distance is understood here in its sociological meaning. However distant in space a stranger may be, he is close by, from this point of view, if we have numerous and daily relations with him and if we

have every facility to satisfy our desire to imitate him. This law of the imitation of the nearest, of the least distant, explains the gradual and consecutive character of the spread of an example that has been set by the higher social ranks" (Ibid., p. 224)...(Ambedkar [(1917) 1979/2014] 3-22)

Ambedkar followed Tarde's theory of imitation to develop his analysis and rationale for the systematic spread of several practices especially endogamy that like any 'closed door system' perpetuated the caste system. These practices further led to an extremely rigid system that could not have been altered. Ambedkar argued that endogamy became part of Hindu society as it originated in the Brahmin castes and then was subsequently imitated by other non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes. Following Walter Bagehot and Tarde's arguments, he emphasized that imitation is deep-seated in the human mind. This imitation led to other subdivisions and classes that became endogamous caste groups. Ambedkar's arguments in this paper were informed by the broader intellectual and political projects of American Anthropology particularly Boasian anthropology and pragmatism at the time. Ambedkar's doctoral dissertation at Columbia under the supervision of Seligman was published as "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India: A Study in the Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance" (Ambedkar [1989/2014]). The doctoral work completed at the London School of Economics and Political Science was published as "The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution" (Ambedkar [1989/2014]).

It is in the context of the wide range of Ambedkar's thoughts and writings that Valerian Rodrigues writes:

" There is much in Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's writings and social practices to consider him a philosopher in the traditional sense. His association with certain philosophers such as John Dewey is well known and in his later years, he closely followed the teachings of the Buddha and philosophical schools that claimed to be inheritors of Buddha's teachings. He was familiar with the debates around socialism, particularly revolving around the critique of capitalism that informed the Fabian school. He followed the works of the British idealists very closely, including their interface with German philosophy, and classical Greek thought. He demonstrates critical readings of certain philosophical texts of India—the major Upanishads and the six systems of philosophy, particularly Samkhya and Badarayana's Uttara Mimansha. He wrote a small treatise on the Bhagavad Gita. Among his contemporaries, he closely followed the work of M K Gandhi,



Sakhya Buddhism (wrote an introduction to the second edition of Narasu's *What Is Buddhism*), the Theosophical School, and strands of Buddhist thought in Ceylon and Burma. Further, his work is replete with familiarity with the major currents of European enlightenment thought (Rodrigues 2017:101).

Ambedkar's understanding of pragmatism and particularly of Dewey's writings is visible in his work over almost four decades. His classes with Dewey helped him to understand the interlinkages of different philosophical systems in the European tradition. These are reflected in a wide range of writings such as "Annihilation of Caste", "Philosophy of Hinduism" and his first intervention in 1917 at the Southborough committee, on the philosophy of education and his approach to constitutionalism and the ultimate quest for freedom of the mind in the struggle for a good society. He had submitted his text entitled "Evidence before the Southborough Committee". This text has a special place especially from the perspective of theoretical discourse of the 'interventionist intellectual'.<sup>11</sup> This is the first political writing of Ambedkar which brought him into direct contact with a wider public in a direct and assertive manner. His earlier writings were part of his academic engagement and were yet to be translated into a political discourse in the public realm. This particular text submitted to the Southborough committee is significant from various perspectives. Ambedkar begins the essay by citing A.B. Hart, one of the founders of American Historical School and who was also the doctoral supervisor of W.E.B Du Bois at Harvard University:

"The most difficult and the most momentous question of Government (is) how to transmit the force of individual opinion and preference into public action. This is the crux of popular institutions." So says Professor A.B. Hart. But this is only half the definition of popular Government. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the other half which is equal if not more in importance. As the Government is the most important field for the exercise of individual capacities, it is in the interest of the people that no person as such should be denied the opportunity of actively participating in the process of Government. That is to say popular

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<sup>11</sup> Valerian Rodrigues in his paper "Justice as the Lens: Interrogating Rawls through Sen and Ambedkar" argues about the interventionist role of Ambedkar to safeguard the rights of the depressed classes referring mainly to the "untouchables" (Rodrigues 2011).

Government is not only Government for the people but by the people. To express the same in a different way, representation of opinions by itself is not sufficient to constitute popular Government. To cover its true meaning it requires personal representation as well. It is because the former is often found without the latter that the Franchise Committee has to see in devising the franchises and constituencies for a popular Government in India, it provides for both, i.e., representation of opinions and representation of persons. Any scheme of franchise and constituency that fails to bring this about fails to create a popular Government (Ambedkar 1917 [1979/2014]: 247)

The significance of the essay derives from the fact that Young Ambedkar was informed by a conceptual, philosophical and political outlook and develops an argument for the enfranchisement and self-determination of different religious minorities against the majority and particularly the “untouchables” of Indian society not only from British rule but also majoritarianism of caste Hindus (Ambedkar 1917 [1979/2014]. The theoretical and philosophical intervention in the essay apart from the data and historical details reflects his intellectual and academic training and engagement across various disciplines both in America and London. The essay is marked by the influence of American pragmatism and social sciences as well as the influence from his studies at LSE<sup>12</sup>.

Ambedkar was a rigorous participant in Indian student life during his academic life at LSE. This participation abruptly ended after a political conflict. He had begun to take part in the discussion of the students union where students read their essays. Ambedkar too presented a paper entitled “Responsibilities of a representative government in India”. The paper gave rise to a heated debate and controversy. This controversy was finally brought to an end by political scientist Professor Joseph Harold Laski with the remark that the “ideology reflected in the essay had too much revolutionary politics to be appropriate for a student group”. His reputation among other students was that of a revolutionary (Omvedt [2003]2011:28-29). His D.Sc thesis was also controversial. He had submitted the thesis titled “Problem of the Rupee”. He submitted his doctoral thesis seventeen months after acceptance of his MSc. thesis in June 1921. While the

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<sup>12</sup> LSE refers to London School of Economics and Political Science.

referees' reports were awaited Ambedkar decided to acquire another degree in Germany. He began learning both German and French and later left for Bonn University, Germany. It has been suggested that while in Bonn. He made contact with Hermann Jacobi, who was the leading German Indologist of his times. But it has been stated that Ambedkar did not continue his studies at Bonn<sup>13</sup>.

He learned from his supervisor Edwin Cannan that the thesis had not been approved by his London examiners due to the extreme criticism of British Policies and “too much departure from orthodox thinking on international exchange” (Omvedt 2017: 35). Then finally he did some editing work and revised the conclusion and submitted again. His writings within the domain of political economy were situated in the neoclassical framework. Ambedkar argued that “within an open economy India could compete well at the global level, noting that Indian exports and manufactures gained at the expense of the British during the period of the low rupee” (Omvedt 2017:38).

In 1917, Ambedkar had reviewed Bertrand Russell's book *Principles of Social Construction* in the journal of *Indian Economic Society*. It is of great significance to notice here again the intellectual sources upon which his review is based besides his own views of these essays (Ambedkar 1918[2014]). Ambedkar points out that the book was based on a lecture series delivered by Bertrand Russell with reference to World War one. The World War had a significant impact on the intellectual life of both Europe and America and this is reflected not just in Russell's work but even in that of the leading philosophers and social scientists of the time namely Durkheim and Weber<sup>14</sup> as well as the intellectual projects of even Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt. While Durkheim and Weber were the most celebrated of the classical sociologists

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp found Ambedkar's application for registration with the Prussian Ministry of Science, Fine Arts and Public Education, a CV in German and his registration into the university ledger on 29.4.1921. Dr. Maren first came to India in 1972 to study labour migration as part of Ph.D. work at the Heidelberg University. She lived in Nagpur for two years. Since then her intellectual association began in India and then she got introduced to dalit politics and B.R. Ambedkar.

<sup>14</sup> For Example see Karsenti, Bruno. (2018). Durkheim, Germany, War, Europe. *Simmel Studies*, 22 (2), 17–34. URL: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1058556ar>

they did not outlive the First World War. While the three interlocutors discussed here survived the Second World War and its impact was greatest on the lived experience and intellectual thought of Hannah Arendt.

In his book *Principles of Social Reconstruction*<sup>15</sup> Russell stated that his attempt is to suggest a philosophy of politics. For him, this philosophy of politics is essentially based on the credence that “impulse has more effect than conscious purpose in moulding men’s lives” (Russell, 1916). Human impulses can be broadly classified into two categories- possessive and creative impulse. Russell considered that the best life is always formed on the basis of creative impulses unlike “the worst which is inspired by the love of possession” (Russell 1916 [2009]: xix). Interestingly, Russell argued that political institutions contribute to the organization of any society in such a manner that might allow human beings to develop more creative impulses rather than possessive impulses. The state, war and property are the cardinal exponents of possessive impulses and on the contrary education, marriage and religion might constitute the creative impulses (Russell, 1916).

While Russell saw his work as a contribution to the philosophy of politics Ambedkar pointed out the sources of behaviourist psychology, sociology, political economy, philosophy and political theory. Being trained both in the American and European system Ambedkar became deeply aware of the dominant and profound discourses across various disciplinary domains and that certainly allowed him to provide a wide horizon to his arguments and also to his understanding of Russell’s book. From Ambedkar’s perspective, Russell believed that war could not be dissipated by rationalistic arguments but by furthering a life of positive impulses. What we could learn from war is about the ‘springs of human action’, what these human actions are and how we develop our understanding of these human actions. Russell believed that these human actions “seems to afford a basis for political philosophy that could hold its own in a time of crisis than the philosophy of traditional liberalism has shown itself to be” (Russell cited by Ambedkar, 1917: 483). Ambedkar emphasized, as is widely known Russell’s influence on the development

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<sup>15</sup> The book “Principles of Social Reconstruction” was originally entitled “Why Men Fight”.

of behaviorist psychology- though later in his life he abandoned the strong version of behaviorism. The new developments in the field of behaviouristic psychology had overthrown the doctrinal perspective that “*external circumstances are responsible for man’s activity. If it were so, contends the behaviourist, it would presuppose a quiescent being which is a biological untruth*” (ibid). Ambedkar seemed to be in agreement with Russell’s view that human beings are endowed with “springs of action” within them as they are “born with certain tendencies to act” (ibid). Therefore, an external environment does not induce activity but primarily directs human activity. The tendency of human being’s to respond differently to stimuli is dependent on the ‘social milieu’ in which they are conducted or become functional.

Ambedkar stated that:

“The modifications which these original tendencies undergo are of the highest importance. They constitute Education in the broadest sense of the word. All modifications, however, are not equally valuable and it is the business of the reformer to eliminate the circumstances and institutions that modify these tendencies for the socially worse and preserve and introduce those that will modify them for the socially better. Whatever that may be, it is of immense social value that these tendencies are capable of indefinite modifications” (Ambedkar 1917:484).

Alongside the pragmatists, Ambedkar points out here that education in the broadest sense of the term is the most significant external condition or circumstance for the transformation of individuals and political institutions. He goes on to argue that we cannot consider all modifications to be of similar value. Therefore existing political institutions could create external conditions based upon which modifications could be directed towards social betterment. Ambedkar is trying to develop an anthropological approach to philosophical understanding during this period around 1917. The significant influences on him are those of Pragmatism particularly Dewey’s writings on Education, Psychology, Political thought particularly with reference to “*Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*” and his approach to the broader philosophical discourses of his time.

One of Dewey's most crucial interlocutors during this period was none other than G.H. Mead. The behaviourist approach and their concern with 'Human Nature' as reflected in the writings of Mead echo in Ambedkar's thinking as it developed during this period. An additional and related concern was that of realizing a democratic society through the organization and dissemination of knowledge in modern society. It is not germane whether or not Ambedkar knew Mead, but Mead's concerns through Dewey's influence informed Ambedkar's intellectual project. Certainly, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead would have been very explicitly visible to students who studied with Dewey at Columbia University and Ambedkar being one among them. Mead published extensively during this period. Though Mead known to sociologists has a completely different trajectory (Huebner 2014).

Ambedkar began as a political economist and at the same time explored various branches of the social sciences. Social sciences were yet to be separated from philosophy in the twentieth century. The wide variety of courses taken by Ambedkar at Columbia University certainly reflects the intellectual and interests of Ambedkar but at the same time helps to understand the intellectual life of America, for the political climate was deeply intertwined with the intellectual and academic pursuits of the time. Scholars have suggested that it is not possible to understand Ambedkar's project without having an in-depth understanding of Ambedkar's Columbia and LSE years. This will help to situate Ambedkar in the broader intellectual and academic milieu of America and Europe (Mukherjee 2009; Omvedt 2017). Ambedkar's later years as a public intellectual drew upon his early academic and intellectual training. The practice and modification of these ideas were further manifested during the last two decades of his life as a public intellectual in the last two decades of his life. Though it is important to highlight here that Ambedkar's life as a political economist is yet to be explored.

## **Thinking about the Human Condition: Philosophy, Arendt and Political Theory:**

Arendt commenced her studies at Marburg university and became a student of Martin Heidegger and then later of Karl Jaspers at Heidelberg University. She was deeply immersed in the questions concerned with classical philosophy. Her dissertation entitled ‘*Love and Saint Augustine*’ was first published in 1929 and received attention only in the 1980s when political theorists recognized that this work echoed in her later writings primarily in the Gifford lectures of 1973 delivered at the University of Aberdeen and was later published as “*The Life of the Mind: Thinking and Willing*” (Arendt 1996: 135)<sup>16</sup>. The preface of Scott and Judith entitled “Rediscovering Saint Augustine and Love” helps us to understand the brief historical context and trajectory of the publication and reception of these lectures (Arendt 1996: vii-xviii). The detailed preface helps to appreciate the history of this text and how Arendt revisited her writings as a political theorist, while the earlier work was written under the rubric of ‘traditional philosophy’. The book also provides a context to the state of scholarship and research during the Weimar Republic and situated herself in that intellectual and political milieu (ibid).

Arendt’s doctoral work focused on the concept of love in the writings of St. Augustine. There are three sections to the dissertation and each of these sections discusses one concept of love. So, the three sections are based on three different conceptions of love. These include “love as craving”, “love as a relation between man and the God”- the creator and then finally “neighbourly love”. In her interpretation, the concept of neighbourly love has been categorised as the highest form of love. Bruehl states that the form of the dissertation is dialectical in nature. The commandment “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” both unites and transcends the initial two concepts of love (Arendt 1996:39). Arendt, like Jaspers, her teacher and supervisor at Heidelberg University, often followed the method of linking contradictory and diverse concepts. Jaspers had already formulated three dimensions of philosophizing- *Weltorientierung* (Orientation of the World), *Existenzerhellung* (Illumination of Existence) and *Metaphysik* (Metaphysics).<sup>17</sup> Arendt found in

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<sup>16</sup> The doctoral work of Hannah Arendt published as “Love and Saint Augustine” has been edited by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark. They have also written an interpretative essay for this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Jasper's concern with how individuals think and act was finally woven through a three-part schematism of “dimensions” in his Philosophy, which was divided, accordingly, into three volumes. One volume was dedicated to

Augustine a “world-oriented love (appetitus)”, “an existential love (neighborly love)” and a “transcendent love (love of the creator)” (Young-Bruehl cited by Tamboukou 2014: 46). Hannah Arendt’s movement from Marburg to Heidelberg corresponded with Karl Jaspers's shift from psychology to philosophy. Jaspers’ seminars and lectures primarily included discussions on the nature of philosophy. His shift to philosophy during this period is a matter of extensive discussion but can be summarized in his statement: “Philosophizing is real as it pervades an individual life at a given moment” (Karl Jaspers cited by Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 63).

In the 1920s, German academic philosophy was dominated by groups or individuals who felt the need to stabilize the status of philosophy. Any alternative path was not officially censured and restricted but according to Jaspers the consequences of this orientation could be observed in appointments and recruitment in faculty positions (Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 44). Jaspers indicated that he was considered an alien as he came from psychology and during this phase he was also “regarded as finished” when he stopped publishing in psychology and began writing in philosophy (Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 45). There existed possibly two categories of philosophical movements which included “scientism, materialism, empiricism, psychologism and positivism” on the one hand, and on the other varieties of neo-Kantianism and formalism (ibid). There emerged a quest or yearning for absolutism along with systematic and certainty in the world of knowledge. The existing philosophical system turned nostalgically to Hegel in their search for a complete system. Thinking about this period, Arendt wrote in an article published in the *Partisan Review* in 1946 that “Philosophy then was either derivative or it was a rebellion of the philosophers against philosophy in general, rebellion against, or doubt of its identity.” Arendt walked the path of being a rebel and decided to move away with the traditional notion and identity of philosophy. She rejected both ‘derivative metaphysicians’ and those who denounced it for being vague and irrational (Arendt 1946 [1994]).<sup>18</sup>

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how philosophical thinking relates to the world and objects in the world, one to how it relates to the human condition, the “existential condition” of man, and one to how philosophical thinking seeks to transcend the world and man. “Philosophical World Orientation,” “Existential Elucidation,” and “Metaphysics” were types, but not static or fixed types; they were more like what Kierkegaard called “stages on life's way.”

<sup>18</sup> The essay was originally published as “What is Existenz Philosophy?” *Partisan Review* 13 (Winter 1946)



Joanne Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark state that:

“In analyzing the dissertation [Arendt’s dissertation], one crucial problem for Arendt scholars has been to explain how a young Jewish student working with the two leading proponents of Existenz philosophy wrote her dissertation on Augustine, the Christian bishop and saint” (Arendt 1996 [1929]:xv).<sup>19</sup>

Hans Jonas, a student at Marburg and worked with Martin Heidegger and then Rudolf Bultmann and Edmund Husserl, points out that “such a topic would not have been all that unusual in the German universities of the time” and it was “in itself an understandable thing”(Arendt 1996 [1929]: xv). Arendt was guided to the problem through her own reading and Jaspers’ work at the time. Jonas points out that the works of Christian thinkers such as St.Augustine, Pascal and Kierkegaard were prominent topics in German Universities and these thinkers in particular had an important place in existential thought. For philosophy students in German universities, Augustine's confessional mode was notably original in comparison with the Hellenic tradition (ibid). The dissertation was published by Springer Verlag in 1929. Bruehl writes: “ She (Arendt) had carried this copy with her when she fled Germany in 1933, kept it through the years she spent in France, and brought it to America, battered and stained, the one sign of her brilliant but brief German academic career” (Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: xix).

Her next important work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* argued that imperialism did not end with the Second World War but a new era of imperialist policies had been inaugurated (Arendt 1958 [1973]: xviii). However, we understand the historical past and even if we tend to learn a great deal from that historical past does not make our future known to us in any possible way. She wrote against the backdrop of the Vietnam war and the new forms of imperial domination that began the post-world war era. The new international political realities did not entirely erase the old world order and certainly grounded itself on the disguised realities of the old world order.

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<sup>19</sup> Joanne Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark state this point in the preface entitled “Rediscovering Love and Saint Augustine”.

From Arendt's perspective, no one could further provide any justification for expansionism following the dictum of "White Man's burden" or even to unite people on the notion of primitive consciousness (Arendt 1958 [1973]: xix). As she argued in *The Origins of totalitarianism* that the word "expansion" seems to have completely disappeared from the political vocabulary (ibid).

Arendt argued:

...the era of the so-called dollar imperialism, the specifically American version of pre-World War II imperialism that was politically the least dangerous, is definitely over. Private investments--"the activities of a thousand U.S. companies operating in a hundred foreign countries" and "concentrated in the most modern, the most strategic, the most rapidly growing sectors of the foreign economy"-create many political problems even if they are not protected by the power of the nation, but foreign aid, even if given for purely humanitarian reasons, is political by nature precisely because it is not motivated by the search for profit. Billions of dollars have been spent in political and economic wastelands where corruption and incompetence have caused them to disappear before anything productive could be started, and this money is no longer the "superfluous" capital that could not be invested productively and profitably in the home country but the weird out- growth of sheer abundance that the rich countries, the haves as against the have-nots, can afford to lose. In other words, the profit motive, whose importance for imperialist policies was frequently overrated even in the past, has now completely disappeared; only very rich and very powerful countries can afford to take the huge losses involved in imperialism (Arendt 1958 [1973]: xix-xx).

One of the trajectories of this expansionism commenced centuries ago in the 'civilizing mission of the empires'. For Arendt, the 'White Man's burden' in the form of imperialism (not merely conquest), Anti-Semitism (not merely the hatred of Jews), and Totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship) confronted the received world order. In the light of these imperialist projects, Arendt's anguish oriented her search for new meaning or probably a new beginning. A beginning characterized by a new political vocabulary that would encompass what she prefers to call 'the whole of humanity' (Birmingham 2006:4). This new beginning should not be dependent on the good of the past.

Arendt's first engagement with sociology is visible in her book review of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*.<sup>20</sup> Arendt tries to pinpoint the philosophical underpinnings of Mannheim's project and categorically, on historical grounds, questioned all of Mannheim's arguments. What is this question which Arendt highlighted in her response titled 'Philosophy and Sociology'?

Baehr states that Arendt 'loathed' social sciences and particularly sociology (Baehr 2010: 3). Arendt not only critiqued but chastised Mannheim for arguing against the autonomy of thought. Being schooled in existential philosophical thought she followed the writings from Parmenides, Plato and Spinoza to Heidegger. The search for the authentic, was the central philosophical question according to Heidegger of traditional philosophy. From Baehr's perspective this leads to an understanding of human beings not as 'terrestrial and transitory' beings. Baehr has argued that "The tradition" as she [Arendt] thought of it elevated the contemplative spirit but disparaged the realm of action. Even though several thinkers at the time in Germany were already engaging in their work with the premises of situation-boundedness of thought, certainly their status did not match that of existential philosophy. Max Weber, with whom Hannah Arendt certainly did not agree on several counts, also echoes the thinking of Arendt particularly in his appeal for 'value free sociology'. This explains the separation of knowledge and politics in contemporaneous German academic communities. Arendt's defense of Existenz Philosophy was centered on her view of sociology being reductionist in its approach. She believed in this tradition of philosophy, its unchangeable metaphysical nature which had to remain untouched by *Körperpolitik* (body politics). It is in this context Baehr states:

"..It craved peace and tranquility, distrusted the body and its passions, and oscillated between utopia and despair. Politics, from this standpoint, was secondary to the life of the mind, the bios theōrētikos; worse, the confounded noise of politics—its long, drawn-out, and inconclusive discussions; its haphazardness; its entrapment in sense perceptions; and hence its failure to conform rigorously to a template of the Good or the Rational—was essentially de-meaning.

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<sup>20</sup> This is also the time in the academic and intellectual world when the status of disciplines are at a different stage. The first half of the twentieth century became a defining period for the social sciences and likewise for sociology. Durkheim's attempt in the Rules of "Sociological Method" to establish sociology marks its beginnings. Durkheim's attempt to define the subject matter of sociology derived its intellectual and political resources from various sources.

More elevated was the soul, the quest for ultimate, disembodied Truth, and for refuge in heaven” (Baehr 2010: 7).

Baehr’s explanation of Arendt’s position certainly reveals the many sidedness of her arguments. One of these positions evokes the broader historical and intellectual landscape of Germany that possibly had an enormous influence on the ‘life of the mind’. This is not to separate the development of German thought and its interaction with the thought that historically developed in different geographical regions. Fritz Ringer has elaborated this situatedness in the intellectual biography of Max Weber and another work entitled ‘The decline of the German mandarins’, elaborating upon on the long duration historical and intellectual milieu of German thought (Ringer: 1969; 2004). This explanation at a broader level helps us to understand the context of the purpose of learning and education in German thought. A crucial educational revolution took place in Germany around 1800 which apparently transformed the research imperative. University faculty were expected to undertake original research. The students joining these universities would go on to follow similar paths. Ringer further argues that this radical transformation in the early nineteenth century accorded a significant position to the faculties of ‘philosophy- as against the professional faculties. This development primarily took place in Prussian Universities and in other German states.<sup>21</sup> The transformation was inspired by German Idealist Philosophy, neo-humanist aspirations for classical Greece and finally by the idea of Bildung - ‘education in the context of self-cultivation’ or what can be termed as the ‘life of the mind’. The ‘life of the mind’ was not about the everyday concerns of human lives. Her review of Mannheim’s work was written in this context which has been broadly discussed and with more clarification at different stages hereafter. Her review has to be read in the context of sociological thought, the German historical tradition and the discipline of philosophy.

Young-Bruehl also argues that Arendt’s passion for philosophy is apparent from her dissertation supervised by Karl Jaspers. The most striking feature of the dissertation is to understand her vision and longing for a sense of community-based on what Saint Augustine termed as

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<sup>21</sup> This development was much earlier than in France or England and also before the Industrial revolution took place.

‘neighborly love’. This resonates with the words of Jaspers in a letter in 1946 that: “Philosophy must become concrete and practical, without for a moment losing sight of its origin” (Jaspers cited by Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 4). For both Jaspers and Arendt, the desire to understand ‘neighborly love’ commences with the rise of national socialism in Germany (Young-Bruehl 2004[1982]). The concrete and practical had to be situated in the conception of ‘neighborly love’ of Saint Augustine (Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 4). Bruehl argues that after her doctoral dissertation Hannah Arendt departed from a conception of reason that is separated from the practical affairs of everyday life and its politics. This is not to say that from Arendt's perspective that the meaning of philosophy had changed. Now Arendt’s quest at the time was to enter the realm of ‘praxis’. In her case, there does not seem to be any point of convergence between these parallel forms of reasoning that determined her thinking at the time.

The question of thought and action in the realm of the public sphere came to the forefront of Arendt’s intellectual project. This is also to highlight her statelessness becoming the source of experience for the culmination of this thought and action. Arendt’s American citizenship left her with a precarious sense of identity but saved her the turmoil of being stateless, allowed her to become part of the life of the republic and to reside in a country which she admired above all others. Her American friends and interlocutors had a liberating effect but obviously, they lacked the deep sense of European culture and intellectual atmosphere that had shaped her life and work.

### **Du Bois, Ambedkar, Arendt: From Sociology of Knowledge to Sociology of Ideas**

This dissertation is based on the idea that the writings of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt intersected with some of the pressing concerns of pragmatism and how they responded to some of these fundamental concerns of pragmatism. Today social scientists argue that the history of the influences and interaction between pragmatism and social sciences has been a neglected field of research and exploration. This neglect is also a sociological one entangled with cultural and historical dimensions of society that in turn structure academic life. This dissertation would

partially attempt to connect certain dots to answer this ‘neglect’ by taking up special cases of the difference between pragmatism and social sciences. This emphasis shall be to understand how this influence and interaction of pragmatism and social sciences could be conceptualized.

It could be argued that Ambedkar, Du Bois and Arendt in the latter part of their lives were public intellectuals and in that role addressed a wide range of ideas. In the second half of the twentieth century, we observe similar examples from different parts of the world where both public intellectuals deployed theoretical and empirical knowledge to communicate with wider audiences. For example, the philosopher Robert Gooding-Williams argues that the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 was a unique moment in the history of political philosophy when seen against the backdrop of the political canon constituted by the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant. Gooding argues that modern political philosophy has many streams and that contractarian political theory mainly refers to the work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville and Kant. Gooding states that ‘*Souls* remained central to addressing the question “What kind of politics should African-Americans conduct to counter white supremacy?” (Du Bois cited by Gooding-Williams 2009: 28)

Peter Burke writes about the movement of ideas in relation to the movement of scholars. In any case, ideas do not remain static and they essentially find their path with the movement of those individuals, who passionately engage with the world of ideas and further develop their course of action (Burke 2000). This movement shall be observed in the context of Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois in a later chapter, essentially helping us to understand a wide spectrum of history and sociology of ideas. Burke’s writings on the distinctive role of exiles and expatriates in the history of knowledge allow them to perform particular/different kinds of intellectual roles/actions. In a similar manner, Randall Collins’s ‘Sociology of philosophies’ helps to develop an in-depth understanding of intellectual life within the larger rubric of sociology and history of ideas. Intellectual life is always constrained by limiting the focus on any particular theme and constant search for interlocutors often in the form of allies. Following the ‘interaction ritual chain’ Collins

states that a human mind as a thinking being constitutes one's personal history in a "chain of social encounters" (Collins 2009: 21).

## Chapter 4

### Pragmatism, Darwin and Social Sciences

#### **Introduction: Pragmatism and Social Sciences**

This chapter attempts to engage with the broader pragmatist framework shared by philosophers, sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists and social activists and intellectuals and their common understanding of the nature of human experience, the formation of self and the social phenomena.

Thus Blumer inaugurated:

symbolic interactionist” in an attempt to label philosophers, sociologists, and social psychologists sharing a pragmatist position regarding the nature of social phenomena (Blumer, 1937a, 171). His version of pragmatism locates empirical social reality in ongoing and always situated adjustive, codeterminative relationships among people acting in worlds of objects. Thus he readily acknowledged contributions of the philosophers George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, William James, and James Baldwin to the underlying principles of this perspective. He also appreciated greatly the more empirically grounded sociological portrayals of action presented by Charles H. Cooley, William I. Thomas, Robert Park, and Ellsworth Faris. He embraced their work because their analyses of society, social structure, and activity reflect the ways people attach meanings to things they encounter in the world as well as the way they construct acts mindful of these meanings (Blumer 2004: xi).

For a long time W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Boas did not receive attention and remained neglected in this broader spectrum of pragmatism (Posnock 1995; Lewis 2001; Kloppenborg 2004; Taylor 2004). The basic premises of the central pragmatist thesis is that the world is not essentially determinate but is open to multiple forms of determination. This led them to view society as a pluralistic universe of collective (not limited to collective conscious/ unconscious) action of



individuals. This collective is considered to be part of the structural construction of a society that determines and reorients collective action. The possibility of the formation of this collective is dependent on the form of participation, public reasoning, and deliberations that take place in any society. It is in this context of deliberations and public reasoning as the central features of democracy, Nancy Fraser has stated:

The idea of "the public sphere" in Habermas's sense is a conceptual resource that can help overcome such problems. It designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas's sense is also conceptually distinct from the official-economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory (Fraser 1990: 57).

Habermas would later emphasize public reasoning and deliberative approaches towards the communicative practices in the formation of the public sphere. This reasoning is based on the premise that individuals are expected to be engaged as equals in these deliberations. Thus public reasoning and deliberation raise significant questions about the moral framework that develops in the process of these scientific and political discussions and their implications (Habermas 1981[1991]).

### **Pragmatism, Darwin and *On the Origin of Species***

The discussions and deliberations that took place among the members of the 'The Metaphysical Club' following the publication of the *Origin of Species* emphasize the place of public

reasoning. It is in this context implications of the publication of Darwin's work, that Brucke Kuklick stated:

“After Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, philosophers asked: how can human freedom and our sense of the world's design be compatible with our status as biological entities? Early in the twentieth century academic thinkers wanted to know: if we are biological organisms, enmeshed in a causal universe, how can we come to have knowledge of this universe; how can the mind escape the limits set by causal mechanisms? By the second-half of the twentieth century, professional philosophers often assumed both that we were of the natural world and that knowledge demanded a transcendence of the natural. They then asked: how is knowledge possible? What are the alternatives to having knowledge?” (Kuklick 2001: 2)

Kuklick further argued:

“ The work of Charles Darwin dealt a body blow to the religious orientation of American speculative endeavor in the last third of the nineteenth century. The primacy of divinity schools in the scholarly world ended, and the explicit Christian thought that governed intellectual life all but disappeared” (Kuklick 2001: 53).

This discussion around Darwin's *Origin of Species* influenced the epistemological, theoretical and moral frameworks that the members of this club also known as 'pragmatists'. Scottish 'common sense' philosophy derived from the work of David Hume and John Locke had gained a foothold in institutions like Harvard and in the academic world at large until the period of civil war in America (Kuklick, 1977: 9). Thus, debates on Darwin and evolutionism became prominent for various intellectual and political projects among the members of the metaphysical club and later for John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Boas, Jane Addams and B.R. Ambedkar.

It is in this context of Darwinian influence Grace and Theodore de Laguna argued in their interview in the year 1910:

“No scientific hypothesis has ever exerted a more profound or far-reaching influence upon the thought of a period, than has the Darwinian theory of evolution upon that of the last half-century. Not only have the group of biological sciences been recreated, but there is scarcely one of the mental and social sciences that has not been in large degree revolutionized.” Peirce agreed, declaring in 1909 that the Origin had prompted “the greatest mental awakening since Newton and Leibniz” (Grace and Theodore de Laguna 1910: 117).

When Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein embarked on an intellectual revival of pragmatism they did not give significant attention to the philosophical and methodological approaches that had developed significantly once the classical pragmatist began engaging with the questions of biology and evolutionism (Pearce 2020: 4).

Most of the existing historical analysis informs us that classical pragmatism as a philosophical school of thought emerged in America and their thought particularly centred around the context of American democratic life. This point of view has its limits from the perspective and history and sociology of ideas. For example, Richard Rorty is considered a neo-pragmatist whose philosophical hero in his words is John Dewey. This is particularly problematic if the historical understanding of classical pragmatism is labelled under the ‘American’ banner. On the one hand though Rorty did not directly associate himself with the social sciences, though his philosophical and methodological work has significant implications for the philosophy of social sciences. Though a detailed context of this goes back to the period of the Vietnam War in America and the response of New Left particularly Herbert Marcuse on American intellectual thought at the time in developing a radical critique of the Vietnam wa (Baert 2004).

None of the pragmatists were considered within the framework of social sciences for a long time. But in the last two decades many philosophers of social sciences have contributed significantly by revisiting classical pragmatism and also neo-pragmatism (Baert, 2004). This is particularly significant in the present context from the perspective of history and philosophy of social

sciences. One of the central concerns is the thought of the classical pragmatists particularly John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, GH Mead, Jane Addams and B.R. Ambedkar.

Being tied to similar intellectual and political struggles, their approach towards knowledge and democratic theory had a crucial impact on the social sciences. This is not to say that their ideas completely overlapped or were similar. What becomes visible in their approach is the attempt to situate democratic theory at the centre of their quest for the development of philosophy. This attempt they labelled pragmatism. So, the question that followed then was how do we think about the project of democracy in modern societies? How do different philosophical and methodological frameworks help us reflect more deeply on the nature of democracy? (Seigfried 1999; Westbrook 2015; Singer 2018; Stroud 2017a). Not just Dewey but all these thinkers including Du Bois, G.H. Mead, Jane Addams and B.R. Ambedkar were committed to the project of democracy in their intellectual and political struggle. It is also possible to situate these thinkers in different geographical and political spaces thus generating an interconnectedness of their intellectual and political response to varieties of problems in the long twentieth century.

Pragmatism was never dominant, but it had a influential impact on liberal intellectuals and political circles, as well as academic philosophy and the social sciences. As Kloppenberg puts it “*Early twentieth-century pragmatists envisioned a modernist discourse of democratic deliberation in which communities of inquiry tested hypotheses in order to solve problems*” (Kloppenber, 1996:101). Boas’s anthropology also resonated with the philosophical and political vision of pragmatism (see also Kloppenberg 1986, West 1989, Ryan 1995). In addition to anthropology other domains of enquiry particularly in America were informed by pragmatism during this period.<sup>1</sup>

After the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the place of Scottish realism that was dominant in intellectual life of America in general declined (Kucklick 1977) . The reception of

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<sup>1</sup> This intersection included other thinkers like GH Mead and WEB Du Bois whose intellectual and political projects were part of the classical pragmatism pursuits, especially considering the fact that both Mead and Du Bois studied with James at Harvard during the same period and their contribution to the theories of self remain a foundational source of social theory in the twentieth century and also in the current times.

evolutionism and in particular the publication of *On the Origin of Species* had coincided with the rise and spread of pragmatism in America (ibid). Scottish common sense philosophy is not nearly as well known today as are more flashy nineteenth- century American philosophical movements like Transcendentalism, but “until the time of the Civil War, Scottish ideas were undisputed both at Harvard and in the academic world at large” (Kuklick 1977: 19).

Du Bois in an address in 1909 had emphasized the significance of Darwin’s writings for the wider understanding of human freedom and emancipation:

What the age of Darwin has done is to add to the eighteenth-century idea of individual worth the complementary idea of physical immortality of the human race. And this, far from annulling or contracting the idea of human freedom, rather emphasizes its necessity and eternal possibility – the boundlessness and endlessness of possible human achievement. Freedom has come to mean not individual caprice or aberration but social self-realization in an endless chain of selves, and freedom for such development is not the denial but the central assertion of the evolutionary theory. So, too, the doctrine of human equality passes through the fire of scientific inquiry not obliterated but transfigured; not equality of present attainment but equality of opportunity for unbounded future attainment is the rightful demand of mankind (Du Bois 1909).

In 1909, W.E.B. Du Bois delivered a speech “Evolution of the race problem” at the National Negro Conference” in New York. Du Bois raised the question whether the *Origin of Species* undermined the view “ that all are created free and equal”. And Du Bois argued that it did not undermine that “ that all are created free and equal” . He rejected the view of August Weismann and other evolutionists that there were inexorable differences between and “among men and races of men”. According to Du Bois “social self realization” was the central premise of social evolutionism. What becomes significant from the perspective of evolutionary theory is “not equality of present attainment but equality of opportunity for unbounded future attainment.” John Dewey too spoke at the conference on the same day and asserted that ““acquired characteristics are not inherited and thus do not contribute directly to evolutionary progress, all individuals can “have a full, fair and free social opportunity. Each generation biologically commences over

again.” “In other words,” he continued, “there is no ‘inferior race,’ and the members of a so-called race should each have the same opportunities as those of a more favored race” (Du Bois Cited by Pearce 2020: 1).

This reception of evolutionism and in particular Darwin’s writings remained a significant intellectual and ideational encounter for classical pragmatists and provided them a new normative, moral and epistemological framework to think about philosophical and scientific problems (Du Bois 1909; Dewey 1910). Though Dewey argued that Darwin’s writings address the questions that were prevalent in the sciences and philosophy, it did not emerge out of any contradictions with religion.

Thus Dewey argued:

No wonder, then, that the publication of Darwin’s book, a half century ago, precipitated a crisis. The true nature of the controversy is easily concealed from us, however, by the teleological clamor that attended it. The vivid and popular features of the anti-Darwinian row tended to leave the impression that the issue was between science on one side and theology on the other. Such was not the case—the issue lay primarily within science itself, as Darwin himself early recognized. The theological outcry he discounted from the start, hardly noticing it save as it bore upon the “feelings of his female relatives.” But for decades before final publication he contemplated the possibility of being put down by his scientific peers as a fool or as crazy; and he set, as the measure of his success, the degree in which he should affect three men of science: Lyell in geology, Hooker in botany, and Huxley in Zoology (Dewey 1910 [2007]: 2).

Religious considerations lent fervor to the controversy, but they did not provoke it. Intellectually, religious emotions are not creative but conservative. They attach themselves readily to the current view of the world and consecrate it. They steep and dye intellectual fabrics in the seething vat of emotions; they do not form their warp and woof. There is not, I think, an instance of any large idea about the world being independently by religion. Although the ideas that rose up like armed men against Darwinism owed their intensity to religious associations, their origin and meaning are to be sought in science and philosophy, not in religion (Dewey 1910 [2007: 2-3)

This recognition by Darwin that the source of his ideas come from science and philosophy and not religion are also evident in his public statement. This was written by Darwin in 1880:

“It seems to me (rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against Christianity and Theism hardly have any effect on the public; and that freedom of thought will best be promoted by that gradual enlightening of human understanding which follows the progress of science. I have therefore always avoided writing about religion and have confined myself to science” ( Darwin cited by Stephen Jay Gould 1977: 30)

The debates and controversies around evolution were one of the immediate causes behind philosophical and epistemological developments in American intellectual circles during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Academic philosophers earlier had thought to reconcile the question of science and religion by studying nature as part of God’s Design but the arrival of evolutionary ideas in American philosophical circles posed a challenge for cultural elites and those who were committed to the idea of Design and nothing else (Dewey 1910: 9-11). In Dewey’s own words Darwin’s fundamental insight was that humans were not a product of an act of Divine creation. These ideas challenged two thousand years of the philosophical understanding of human societies and the physical world (Dewey 1910: 11 ). Furthermore, it suggested that there was no discontinuity between nature and humans or nature and culture. It rejected the long established historical view prevalent among Christian theologians and dominant elites and substituted these by ideas of random mutation and natural selection. This rejection of long established views required the notion of democratic practices to be embedded in the process of scientific inquiry. The deliberations following controversies, debates and discussions paved the way for pragmatists to think of an experimental notion of truth and later democracy.

The chapter also swells on discussions concerning moral epistemology and normative frameworks in the writings of John Dewey and G.H. Mead with the discipline of anthropology and sociology in the early decades of the twentieth century. This is also evident in the writings of

W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Boas and B.R. Ambedkar. This offers a broader picture at the intersection of pragmatism and social sciences.

### **Pragmatism, Darwin and Social Sciences**

An overview of the writings within the broader domain of pragmatism (including of social scientists such as the anthropologist Franz Boas) along with historical exploration of pragmatism is significant to understand that some of the core ideas of these thinkers emerged from a dialogue between philosophy and biology (Pierce 1877 [2021]; Wright 1871, 1873; James 1975; 1976, 1982; Mead 1909; Du Bois 1909 Dewey 1910; Weiner 1972).

For example referring to evolutionary ideas and their situatedness in both social and natural sciences, Du Bois argued:

The implications of the African background are more social than biological. [Leo] Frobenius points out that the history of peoples and the history of civilization fall short of identity in the measure in which forms of civilization, more than peoples, are the creatures of their surroundings and of the home soil . . . I propose to show that certain African peoples have developed social organizations which compare favorably with those which we regard as the achievement of civilization; that they have developed towns and cities and states, markets and exchanges, a juridical system and a jury system, a method of tracing property descent and property rights, and art, and that these owe very little if anything to the influence of example of the so-called higher cultures . . . When we think of civilization we think of one single evolution of which different cultures are steps. There are many civilizations (Du Bois cited by Besek et al. 2021: 11).

Thus Du Bois argued from a humanistic and normative framework following the ideas of Darwin:

“so far as purely physical characteristics are concerned, the difference between men do not explain all the differences of their history. It declares, as [Charles] 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” (Du Bois 1996 [1897]:40).



These evolutionary ideas concerned with the trajectory of biological and historical formation of human societies and were prominent among the practitioners of pragmatism and in particular John Dewey. These ideas were crucial for Ambedkar who was located in the same institutional and philosophical framework. The exposure and engagement with evolutionary theories allowed Ambedkar to develop some of his early questions about the origins of caste. S S Stroud has argued:

“ We do not see Ambedkar making much of Dewey’s naturalism or his reading of humans as part of organic environments. Habit as a social psychological category is about as close as we get to Dewey the Darwinian naturalist, in Ambedkar’s appropriation. Perhaps Ambedkar was wary of talk of the “natural,” as this rubric was consciously or unconsciously applied to the caste hierarchy in the Hindu system he wished to undermine. Alternatively, he seemed to value religion much more than Dewey did, a factor most likely stemming from his immersion in the religiously pluralistic Indian environment, and one that leads him to a different sort of emphasis than the scientifically inflected pragmatism of Dewey’s work. This prominence granted to the category of religion uniquely colors Ambedkar’s form of willful, pluralistic pragmatism that he builds upon his engagement with Dewey’s thought. In any case, it should be clear that Ambedkar’s use of Dewey is not mechanical or unoriginal, and it should grant him entry into the pantheon of those we consider to be pragmatists (Stroud 2017a: 98).

But the standard philosophical strategy of most naturalisms is to find some way of showing that culture has influenced the nature of man’s thinking, thereby producing new and incommensurable and non-cognitive vocabularies. In this context, Dewey is regarded as both Hegelian and Darwinian. According to Hegelian historical theory, Dewey denies that the natural sciences investigate the essence of things, and, as a Darwinian, he is a naturalist who argued that the natural sciences are the best approach to uncovering the structure of reality.

Thus Rorty writes:

“ Dewey, it seems to me, is the one author usually classified as a ’naturalist’ who did not have this reductive attitude, despite his incessant talk about ’scientific method’. Dewey’s peculiar

achievement was to have remained sufficiently Hegelian not to think of natural science as having an inside track on the essences of things, while becoming sufficiently naturalistic to think of human beings in Darwinian terms” (Rorty 1979 [2009]: 362).

### **Spencer, Evolutionism and Spencerian Social Sciences**

The discussion of evolutionism had become a significant lens to think about and engage with the modern philosophical approaches for the first cohort of pragmatists: Charles Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910) and Chauncey Wright (1830-1875) (Pearce 2020).<sup>2</sup> The writings of Herbert Spencer were of great significance for them and at the same time they were considered to be among the fiercest critics of Spencer. Herbert Spencer has been considered to be one of the most widely read thinkers in the American intellectual landscape especially during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

Charles H. Cooley discussed Herbert Spencer at the University of Michigan, Research Club:

I imagine that nearly all of us who took up sociology between 1870, say, and 1890 did so at the instigation of Spencer. While he did not invent the word (though most of us had never heard it before), much less the idea, he gave new life to both, and seemed to show us an open road into those countries which as yet we had only vaguely yearned to explore. His book, *The Study of Sociology*, perhaps the most readable of all his works, had a large sale and probably did more to arouse interest in the subject than any other publication before or since. Whatever we may have occasion to charge against him, let us set down at once a large credit for effective propagation.

It is certain that nearly all of us fell away from him sooner or later and more or less completely. My own defection, I believe, was one of the earliest and most complete; and since the recoil has gone farther with me than with most others, it is not unlikely that I now fail to do him justice. However, my views, such as they are, have at least had ample time to mature, and I offer them

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Pearce, Trevor. *Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy*. University of Chicago Press, 2020, pg no. vii for the complete list of pragmatists divided in cohorts.

for what they may be worth (Cooley 1920: 130).<sup>3</sup>

The popular reception of Herbert Spencer and Spencian ideas (in particular concerning social darwinism) were also challenged in certain quarters. During the 'progressive era' (1896-1916) in America, Herbert Spencer was characterized as a conservative social darwinist that negatively impacted upon his reputation as a thinker (Cooley 1920). But this does not account for his extraordinary appeal among the "postbellum intellectuals" in America. Most of the thinkers and especially Spencian sociologists drew a line between the "The Study of Sociology" and the objectionable and unacceptable political and moral philosophical frameworks in "Social Statics" (Spencer 1892). This is not to say that Spencer's sociology was unrelated to his writings on social evolutionism. In his 1920 article entitled "Reflections Upon the Sociology of Herbert Spencer", Cooley argued that his volumes on *Principles of Sociology* did not offer anything new and was contiguous with his earlier writings starting from "Progress: Its laws and cause" published in 1857 and "First Principles" published in 1862. In a highly critical perspective, Cooley also pointed out that Spencian ideas were "unevolutionary" primarily when compared with ideas of Darwinian evolutionism. Cooley argued with regard to Spencer's sociology that it was " .biological-individualistic, the biology being of a type involving use-inheritance, and the individualism of a mechanical sort quite inadequate to embrace human personality" (Cooley 1920: 139).

Cooley was himself embedded in the intellectual trajectory of pragmatism and sociology and enjoyed the intellectual camaraderie of both Dewey and Mead. Cooley and then Mead had developed a communicative approach to understanding democracy in their writings. which were in line with "social order" and "social change" to engage in the process of action (Cooley 1964 [1902]; 1963 [1909], Mead 1925; 1964 [1930]; 1973, Schubert 2006). They were among the first sociological thinkers to situate the self in the realm of the social and came up with the idea of the "social self"-considered to be among the most prominent sociological concepts in the twentieth

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<sup>3</sup> The paper was read at a meeting of the Research Club of the University of Michigan, held to celebrate the centennial of Spencer's birth. It was later published by the American Journal of Sociology in 1920.

century (James 1890 [1983]; Du Bois 1903 [2007]; Mead 1934 [2015], 1964; Ambedkar 1942 [2004]; Schutz 1967; Rawls 1989; 2000; Lemert 1994; Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). These writings of Cooley and Mead have been considered to be foundational writings of “Pragmatic Sociology” (ibid).<sup>4</sup> Cooley believed that Spencer had little conception of both individuals as well the social order and thus of the relational understanding of both the individual and the social. Cooley juxtaposed the ideas of Spencer with those of Darwin and argued:

“...I think, that while the organic view of life implied in Darwinism is consistent with very great emphasis upon individuality, it also involves an increasing consciousness and self-direction in the process as a whole, irreconcilable with the drastic reduction of state functions advocated by Spencer. And I am not aware that the idea of a coming equilibrium of human relations, in the anticipation of which we can find a code of conduct, has any important following at the present time. It is felt to be untenable” (Cooley 1920: 141).

Cooley further stated:

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to highlight here particularly in the context of Ambedkar ( as a student) to follow the line of argument in the later part of this chapter. The course outline published on the Columbia University website is clearly indicative of the fact Ambedkar was introduced to the ideas of Charles Horton Cooley in the classes of sociologist Franklin Henry Giddings in the coursework titled “ Sociology s102 Principles of Inductive Sociology”. It is also possible to argue with certainty that both Cooley and Mead would have been discussed in Ambedkar’s paper with John Dewey. During this period Dewey, Mead and Cooley were engaging with the questions of social organizations, social order, the question of democracy and the question of social self as among their prominent endeavours. The official course catalogue by Columbia University highlighted the following description of the course offered by John Dewey:

“ Philosophy 231 Psychological Ethics & Moral & Political Philosophy:John Dewey: It will consist of an analysis of conduct and character from the standpoint of social psychology. The formation through the influence of the social environment of biological impulses and wants into moral affections, beliefs and judgments, together with the genesis of the self as an agent will be considered. Typical Ethical theories (as the Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Scholastic, Kantian, and Utilitarian) will be discussed so far as their psychological factors are concerned, the extra hours being given to this phase of the subject.”

Apart from this particular course Ambedkar had studied two other papers with John Dewey: “ Philosophy 131 Moral and Political Philosophy” and “ Philosophy 132 Moral and Political Philosophy”. It is also important to highlight here that the coursework catalogue is clearly indicative of the fact that Ambedkar was introduced to the idea of evolutionism across several coursework papers.

Please see: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html>

“ If I have seemed to depreciate him it is perhaps because Spencer set his claims so high that any attempt to estimate them almost inevitably takes the form of lowering his own mark. But, when all is said, he remains a man of extraordinary powers and vast influence upon the thought of his day, if not altogether the equal mate of Darwin that we once supposed him to be” (Cooley 1920: 145).

Even though many of Spencer’s essays opposed social reform, Spencerian sociologists continued to read him not as a social darwinist rather as a philosopher and as an architect of the new science of sociology even though it was not attached to any programme of action. Spencer’s writings had remained at the centre of major philosophical and political discussions among thinkers both in America and Europe at large.

Spencer’s justification of the moral and social order are now considered to belong to “Social Science as apologia” ( Brandmayr 2021).<sup>5</sup> Breslau writes:

The works of the American Spencerian sociologists, in calling for a harmonized social order that was more than unfettered competition but less than state coordination or socialism, an organized capitalism, supported what was becoming the new social order. But class interest does not account for their “evolutionary naturalism,” to which most of their work was devoted. This was not a vision for capitalist society but for sociology and its object of study. The sociologists were not primarily agents for a monopoly fraction of the capitalist class but had interests of their own in securing their cultural authority and a market for their research and teaching.....The social sciences faced special problems of legitimation, and their very presence in the new universities was by no means certain. They therefore imitated the established natural sciences in order to appear “scientific.” One way of doing this was to adopt research methods that had proven their utility in the natural sciences, such as statistics (Camic and Xie 1994). Another way of drawing on the natural sciences was through the transfer of conceptual systems as metaphors, for instance, the way that marginalist economics was invented by metaphorically applying the nineteenth-century physics of energy to the social world (Mirowski 1989). This type of borrowing is germane to the

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<sup>5</sup> Brandmayr, Federico. “Social Science as Apologia” *European Journal of Social Theory*, (February 2021).  
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431021990965>.

founders of sociology in the United States, who, following Herbert Spencer, argued that the analogy between society and a living organism justified applying to the former those modes of analysis developed in studying the latter. We might wonder whether sociology may have been to biology what neoclassical economics was to physics (Breslau 2007: 42).

These developments in the social sciences challenged those who were committed to an ethical and normative framework for wider democracy. Social scientists at the time followed the pluralist framework envisioned by pragmatism in order to engage with social realities and change them according to democratic principles. Pragmatism's pluralist framework and the changing nature of inquiry and truth led them to the view that essences were not fixed or we as human beings can proclaim to have no essence in the foundationalist sense. We find alternative or parallel perspectives of ourselves offered by poets, psychologists, archeologists. For the pragmatists the purpose is not only to arrive at results in the natural sciences but how to develop a humanist tradition and descriptive vocabularies to think about different periods, traditions and historical events. Pragmatism found it essential to engage with the social consequences of Darwin's evolutionary theory. What philosophical, historical, epistemological and moral questions did the *Origin of Species* raise – even if Darwin himself had not raised them. Philosophically, the pragmatists felt that Darwinian evolution provided a refutation of any kind of apriorism, while intuition and reason were the outcomes of evolutionary processes that were subsequently applied to the search for knowledge.

### **Pragmatism and Darwin: New Philosophical and Sociological Inferences**

There were a number of questions that occupied philosophers from Hegel to Comte to Dewey. In Dewey's words: "What is the meaning of the problem of knowledge? What is its meaning, not simply for reflective philosophy or in terms of epistemology itself, but what is its meaning in the historical movement of humanity" (Dewey 1897). The pragmatists had a sincere and deep engagement with the writings of Darwin and its repercussions on their approach to the social and political world. John Dewey published his book *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* in 1910, though this was not the first engagement of Dewey or of the pragmatists. Du Bois's understanding

of the world as well was not solely based on his disciplinary understanding of the philosophy and the social sciences but also included natural sciences. The most important question for Du Bois and Franz Boas was race. Race was to be understood not just in biological terms but had its social and historical dimensions as well.

Philip Kitcher has stated about Dewey's essays on Darwin:

In an important essay—the best philosophical account of Darwin's significance written in the century following the publication of the *Origin of Species*—Dewey characterized Darwin's achievement in methodological terms. The great pioneers of the seventeenth century, Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Boyle, Newton, and others, had developed methods for investigating physical phenomena (particularly aspects of motion). Darwin extended the scope of methods of disciplined inquiry, so as to embrace the living world. His accomplishment set the stage for a further step: to elaborate methods for inquiry in the human and moral sciences. The goal, as Dewey recognizes, is to make progress in these domains less chancy than it has hitherto been.

Anyone who reflects on the historical episodes motivating Dewey's emphasis on method should draw some obvious conclusions. First, the search for a method involves addressing three questions: Where does one begin inquiry? How does one conduct inquiry? and How does one end inquiry? Different questions are prominent in different cases. One of Darwin's major methodological advances consists in his recognition of questions worth asking. Second, the initial attempts to formulate methodological proposals are notoriously vague and incomplete. The various dicta of Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, and others are hard to reconcile with one another, but they serve as inspiration for investigations in which they are used selectively and given more definite shape. Out of those particular inquiries, and attention to the record of successes and failures, superior formulations of the original maxims emerge. More precise directives generate new research, and methods continue to be refined. The histories of the sciences testify to something specialists take as a truism, but which is not broadly appreciated: methodology doesn't descend from some a priori heaven but is built up, in stages, out of fallible human explorations (Kitcher 2021: 31-32)

For Dewey, Darwin's *Origin of Species* was a milestone in the development of natural sciences, the philosophical and methodological consequences of which had still to be explored. The focus

on the two terms Origin and Species had inaugurated ‘intellectual revolt’ against the philosophical approach to nature and knowledge at large. This new view of humans and their evolution would also influence the study of politics, religion and morality. Before the publication of the book *The influence of Darwin on philosophy and other essays in contemporary thought* Dewey had already delivered a lecture in Columbia in 1909 titled “Charles Darwin and His Influence on Science”. Dewey’s interpretation of the history of biological change was shared to a large extent by the classical pragmatists. This approach towards philosophy of science allowed them to critique the worldview centered around the notion of God, Religion and Racism (Gould 1992; 1996). It is interesting to note that as Gould stated:

“The most ardent materialists of the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels, were quick to recognize what Darwin had accomplished and to exploit its radical content. In 1869, Marx wrote to Engels about Darwin’s Origin: Although it is developed in the crude English style, this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view””(Gould 1992: 30)

Gould further stated:

“A common bit of folklore—that Marx offered to dedicate volume 2 of *Das Kapital* to Darwin (and that Darwin refused)—turns out to be false. But Marx and Darwin did correspond, and Marx held Darwin in very high regard. (I have seen Darwin’s copy of *Das Kapital* in his library at Down House. It is inscribed by Marx who calls himself a “sincere admirer” of Darwin. Its pages are uncut. Darwin was no devotee of the German language.)...

Darwin was, indeed, a gentle revolutionary. Not only did he delay his work for so long, but he also assiduously avoided any public statement about the philosophical implications of his theory (Gould 1977: 30-31)

Dewey’s movement towards Darwin within the broader project of philosophy of science is also to highlight the changing meaning of reality. This was also a phase, between the conflict of Darwin’s origin of species and eugenics, where the question of Who qualifies to be a human being was yet to be arrived at. Not only Dewey but the ‘The Metaphysical Club’ debated and discussed



Darwin's *Origin of Species* as well as Comte's positivism. The members of the club that included Peirce, Wright and James were deeply concerned with the advancement in the field of sciences and were concerned about the consequences of this development on the philosophical project.

Peirce wrote:

“ I do not know how promptly he [Cahuncey Wright] accepted the doctrine ‘Origin of Species,’ because from before its appearance until the following summer I was in a remote wilderness, and merely heard of the appearance of such a work that had created an immense sensation. I did not at all realize that the greatest mental awakening since Newton and Leibniz had begun” (Peirce 1909 [2014] : 387)

Pierce published two papers in the 1870s as the founding approach towards his quest to develop a new philosophical framework. The purpose is to understand their ideas in a dialogical form within a broader project that came to be identified as highlighting Peirce's shift from James's philosophical approach of pragmatism. In his first published paper “The Fixation of Belief” Pierce deals with several significant concepts of philosophy and truth being one among them (Peirce 1877[2021]). Pierce argued that post Cartesian epistemology made a significant development towards the realm of certainty although its treatment and conceptualization of certainty was a problematic one. Another point of departure from the existing theories of knowledge was concerned with their conceptualization of truth and order in the light of existing modes of thoughts and beliefs. Pierce thought of this conceptualization of truth as a misconception- and the focus should not be on ‘foundations, grounds or coherence’ of the existing systems of thought. The purpose should be to think of current beliefs as a form of beginning from where we begin to hope for the necessary epistemological and existential changes (ibid).

“Epistemology must begin in the middle, with what has been passed on to us, and it must devise tools for inquiry, so that we can bequeath to our successors something better than what we inherited (Kitcher , 2012: 332).” It is important to note here and develop a detailed outline of how the idea of ‘epistemology must begin in the middle....’ provided a significant framework to both James and Dewey for their “reconstruction in Philosophy”.

James's attempt to engage with these ideas of Pierce resulted in his thinking about the role of the philosopher, who is often seen as a 'prescriptive outsider' in the realm of traditional philosophy. James believed that the philosopher today is no longer a 'prescriptive outsider' but a significant insider, a participant. The role of this participant philosopher is to think of methods that can allow space for deliberation within a certain moral and ethical framework including moral deliberations. The question of scientific rationalism and objectivity is a deeply tied up question for classical pragmatism.

It is important to note that Du Bois was a "Jamesian organic intellectual and even arguments of many others have highlighted Du Bois's pragmatism lineage since his Harvard students days" (West 1989). A similar lineage is indicated in the case of the development of Ambedkar's philosophical and political approaches especially in reference to John Dewey. Arthur Lovejoy's thirteen versions of pragmatism highlight several differences, similarities and correspondences of ideas among pragmatists both in direct and indirect ways (Lovejoy 1908). Du Bois's early attempts to engage with questions of race relations following the lens of the "black women's" question further led to thinking about intersectionality as an important methodological tool in the research in social sciences.

Patricia Hill Collins has argued:

"Pragmatism and intersectionality potentially complement each other, in that each discourse speaks to gaps in the other. Pragmatism presents a provocative analysis of community that provides a useful framework for understanding the processes by which social structures are constructed, yet its neglect of power relations limits its own arguments. Intersectionality provides a distinctive analysis of social inequality, power, and politics, yet the relative newness of this field in the academy has produced provisional analyses of these themes. In all, in both discourses, using the pragmatist construct of community and infusing it with intersectionality's ideas about

social inequality, power, and politics might animate new avenues of investigation” ( Collins 2012: 444)

This intersectionality is central to the writings of both Du Bois and Ambedkar. The theme of intersectionality and pragmatism follow in the writings of Patricia Hill Collins and Cornel West attempting to reviving the canon of pragmatism.<sup>6</sup> This is reflected in their thinking about the wider view of democracy, essentially “social democracy” discussed in previous chapters. They formulated their ideas contextualising racism, slavery, casteism, emancipation of women, colonialism and imperialism. Following the thought of Du Bois and Ambedkar it is possible to engage with the question of intersectionality as a significant research method that remained central to their academic endeavours. Their early engagements with intersectional methods in terms of writings are visible throughout their writings.

In a 1909 piece Peirce argued that *On the Origin of Species* had contributed to the most significant mental and intellectual awakening since the writings of Newton and Leibniz.

Philosophers have often viewed pragmatism as an evolutionism based epistemological understanding of mind. Thomas Goudge has argued that classical pragmatists were the first set of philosophers who developed an understanding of the philosophy of mind (Goudge 1973). The pragmatists had accepted one of the crucial implications of Darwinian ideas that the function of

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<sup>6</sup> It is also important to note here that Patricia Hill Collins has provided a crucial critique of Pragmatism. She has argued that “ One distinguishing feature of classical American pragmatism is that it seemingly paid scant attention to race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, or nationality. Given the Progressive Era, a period of tremendous social unrest and a period during which classical pragmatism emerged, this omission is surprising. Instead, the themes of classical pragmatism, such as attention to democracy, science, enlightenment, fairness, and societal good, seem distanced from the contentious political debates of the day.....American pragmatism gained legitimacy primarily as a methodology or set of tools that one might use in studying particular social phenomena. As a result, social inequality, power, and politics were defined out of the center of American pragmatism. This does not mean that these entities were not present—they simply were not principle concerns. Social inequality, power, and politics are implicit throughout this discourse but are not core theoretical concerns. Pragmatism could uphold social justice projects, and its practitioners, as individuals, often became important figures within progressive causes. In essence, the discourse lacked a self-reflexivity on its own universalistic assumptions whose understandings of social phenomena were affected by its placement in the social inequalities, power relations, and politics of its inception” (Collins 2012: 444-445)

the mind is associated with behavioral aspects of the organisms in adapting to their environments. Their [classical pragmatism] initial understanding was that the mind could not be considered any longer as a spiritual terrain which exists on its own or possessing a transhistorical, sacred and immutable nature but is embedded in a cultural and social milieu. It was not possible for them to think of mind as something that existed on its own inside the human body.

As Peirce wrote:

“Modern philosophy has never been able quite to shake off the Cartesian idea of the mind as something that "resides"- such is the term-in the pineal gland. Everybody laughs at this nowadays, and yet everybody continues to think of mind in this same general way, as something within this person or that, belonging to him and correlative to the real world. A whole course of lectures would be required to expose this error” ( Peirce cited by Thomas Goudge 1973: 135).

### **New Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives: Radical Critique of Race, Caste and Religion**

The recognition of the mind’s social and cultural milieu plays a central role in the writings of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. This debate on evolution also became crucial for Franz Boas’ radical interpretation at Columbia University. Henry Lewis has argued that the thoughts of Franz Boas have crucial similarities with the thoughts of pragmatist thinkers especially William James, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Though it is important to point out here that Boas and Du Bois remained intellectual collaborators through their s intellectual and political engagements, and especially on the question of race in determining the historical world order. The main aspect which Lewis has pointed out is that of evolutionism that had become crucial in an age when anthropology was struggling to acquire scientific status (Lewis 2001). It was Franz Boas who developed anthropology’s scientific approach to the study of human culture and behaviour. The worldview of Boas is mirrored in the works of pragmatists like William James, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and G.H. Mead. These developments in American Intellectual life occurred

against the backdrop of debates between the Calvinists and those supporting Darwinian ideas of evolution.

As Bruce Kuklick writes:

The more or less conservative Calvinist theology of the divinity schools was slowly transformed during the nineteenth century. The new ideas in the life sciences, and surely the publications of Charles Darwin, negatively affected traditional Christian certainties. Science questioned a literal understanding of Genesis's tale of creation and of the origin of humanity. Educated Americans were reconfiguring their Christian views. The growth of graduate study outside the schools of theology signaled the secularization of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Yet the decline of creedal conviction must not be overstated. Scholars had worried about Genesis long before Darwin and had "figurative" interpretations of the Bible available. Beliefs were given up gradually. Various strategies combated the corrosive impact of nineteenth-century thought. A massive commitment to Christianity remained intact (Kuklick 1996: 21)

Herbert Lewis has pointed out the centrality of Darwin's writings particularly *Origin of Species* for both William James and John Dewey. How both translate Darwin's ideas into the realm of the social and political. Lewis also highlights Boas approach to the philosophy of science and then towards human nature, culture and anthropology within the larger rubric of human experience. The intellectual and philosophical component of Boas's thought was similar in many ways to the American philosophers of his time which includes philosophers like William James, John Dewey and Georg Herbert Mead (Lewis 2001). It was not only the influence of Darwin's thought but in the German intellectual thought of the time. Being from Germany Boas had studied and later migrated to America and was influenced by American thinkers and philosophers like William James, George Herbert Mead, G. Stanley Hall, Josiah Royce, W.E.B Du Bois and others. These influences came from philosophy and the different branches of the newly emerging social sciences.

Herbert Lewis states that:

“ Boas and his American counterparts were exposed to the powerful German historicist tradition derived from Johann Gottfried von Herder and Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt (Iggers 1983, Bunzl 1996), to the revival of the thought of Immanuel Kant by the so-called Neo-Kantians (among them Kuno Fischer, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, and Wilhelm Dilthey), and to developments in academic psychology led by Hermann von Helmholtz, Gustav Fechner, and Wilhelm Wundt. The Americans and Boas brought these ideas back to Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Clark, Chicago, Columbia, Michigan, and Berkeley” (Lewis 2001: 384)

Lewis further writes:

The convergence of Boas’s thought with that of the leading pragmatists may help account for the rapid acceptance of his work in America. As Carl Resek remarks in his biography of Lewis Henry Morgan, “In almost every field of learning, pragmatism effected a turn from all rigid systems and social laws that presumed to reflect reality. It replaced certainty with probability, causality with choice” (1960:156).<sup>10</sup> It was Boas, of course, who led the movement away from social evolutionism and toward a new view of cultures and their histories. A discussion of the major premises of the pragmatist *Weltanschauung* will help to elucidate Boas’s anthropology. This is not merely of antiquarian interest, however: the outlook of the pragmatists and Boas shares some important elements—although only some—with postmodernist thinking as well (Lewis 2001: 384)

Boas' earlier life and training in German academia remained central even after his arrival in America and then in particular establishing the anthropology department at Columbia university. His writings on *Anthropology and Modern Life* argued for a modern scientific anthropology and explorations in the field of race studies (Boas 2014). Boas’ students like Alexander Goldenweiser, Robert H. Lowie, Paul Radin, and Alexander Lesser were influenced directly by pragmatist thought and particularly by John Dewey himself. B.R. Ambedkar became part of this philosophical and intellectual milieu and operated within this framework of philosophical anthropology. The next three decades of his life under British colonial rule were significantly influenced by the very lessons learnt at Columbia University from teachers like John Dewey and

Alexander Goldenweiser. Ambedkar too recognised the significant influence of Darwin's thought primarily in the realm of critique of long-standing theological and religious opposition to opposition to the social and political emancipation of the human mind (Stroud 2017a).

Boas and Dewey gave primacy to the realm of 'experience' and how the context of 'experience' has been considered in the realm of the western intellectual thought at the time. From a broader perspective this epoch in western (American-European thought) academia was devote to developing a philosophical and methodological critique of positivism. This radical criticism of and shift from positivism were integral parts of the project of both American anthropology and philosophy of pragmatism. Lewis points out that Columbia University had organized a lecture entitled 'Charles Darwin and his influence on science' in 1909, and Dewey and Boas delivered lectures in the series. Dewey delivered the lecture entitled 'Darwinism and Modern Philosophy' and Boas spoke on 'The Relation of Darwin to Anthropology'. Dewey published his book *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought* the year after'. Boas' lecture remains unpublished and he never published a separate work on Darwin but wrote on the influence of Darwin on his anthropology (Lewis 2001). Boas finished the speech with the following words: "I hope I may have succeeded in presenting to you, however imperfectly, the currents of thought due to the work of the immortal Darwin which have helped to make anthropology what it is at the present time." (Boas cited by Lewis 2001: 387)

Chairez-Garza has argued how Franz Boas' ideas of race and culture influenced Ambedkar via his anthropology teacher Alexander Goldenweiser. Goldenweiser was one of the prominent students of Franz Boas. Following the broader tenets of Boasian anthropology, Ambedkar problematized the question of caste and condemned the practice of untouchability.

Chairez-Garza writes:

"Ambedkar was a student at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916. His main area of study was economics, but he did not limit himself to this discipline. His student records show that he also took courses in sociology, politics, philosophy, history and even two courses in anthropology that

lasted a full academic year. From 1915 to 1916, he attended the courses, ‘General Ethnology: Primitive Man and Physical Environment’ and ‘General Ethnology: Primitive Religion, Mythology and Social Organisation’, led by Alexander Goldenweiser. It is here that we can establish a connection between Ambedkar and Boas because Goldenweiser was one of Boas’ first generation of students. After working at Columbia under Boas, Goldenweiser left to establish the anthropology department at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. There he taught prominent figures of modern anthropology such as Ruth Benedict and Leslie White who, like Ambedkar, questioned the importance of racial theories throughout their work. Goldenweiser’s life work focused on Native Americans, particularly on the Iroquois tribe, and he wrote extensively on issues regarding anthropological methods. His writings reflected a great many of the ideas of his mentor, Franz Boas” (Garza 2018: 3).

“...Ambedkar rejected the idea that the identity and place in society of untouchables were determined by their supposed racial inferiority. Instead, he emphasised the importance of culture, which, in Boas’ vision, included the environment, psychology and language, elements that were key in the construction of identities and societies. Ambedkar adopted this mode of thinking to argue that untouchability was not fixed or hereditary, but was a cultural problem that could be fought and eradicated” (Garza 2018: 1-2).

Boas’ writings and in particular his work *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) affected a paradigmatic shifts by challenging “ racial typologies of the day that attributed fixed mental and physical characteristics to specific races” (Garza 2018: 4). Boas argued for the idea of multiple cultures and how these cultures have historically and culturally been located in particular circumstances (Boas 1944) . He [Boas] engaged with “history, culture and psychology in human life to broaden our understanding of “ material, social and symbolic realms of life” (Garza 2018: 4) .

Like Boas and Goldenweiser, Ambedkar considered Evolutionist and Eugenic theories to be completely irrational. Even though he did not deign to explore them in great detail in his writings, they remained in the background of his anthropological and political thinking while discussing



the question of caste, race and untouchability (Garza 2018). Ambedkar writes: “Without stopping to criticize those theories that explain the caste system as a natural phenomenon occurring in obedience to the law of disintegration, as explained by Herbert Spencer in his formula of evolution, or as natural as ‘the structural differentiation within an organism’, to employ the phraseology of orthodox apologists; or as an early attempt to test the laws of eugenics — as all belonging to the same class of fallacy which regards the caste system as inevitable, or as being consciously imposed in anticipation of these laws on a humble population, I will now lay before you my own view on the subject” (Ambedkar 1917 [1979/2014]: 17).

For Ambedkar, two revolutions were central to the reconstruction of human society especially through the critique and dismantling of the theological order. Ambedkar argued that the Copernican revolution had freed astronomy from the domination of the religious order. And then the Darwinian revolution had freed biology and geology and the broader domain of philosophy from the impediment of religion. At the same time, he also believed that both the field of medicine and psychology were yet to free themselves from the trammels of religion and theological order.

Ambedkar argued:

Students of History are familiar with one Religious Revolution. That Revolution was concerned with the sphere of Religion and the extent of its authority. There was a time when Religion had covered the whole field of human knowledge and claimed infallibility for what it taught. It covered astronomy and taught a theory of the universe according to which the earth is at rest in the centre of the universe, while the sun, moon, planets and system of fixed stars revolve round it each in its own sphere. It included biology and geology and propounded the view that the growth of life on the earth had been created all at once and had contained from the time of creation onwards, all the heavenly bodies that it now contains and all kinds of animals of plants. It claimed medicine to be its province and taught that disease was either a divine visitation as punishment for sin or it was the work of demons and that it could be cured by the intervention of saints, either in person or through their holy relics; or by prayers or pilgrimages; or (when due to demons) by exorcism and by treatment which the demons (and the patient) found disgusting. It also claimed physiology and

psychology to be its domain and taught that the body and soul were two distinct substances (Ambedkar [1987/2014]: 8-9).

Ambedkar was cognisant of the histories of South Asia and western societies' and their dark ages where the theological and religious structure had completely denied human agency. In this process theological doctrines went on to play the most crucial role. From Ambedkar's perspective both these revolutions i.e. the Copernican revolution and Darwin's *Origin of Species* had completely dismantled the deep entanglements of religion in the societal order. In fact in Ambedkar's analysis theological order resonates with societal norms and values. Ambedkar brought in the key progressivist ideas of the first half of the twentieth century.

Ambedkar's own religious quest is central to his understanding of the movement of history including the present age of modernity. He was preoccupied with the origin and history of religion, and the consequences of the ideas in the *Origin of Species*. Ambedkar thought possibly resonated with Dewey's when the latter argued that Darwin's *Origin of Species* was a milestone in the dissolution of the old ways of thinking. As a result of which new methods, approaches, problems and intentions were beginning to take shape in the broader domain of the philosophy of change.

Richard Rorty argued that pragmatism too emerged as a response to a traditional philosophical understanding of the world (Rorty 1979; 1999). For Dewey the significance of the old ways of thinking lies in their paving the path for the formation of new ways of thinking. Old will survive only through the formation of new knowledge. In the absence of a new approach, or ways and modes of thinking, the old will essentially lose its salience. From a philosophical perspective, Dewey's idea appears to be convincing but from an anthropological and sociological perspective there is a complete separation of new ways of thinking from the old ones. The old historical and cultural structures continue to determine the everyday life of modern societies. For Dewey it remained a quest to understand this new mode of thinking and primarily its concern with knowledge. One of the crucial concerns was to understand the changing nature of both philosophy and sciences as well their entanglement and separation during this period. It is in this background

it is possible to argue that Dewey viewed Darwin's ideas in order to distinguish between the old and the new (Dewey 1910 [2007]). The Darwinian revolution was one in a series of scientific revolutions that were a complete break with the traditional modes of thought. As Gramsci would put it during the same period: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci 1930 [1971]). There is an ambiguity with regard to the idea of scientific revolution as a break with the past. Some of them, while recognizing the importance of scientific revolution, concurrently entertained a gradualist theory of knowledge.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the social sciences were concerned with sociological and anthropological roots of ideas including philosophical ideas. These anthropological and sociological concerns were evident in the writings of Du Bois and Ambedkar. This is not to say that the absence of anthropological and sociological considerations were marginal in Dewey's reflections on knowledge. During the second decade of the twentieth century we began to observe a political turn in the writings of John Dewey and was probably stimulated by the first world war. This war compelled thinkers across geographical regions to reconsider their philosophical and political presuppositions. Not only Dewey but several thinkers and social theorists during this period faced the crisis. This included Du Bois, Emile Durkehim, Max Weber and Georg Simmel among others. The outcomes of these reflections were quite distinct; Du Bois's response was completely different from other scholars, for he saw the first world war as a struggle for the continuation of the white race to continue their suppression of other races whom they considered as lower races (Williams 2010, 2018a, 2018b).<sup>7</sup>

Scholars, thinkers and also their students in America at the time encountered evolutionism in their scholarly journey. The first generation pragmatists were not only influenced by Darwinian ideas but drew on evolutionary concepts to develop their philosophical positions. The impact of the Darwinian revolution that for the first and second generation pragmatists, was the recognition that the old conceptual order had made way for a new one. Dewey believed Darwinian ideas to have

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<sup>7</sup> The question of the first world war and social reconstruction of society has also been discussed with regard to Bertnard Russel and Ambedkar in the third chapter.

changed two thousand years of philosophy and completely transformed the way we conceive this world in our philosophical and scientific imagination (Dewey 1910).

By 1898 Dewey had started to think of biological variation in the evolutionary process as experimentation ( Pearce 2020: 250). Pragmatism also viewed evolutionary ideas to be based on the experimental method. William James too entertained the idea for in his review of the book *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* he quotes Darwin: "... man selects varying individuals, sows their seeds, and again selects their varying offspring. . . . [He], therefore, may be said to have been trying an experiment on a gigantic scale; and it is an experiment which nature during the long lapse of time has incessantly tried" (ibid).

Dewey had opened up the discussion on Darwin's writings by arguing that the publication of the book *Origins of Species* was not only a paradigm shift only in the natural sciences. He believed that the development of evolutionary theory and particularly the writings of Darwin had been overlooked by experts. The combination of the words "origins" and "species" triggered an intellectual revolt against some of the central conceptions of philosophy. According to Dewey, during this long period philosophy was founded on the idea of being "fixed" and "final". Following this notion, "change and origin are signs of deficiency and unreality".

As Dewey wrote:

" In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, the 'origin of species' introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion" (Dewey 1910: 1-2)

### **From Social Experimentation to Social Democracy**

This new logic of morals, politics and religion allowed progress to be viewed as central to evolutionary and experimental methods of social scientists in the social reform tradition. It is this

tradition which John Dewey, G.H. Mead, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams had joined in the 1890s. Ambedkar became part of this tradition during the second decade of the twentieth century and significantly transformed this tradition in the next three decades. It has been argued that there already existed a long history of experimental methods in the political domain (Pearce 2020). Peirce had cited John Adams in his 1889 entry for experimenting with the ‘century dictionary’<sup>8</sup>. Adams wrote in 1787:

“The systems of legislators are experiments made on human life and manners, society and government. Zoroaster, Confucius, Mithras, Odin, Thor, Mahomet, Lycurgus, Solon, Romulus, and a thousand others, may be compared to philosophers making experiments on the elements. Unhappily a political experiment cannot be made in a laboratory, nor determined in a few hours” (Adams 1787: xxiv).<sup>9</sup>

Pierce too elaborated upon the method of experimentation in philosophy: “The laboratory life did not prevent the writer (who here and in what follows simply exemplifies the experimentalist type) from becoming interested in methods of thinking; and when he came to read metaphysics, although much of it seemed to him loosely reasoned and determined by accidental prepossessions, yet in the writing of some philosophers, especially Kant, Berkeley, and Spinoza, he sometimes came upon strains of thought that recalled the ways of thinking of the laboratory, so that he felt he might trust to them; all of which has been true of other laboratory-men” (Peirce 1905: 161-181).

In other words, Peirce was arguing that the ways of thinking of the laboratory had permeated the works of philosophers even in the eighteenth century and that there were philosophical precedents to his philosophical proposal.

During his classes at the University of Michigan in 1892-93, Dewey told his students that he preferred “experimenting in legislation” and that we should “experiment differently in separate states and note the results” (Dewey Cited by Pearce 2020: 251).

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<sup>8</sup> The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedic Lexicon of the English Language, 6 vols. (New York: Century, 1889–91), 2:2079, s.v. “experiment.”

<sup>9</sup> John Adams, A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, 2 vols. (London: C. Dilly and John Stockdale, 1787).

Du Bois learnt a similar lesson from his economics professor Gustav Schmoller in Berlin. Schmoller defined the experiment during a seminar in 1893-94 as follows: “... the power to alter at will the factors in a problem and so to measure them”. He also argued that “experiment tho[ugh] harder in G[eistige] [i.e., Social or Mental] Sc[iences], is still not impossible—viz.: in history and government” (Pearce 2020: 251).

Peirce had also referred to the writings of the economist William Stanley Jevons in his dictionary entry. Jevons in his book “Methods of Social Reform” argued that experimentation was the only route to social progress. Jevons believed social reform to be essentially experimental: “I maintain that, in large classes of legislative affairs, there is really nothing to prevent our making direct experiments upon the living social organism. Not only is social experimentation a possible thing, but it is . . . the universal mode of social progress. It would hardly be too much to say that social progress is social experimentation, and social experimentation is social progress” (Jevons 1883: 256). The logic of social experimentation in any social democratic setting gives the opportunity to engage with the public sphere in order to overcome possible mistakes.

Du Bois and Ambedkar thought of experimentation as necessary in the social and political life of society. But the method of experimentation was not enough in itself. The experimenters in the social world should not be limited by the question of what would happen. But rather what ought to happen? Du Bois mentioned in his autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*, that any critical progressive change requires more than just empirical evidence and rational behavior. Du Bois wrote:

It needs carefully planned scientific propaganda; the vision of a world of intelligent men [and women] with sufficient income to live decently and with the will to build a beautiful world. It will not be easy to accomplish all this, but the quickest way to bring the reason of the world face to face with this major problem of human progress is to listen to the complaint of those human beings today who are suffering most from white attitudes, from white habits, from the conscious and unconscious wrongs which white folk are today inflicting on their victims. The colored world therefore must be seen as existing not simply for itself but as a group whose insistent cry may yet

become the warning which awakens the world to its truer self and its wider destiny (Du Bois 1940 [2007]: 87).

Du Bois's understanding of progressive social change is reflective of the argument made in this chapter that pragmatists did not engage with the questions of evolutionism and the writings of Darwin in a passive manner but rather transformed these questions into a normative and moral framework. For Ambedkar the application of the method of experimentation especially is to determine the essence of democracy, where people both in their individual and collective life learn the lessons of sociality. The reciprocal relationship between the individual and the collective or society is such that one cannot exist without the other. For Ambedkar, the encounter with the debates on evolutionism and the writings of Darwin were crucial from the perspective of religion. Ambedkar seems to be more concerned with the question of religion when compared with other pragmatist thinkers of his generation. This is related to his serious interrogation of the caste system in Hinduism, which was the central defining feature of one's life from birth. Furthermore, given the diverse history of the Indian subcontinent characterized by a multiplicity of different religions, Ambedkar felt that religion was a crucial social force in the life of a society.

Ambedkar writes:

“ Darwinism was such a severe blow that the authority of theology was shattered all over to such an extent that it never afterwards made any serious effort to regain its lost empire. It is quite natural that this disruption of the Empire of Religion should be treated as a great Revolution. It is the result of the warfare which science waged against theology for 400 years, in which many pitched battles were fought between the two and the excitement caused by them was so great that nobody could fail to be impressed by the revolution that was blazing on... There is no doubt that this religious revolution has been a great blessing. It has established freedom of thought. It has enabled society “to assume control of itself, making its own the world it once shared with superstition, facing undaunted the things of its former fears, and so carving out for itself, from the realm of mystery in which it lies, a sphere of unhampered action and a field of independent thought”. The process of secularisation is not only welcomed by scientists for making civilization—as distinguished from culture—possible, even Religious men and women have come

to feel that much of what theology taught was unnecessary and a mere hindrance to the religious life and that this chopping of its wild growth was a welcome process” (Ambedkar [1987/2014]: 9)

**Conclusion:**

It is possible to conclude by arguing that the debates on evolution and in particular the ideas and writings of Darwin were central to philosophical thinking including pragmatism at the turn of the twentieth century. From Peirce to James to Dewey pragmatists developed their understanding based on the debates around evolutionism and Darwin’s writings. And then Mead, Du Bois, Boas, Addams and Ambedkar found these ideas on evolutionism and Darwin’s thought crucial for their philosophical and political projects. These philosophical and political projects made *sui generis* contributions to the social sciences and the fight against the racial and caste based cultural and historical understanding prevalent across societies. Thus the implications of this thinking are observed across widespread discussions in psychology, anthropology, social theory, political theory, humanities and interdisciplinary disciplines like sociobiology.



## Chapter 5

### Towards Historical Reflexivity: Reading History and Social Theory

#### **Introduction: History and Social Theory**

The philosophical and methodological developments of the twentieth century were not merely the outcome of social scientist's quest for objective knowledge but were influenced by new social movements which went beyond academic settings and networks (Smith and Pagnucco 1997; Kaldor 2003; Alexander 2006; Müller 2011; Bob 2012; Castells 2015; Tognato 2020). This is not to say there existed/exists a complete demarcation between the site of social movements and academic spaces. These spaces of academic and social movements have been connected through the twentieth century.

Alexander writes:

Public opinion articulates the cultural structure of civil society, defining democratic and antidemocratic opinions, publics, representative figures, and regulative institutions. Such binary structuring marks the history of political thinking about the role that public opinion can play. Theorists ambivalent about democracy have conceived the public's opinion in both ways, as gullible and easily swayed, irrational and emotional, and as constituting the potential for tyranny, even as, at the same time, they have found inside public opinion a deep reflection of the rationality, individuality, and independence that marks democratic life (Alexander 2006: 72).

These transnational social and political movements that were part of the new social movements that led scholars, social activists and civil society to collectively think of meaningful ways to reconstruct social life (Habermas 1979). These transnational movements and processes have alerted sociologists to their own philosophical and methodological approaches. The concerns of enslavement, racism, capitalism, labour movements, authoritarian regimes have developed into a

complex web of research concerns with new questions that have come to the forefront in the last few decades within the domain of social sciences (McKee 1993; Morris 2007a, 2007b). Thus, this chapter is centred around the writings and thoughts of both Du Bois and Ambedkar. How did they engage with history and historicism as powerful frameworks for understanding modern societies? Their writings provide critical engagement with historical frameworks that were prominent at the turn of the twentieth century. Their writings continued in the political and normative framework that had emerged initially with the American and French revolutions and more crucially were framed by the narratives of emancipation that were prominent in the struggle against slavery in Haiti.

Peter Wagner writes:

....the social sciences are an intellectual response to the post-revolutionary aporias of political philosophy after the American and French Revolutions. The development of basic conceptual approaches of social theory as well as the emergence of an empirical research strategy in the social sciences- as contrasted to the tradition of normative political philosophy-are means to provide arguments for the form and substance of socio-political orders after the revolutions had initially appeared as melting all that was solid into air. Thus, the history of social sciences is a history of dealing with a number of key problématiques stemming largely from the onset of political modernity. These problématiques have certainly not been solved, but they have also not been abandoned either (Wagner 2001: 2).

This engagement with the writings of Du Bois and Ambedkar on the one hand and Arendt on the other is to engage with problématiques that are yet to receive significant attention in the history of philosophy of social sciences. The engagement with history as part of sociological analysis remained at the forefront during the long formative period of classical sociological theory. The formative period of ‘classical sociological theory’ remained deeply engaged with the historical understanding of human societies. This engagement with history has been reflected upon in great detail by Rober Bellah in his article entitled “Durkheim and History” (Bellah 1959).

Perhaps, it is true, the busy sociologist will find this procedure uselessly complicated. In order to understand the social phenomena of today . . . , isn't it enough to observe them as they are given in

our actual experience and isn't it a work of vain erudition to undertake research into their most distant origins? But this quick method is full of illusions. One doesn't know social reality if one only sees it from outside and if one ignores the substructure. In order to know how it is, it is necessary to know how it has come to be, that is, to have followed in history the manner in which it has been progressively formed. In order to be able to say with any chance of success what the society of tomorrow will be., it is indispensable to have studied the social forms of the most distant past. In order to understand the present it is necessary to go outside of it (Durkheim cited by Robert Bellah 1959: 450)

Bellah further argues that historical understanding is important to engage with the present but it is also important for the sociological method (Bellah 1959). It is possible to argue in the contemporary state of affairs that history continues to remain a significant framework that allow social theorists not only to engage with social realities but also the history of social sciences. As a result, social theory in the twentieth century has a philosophical and methodological understanding of classical sociological theory as well as the social sciences at large (Wagner 2001; Lemert 2015; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). In their recent text “Colonialism and Modern Social Theory”, Gurminder Bhambra and John Holmwood point out that: “Modern social theory is a product of the very history it seeks to interpret and explain” (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021: 1).

They further write: “Although some have presented theoretical concepts as standing outside history, and, as such, as universal foundations for any understanding, this view is now significantly discredited by post-positivist philosophies of science. Theorising, like other human activities, is historically located and subject to change. It reflects the social circumstances, including the social relations in which it is produced. Knowledge, where it is the product of privileged knowers, involves the exclusion of other knowers and marginalises their knowledge. These, then, exist as either alternative knowledges or oppositional, subaltern knowledges, outside the categories of what is presented as the mainstream” (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021: 1).

The aforementioned arguments suggest that the reconstruction of social theory recognizes the importance of diversification within the community of social scientists as well as the silence of history on certain aspects of sociological thought. It is not possible to develop a coherent understanding without expanding the range of knowers within the community of practitioners of knowledge. The domain of social theory of knowledge recognizes the knower from the knowledge produced, but it seeks to expand the community of knowers to produce more robust knowledge.

### **Du Bois and Ambedkar: The Entanglement of History and Biography**

Du Bois and Ambedkar had suffered discrimination following the long history of racism and casteism. Following the broader tenet of pragmatism, they began placing human experience at the forefront of the projects of the social sciences. Following the ideas inherent in the *Sociological Imagination* of C Wright Mills, it is possible to argue that in the case of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt the framework of ‘biography and history’ is relevant to their approach to knowledge.

Mills stated:

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst.....No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

- (1) What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?
- (2) Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole?

How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?

(3) What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining? (Mills 1959 [2000]:6 -7)

The concern with biography and history in the writings of both Ambedkar and Du Bois were significant from the perspective of the critique of modernity. Du Bois engaged with American history since his early academic and intellectual life. He contributed significantly to the history of the African-American community from a pragmatist perspective. James had already left a mark on Du Bois' thought so much as the latter considered himself to be "a devoted follower of James at the time he was developing his pragmatic philosophy" (Campbell 1992: 569).

### **Du Bois at Harvard: Engagement with Historicism and Social Theory**

Campbell writes—" Du Bois maintains that it was James who, together with Albert Bushnell Hart, turned him "back from the lovely but sterile land of philosophic speculation, to the social sciences as the field for gathering and interpreting that body of fact which would apply to my program for the Negro" (A 148). In addition to these intellectual influences, Du Bois reports frequent personal contacts with James outside the academic setting, including being "repeatedly a guest in the home of William James. . ." (Campbell 1992: 569-570).

Kloppenburg too emphasized this aspect of the intellectual trajectory of Du Bois: "Du Bois credited James with turning him away from "the sterilities of scholastic philosophy to realist pragmatism" and the historian Albert Bushnell Hart for saving him from "the lovely but sterile land of philosophic speculation" and turning him toward "the social sciences as the field for

gathering and interpreting that body of fact which would apply to program for the Negro (Du Bois 1968: 131 cited by Kloppenberg 2004: 205)".

He completed the course on 'Psychology and Ethics' with James. Both William James and Albert Bushnell Hart influenced Du Bois's decision to enter the social sciences and move away from scholastic philosophical approaches. After completing a PhD on "the suppression of the African slave trade", Du Bois studied the period of reconstruction and race in America at the turn of the twentieth century. The period starting from the civil war to the passing for civil rights in 1964 has been considered to be significant as Bhambra writes:

The US Civil War, which began in 1861, did not have emancipation as one of its aims. However, emancipation of enslaved African Americans was one of its outcomes. Not least, as many African Americans seized 'the opportunity presented by the war to escape slavery' (Foner, 2005: 44). Mass, collective self-emancipation forced the hand of the legislators into legalizing the de facto actions of African Americans. Legal emancipation was followed by a decade of 'Reconstruction' when attempts were made at 'remaking' the nation along more egalitarian lines, but these attempts foundered as the white Democrats regained power in the southern states and reinstated forms of disenfranchisement and segregation along racial lines. The broader social context was also one of widespread and systematic violence against African Americans, including lynchings and the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan (see Johnson, 2008). The Jim Crow years of institutionalized violence against African Americans lasted close on a century, from 1876 till 1965, and only came to a formal end with the passing of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) in the 1960s...(Bhambra 2014: 480).

Apparently, this time period highlighted by Gurinder Bhambra runs parallel to the academic, intellectual and political trajectory of Du Bois including other major African American intellectuals among the pioneers of social sciences in America. These African American intellectuals include E Franklin Frazier, Anna J. Cooper, Oliver Cromwell and many more.

Itzigsohn and Brown write:

He [Du Bois] created a school, working with others such as Monroe Work, Richard R. Wright, George Haynes, and Mary Ovington. As an organizer of the Atlanta conferences, he invited and conversed with leading scholars of his time, among them Franz Boaz and Jane Addams. He also conversed with such leading Black feminists as Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia Cooper, from whom he undoubtedly learned, although probably not enough. As a civil rights and Pan-African activist, Du Bois was in the center of the organizing networks of important international gatherings. Toward the end of his life, his friendships with Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore<sup>11</sup> were central in shaping his vision of a Pan-African socialism.

Du Bois's was a fascinating life that encompassed the whole world— from Great Barrington, Massachusetts, to Accra, Ghana, from Atlanta, Georgia, to Berlin, Germany, from New York City to Beijing, China. As a thinker and an organizer, he participated in some of the most important political debates of his time in not only the United States but the whole world. His writing was prolific and his oeuvre is immense. Yet at the same time, he was always embedded in networks of intellectual exchange and collaboration (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020: 12-13).

Du Bois's second major publication "The Study of the Negro Problems" specifically addresses the problem of the Jim Crow legal system as a legitimized form of oppression (Du Bois 1898). It is in this context that the historical scholarship and struggle of Du Bois highlighted the paradoxes of history and modernity

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,— this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois 1903 [2007]: 9)

Slowly with the passage of time, Du Bois's discontent with racism in America grew and the Jamesian concerns in his writings receded into the background. And even though the question of racism, colonialism and the African-American became more prominent, Jamesian pragmatism remained a significant critical sensitivity in engaging with different sociological questions throughout his intellectual life ( Reed 1997; Gilroy 1993; Kloppenberg 2004; Rabaka 2010; Itzigsohn and Brown 2015, 2020).

### **Ambedkar at Columbia: Engagement with Historicism and Social Theory**

within addition to Harvard, most of the developments within the historical school of pragmatism took place at Columbia University. Apart from Dewey there were several historians who collaborated with Dewey on several occasions (Gronda and Viola 2016; Gronda et al. 2017) . Some of these historians also taught Ambedkar and played a significant role in his thinking. These historians included James Harvey Robinson, Charles Beard, Mary Beard and James Shotwell (Kloppenber 2004). Apparently, Ambedkar studied with most of these historians at Columbia University. He studied three papers with James Robinson. These papers included: "History 226: The Protestant Revolt", "History 121: The History of the Intellectual Class in Europe: Part I", "History 122: The History of the Intellectual Class in Europe: Part II". With James Shotwell he studied five papers. These papers include: "History 155: The Origins of European Society", "History 156: Social and Industrial History of Modern England", "History 226: Europe in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries". And then he completed one paper with Charles Beard: "Politics 214: The Principles of Politics".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The description of Ambedkar's history courses:

Please see: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html>

1. "History 226: The Protestant Revolt" by James Robinson: Consideration of origin, character and effects of Protestant Revolt, rather than history of Europe during period of the Reformation.
2. "History 121: The History of the Intellectual Class in Europe: Part I" by James Robinson: This course and History 122 follow changes in interests, opinions, and attitude of mind of intellectual classes from days of the Greek Sophists to our own. Antecedents of intellectual history; primitive reasoning. General range of Greek speculation, especially as transmitted to western Europe by Romans, will form background for estimate of Christian conception of man and world, as represented in Augustine's City of God. Origin of medieval universities. Revival of Aristotle and range of university teaching in thirteenth century.
3. "History 122: The History of the Intellectual Class in Europe: Part II" by James Robinson: Open only to those who have taken History 121. Follows slow decline of Scholasticism during fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth



h Robinson and Beard trained their scholars not to consider the past as a sacred domain. In his book *The New History* (1912), James Robinson observed that only through observation from a distance of these historical past events, episodes and other processes could one think of meeting contemporary historical and societal challenges. Following the philosophical thought of pragmatism and Dewey being an important interlocutor at Columbia, both Robinson and Beard came to think of “Geisteswissenschaften as experimental sciences” (Kloppenber 2004: 205).

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centuries; intellectual aspects of "Renaissance" and of Protestant Revolt; birth of modern scientific spirit with Lord Bacon and Descartes; Deism; French Philosophies; and, finally, novel elements in contemporaneous intellectual life.

4. “History 155: The Origins of European Society” by James T. Shotwell: Deals with evolution of European society, with especial emphasis upon history of work and of common things of daily life. Begins with survey of prehistoric man, the stone, bronze, and early iron ages, rise of agriculture, ancient city states, commerce and slavery. Passes in review early German village life, feudalism, management of manorial estates, rise of European cities, emergence of capital and origins of national state.

5. “History 156: Social and Industrial History of Modern England” by James T. Shotwell: Begins with short survey of Commercial Revolution which changed centre of European society from Mediterranean to North. Treats of influx of gold and silver from America and the business aspects of modern politics. Industrial Revolution then taken up in detail, great inventions and rise of the factory system. Considers advent of industrial proletariat and includes survey of popular movements toward reform, social legislation, Trade Unions, Chartism and historical setting of Socialism.

6. “History 226: Europe in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries” by James T. Shotwell: Research course open to specially qualified students.

7. “History 223: Primitive Institutions in European History” by James T. Shotwell: Considers in detail some of the topics presented in History 155, and open only to students taking that course.

8. “History 103: History of India and of Persia” by A.V.W. Jackson: The early history and civilization of India and of Persia. Development with special reference to general historical position and present importance in relation to the West.

9. “History 228: The Reforms of the French Revolution” by David S. Muzzey: Does not deal primarily with political history but with great and permanent achievements of Revolution. Includes description of organization of French monarchy under Louis XVI; development of spirit of reform in Europe; "benevolent despotism"; progress of reform in France to completion of the constitution of 1795.

10. “History 169: The Expansion of Europe: First Phase” by William Robert Shepherd: Rise of oversea dominion: early contact of Europe and Asia; commercial individualism and state-directed colonization; national mercantilism and colonization by chartered companies; development of systems and policies; methods of administration; social and industrial conditions; diffusion of commerce; transplantation of culture; reflex influence of expansion on European life and thought.

11. “History 170: The Expansion of Europe: Second Phase” by William Robert Shepherd: Europeanization of the world, and general problems involved in process: era of transition; progress toward world partition; age of imperialism; course of territorial enlargement; spread of population; effects on oversea dominions and their native inhabitants; question of racial superiority; present classification and distribution of colonies; government and administration; diffusion of European influence, with particular reference to Asia; principal changes wrought by expansion on European type of civilization today.

Kloppenbergr writes:

Robinson had been a student of James's at Harvard, and James's influence was clear in everything Robinson wrote. Robinson outlined the principal differences between the ideas of earlier eras and the outlook of his age, characterized by experimental science, and invoked Dewey as the best guide to what distinguished the twentieth century from what had come before it. We have learned, Robinson wrote, that "truth is not merely relative," as some Greek thinkers had understood, but "that this relativity is conditioned by our constant increase in knowledge." Our resulting awareness of "a dynamic relativity" derives from "rapidly advancing scientific knowledge, which necessarily renders all our conclusions provisional" (Robinson 1912, 130). Moreover, Robinson argued, historians must make this sensibility and the results of scholarship inspired by it accessible to ordinary people rather than continuing to view it as a privilege restricted to elites. Whereas other students of Robinson's field of European intellectual history saw themselves operating in a rarified atmosphere in which only a few well educated minds could find sustenance, Robinson believed that knowledge of how ideas develop would enable ordinary people to think for themselves. Robinson sought to broaden the study of intellectual history to encompass the relation between ideas and contexts, and he worked to shift the focus of study from the ancient world to the more recent past so that people could see how their own culture had developed. Together with Beard and Dewey, Robinson participated in founding the New School for Social Research in 1918 as an institution devoted to making advanced study available to, and useful for, Americans who had previously lacked access to education beyond the level of secondary school (Kloppenbergr 2004: 206).

This idea of history and knowledge is in line with practice, the communicative approach and social action. James Robinson was a student of William James at Harvard and the Jamesian influence remained extremely significant. This influence could be observed across different writings of Robinson. Interestingly, James Shotwell was a student of James Robinson. Robinson emphasized the importance of interpreting the meaning of history for the present. Robinson's attempt was to broaden the study of intellectual history where common people could develop their thinking if they acquired a knowledge of how ideas develop. The study of intellectual history was important to understand the relationship between ideas and context (Robinson 1912).

It is possible to argue today Ambedkar might have engaged with James's pragmatism in the classes of James Robinson. Some of these ideas prepared Ambedkar to develop a communicative approach following a dialogical method with the public for the next four decades as a public intellectual in India. 'New Sociology of knowledge', 'sociology of intellectuals' and theoretical discussions in the book *Ideas on the Move in the Social Sciences and Humanities* provide the framework to understand how Ambedkar translated pragmatist ideas in his quest for democracy in India i.e. contributed to seek emancipation as envisaged by theory (Stroud 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018).

Contemporary developments in the 'New Sociology of knowledge' and pragmatism broadens the scope of both intellectual history and history of ideas where the relationship between not only ideas and context is crucial but also the interplay between ideas and practice is crucial (Camic and Gross 2001). For pragmatists, democracy was never limited to the functioning of political institutions, but rather it is only through an active citizenry does democracy think of itself as functioning as a social democracy. Pragmatists believed that practitioners of knowledge must ensure accessibility of knowledge and expert knowledge to common ordinary people through varieties of communicative strategies.

Robinson argued that our dynamic relativity is an outcome of the constantly evolving frontier of scientific knowledge where findings are deemed to be provisional. He argued that our "dynamic relativity" comes from "rapidly advancing scientific knowledge" which substantiates all our conclusions as provisional. Robinson differentiated between the ideas of earlier periods from that of his age against the backdrop of the experimental sciences and did invoke John Dewey. He argued that "truth is not merely relative" but also that "that this relativity is conditioned by our constant increase in knowledge" (Robinson 1912: 130). This relativity of truth alludes to the coevolution of theory and practice in the shaping of what we consider to be robust knowledge. The scope of relativization depends on one's perspective of pragmatism along with which pragmatist philosopher one is engaging with.

Robinson argued that Greek thinkers also had a similar understanding of the view of truth. Both Mary Beard and Charles Beard also argued history to be a project of continuing reinterpretation. Charles Beard advanced the understanding of new history in his controversial study “An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States” (Beard 1913). He brought to the scene the study of constitutional history as a new method of historical analysis/interpretation. He argued that historical scholarship should reveal the past in order to develop democratic reformist frameworks (ibid).

Carl Becker also echoed similar thoughts in the widely discussed American Historical Association address: “Everyman his own historian...man and his world can obviously be understood only tentatively, since it is by definition something still in the making, something as yet unfinished” (Becker 1932, 236). Charles Beard underlined the provincial nature of historical understanding. Beard developed further on these ideas in the presidential address of the American Historical Association entitled “Written History As An Act of Faith”:

Beard argued:

The scientific method is, therefore, a precious and indispensable instrument of the human mind; without it society would sink down into primitive animism and barbarism. It is when this method, a child of the human brain, is exalted into a master and a tyrant that historical thought must enter a caveat. So the historian is bound by his craft to recognize the nature and limitations of the scientific method and to dispel the illusion that it can produce a science of history embracing the fullness of history, or of any large phase, as past actuality. This means no abandonment of the tireless inquiry into objective realities, especially economic realities and relations; not enough emphasis has been laid upon the conditioning and determining influences of biological and economic necessities or upon researches designed to disclose them in their deepest and widest ramifications. This means no abandonment of the inquiry into the forms and development of ideas as conditioning and determining influences; not enough emphasis has been laid on this phase of history by American scholars. But the upshot to which this argument is directed is more fundamental than any aspect of historical method. It is that any selection and arrangement of facts pertaining to any large area of history, either local or world, race or class, is controlled inexorably

by the frame of reference in the mind of the selector and arranger. This frame of reference includes things deemed necessary, things deemed possible, and things deemed desirable. It may be large, informed by deep knowledge, and illuminated by wide experience; or it may be small, uninformed, and unilluminated. It may be a grand conception of history or a mere aggregation of confusions. But it is there in the mind, inexorably. To borrow from Croce, when grand philosophy is ostentatiously put out at the front door of the mind, then narrow, class, provincial, and regional prejudices come in at the back door and dominate, perhaps only half-consciously, the thinking of the historian (Beard 1934: 227).

Becker thought of historical discourse as something that continues to arrive at new meanings. But this search for new meanings also depends upon the reflexivity of the historian to engage with new forms of ideas and interpretations. Often these ideas and interpretations speak to the wider new empirical evidence, social and political movements and thus pose different forms of challenges for the historians. These new meanings are arrived at as communities expand and diverse actors, institutions and political circumstances come into interplay. Becker and Beard considered history to be a project of “hermeneutics and pragmatic truth testing” (Kloppenber 2004: 207). Thus, knowledge in the historical domain or the wider framework of social sciences takes into consideration the coming together of both facts and interpretations.

Ambedkar's historical preoccupation related to the persistence of the hegemony of the Brahmanical textual tradition and the survival of discriminatory practices during the period of British colonialism in India (Omvedt 1994; Rodrigues 2004, 2011b; Zelliott 2013). Ambedkar was deeply aware that in the Sanskritic textual tradition he could never be an insider and merely learning the language would not make him an insider. The sense of being an outsider in the tradition allowed Ambedkar to ask what these traditions represented but also ‘what they did?’ and ‘what they achieved?’

Valerian Rodrigues writes “Ambedkar privileged the written word. He would make written submissions before committees and commissions to negotiate across the authority of a formulated text. In a culture that was largely oral, the written word gave him a distinctiveness

which earlier the upper castes in general and Brahmins, in particular, tended to usurp. The written world enabled him to reach out to a larger world, conferring some degree of permanence or immortality and allowing him to usurp some of the Brahmanical authority. The writings, therefore, cannot be separated from their nexus to power, though they are in variegated ways, some in the immediate sense and others with permanent implications. This nexus can insinuate the significance of a text differently from other writings” (Rodrigues 2004: 2).

These ideas associated with writing and the life span or longevity of the written word have also been engaged in the writings of Filipe Carreira Da Silva and Monica Brito Vieira .

Carreira Da Silva and Vieira writes:

...regarding the complex and close interplay between material form and meaning production, we suggest that texts are products of an embodied mind—a mind that makes sense of itself and the world through association with the body, notably in the very physical and sensuous act of writing. In this sense, discursive practices are always already material, and our understanding of theory as theorizing, as practice rather than outcome, can emerge only through examining their interplay. Writing, for one, is not a disembodied act. It is rather a physical act of craft, committing ideas and words to a physical medium, working them out through it. Their relationship to material form is one of mutual entailment rather than mere externality (Barad 2003, 822). Hence just as it would be wrong to reduce meaning to form, conceiving meaning apart from form would be equally disingenuous. Second, if texts are embodied forms, and if form affects and is even constitutive of meaning, then there is a very literal sense in which producing a book can be “meaning making.” It is, therefore, to be expected that the struggle over the meaning of a text, and the possibilities of creative development it opens up, will sometimes become a struggle over its particular and specific physical embodiments (Silva and Vieira 2019:2).

It is possible to argue that Ambedkar was aware that he was confronting a scriptural canon that legitimated the caste hierarchy along with the subjugation of women with its notions of ‘purity and pollution’ (Parvathamma 1989). The sacred and profane in written and textual form throughout history has anchored cultural hierarchies. Ambedkar’s anthropological training

provided him with a vantage point to engage with the question of cultural hierarchies of India that were different from other Indian critiques of the same time. Ambedkar also attempted to depart from the historiography of Great Men in history.

Gail Omvedt writes:

In India, Utopias have been posed for centuries by the radical anticaste intellectuals coming from dalit and bahujan (former untouchable, former shudra) backgrounds. They can be traced from the early modern period of the bhakti movement, when they were only hints of a future, to the more determinate forms guiding the struggles under colonialism. The inchoate or determined forms of utopias have thus depended on the situation of the time; as modern developments increased, the new society seemed to become more and more one to struggle for, one with specific outlines (Omvedt 2008: 11)

It is a striking fact that in India that we can see the emergence of Utopias at almost the same time as in Europe. But these are found at a lower level of society (as contrasted with intellectuals Thomas More, writing in Latin). Utopias were not available in Sanskrit. Rather they are found in this visions of dalit- bahujan intellectuals of the radical bhakti movement of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. These are not so elaborated as in Europe, but that it is in part due to the lack of documentation of mass activities and the fact that there were very few among the more literati elites who could move beyond the sanskritized and brahmanic perspectives that militated against visions of equality (Omvedt 2008: 15).

### **Du Bois and Ambedkar: Reading History, Positioning and Action**

Following the philosophical tradition of J.L. Austin, it is possible to argue that both WEB Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar writings could be thought on the lines of performative sentences. Austin preferred to use the word 'performative' in varieties of ways and constructions.

At the occasion of William James lecture, JL Austin referring to the term 'performative' stated:

“ The name is derived, of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action- it is normally thought of as just saying something” (Austin 1962: 6-7).

Du Bois and Ambedkar thought of modern knowledge to be the domain of action-oriented practice that would help to engage with historical and cultural hierarchies, discrimination and inequalities that often seem to appear to be unresolvable. Modern knowledge, unlike that in most historical epochs, allowed human beings to overcome the burden of tradition and develop communicative methods to think through historical and contemporary problems of modern societies. It is in this context where the project modern knowledge enables action-oriented manoeuvring of the world, and where human experience resonates with the project of knowledge and vice-versa. Du Bois and Ambedkar believed in the power and performative capacity/dimension of words especially for those who have been silenced. It is through the performative capacity of words that actions are performed in the public domain (Omvedt 1994; Kumar 2015; Stroud 2016, 2017a; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

Patrick Baert writes:

“ Positioning theory has its origins in speech-act theory, and it is worth contextualizing this philosophical perspective. Following Wittgenstein, speech-act theorists pay attention to how words, rather than representing or mirroring the external world, accomplish things. By the early 1960s, Austin, for instance, was intrigued by ‘performative utterances’; these are utterances which are neither true nor false, but which nevertheless do something. Promises, compliments or threats are examples of such utterances. At the time, Austin’s interest in performativity put clear blue water between his philosophy and that of the logical positivist tradition: the latter took propositions as depicting the external realm (and therefore either true or false), whereas Austin was keen to explore their performative aspects. Through the second half of the twentieth century, fewer and fewer philosophers thought it fruitful to conceive of language as copying the external world. Many philosophers and theorists, belonging to otherwise different intellectual orientations, became committed to the idea that language is an act which, like any act, does something. This



has had significant pay-offs, for instance, reshaping critical theory along communicative lines (Habermas) or even redefining philosophy altogether...(Baert 2015: 163-164).

The purpose of Ambedkar and Du Bois was not to mirror the world in what they wrote or what in pragmatism is viewed as ‘copying the world’ but in of ‘coping with the world’ as they moved away from only ‘representational view of the knowledge’ in the broader terrain of the classical pragmatist tradition. The mirror view considers knowledge in terms of “passive” and “accurate recording of the essence of the external world”. Following this view, the “external world” is understood to be independent of “human experiences”, that is yet to be discovered.

Baert and Carreira da Silva argue:

The mirror view is widespread both in philosophical and scientific circles, and it assumes an opposition between theory and knowledge on the one hand, and practice and action on the other. Knowledge is taken to be passive and instantaneous, whereas action is, by definition, active and proceeds through time. One of the upshots of this view is that knowledge should no longer be judged on the basis of its isomorphic relationship to the external realm, but on the basis of what kind of contribution it makes to our world. For too long, the dualism between theory and practice and its attendant preoccupation with accurate representation has led Western philosophers to ignore the practical difference knowledge can make. Pragmatism breaks with this dualism and takes seriously the notion of scientific engagement. In sum, our hermeneutically inspired pragmatist agenda for the social sciences comprises three central claims (Baert and Silva 2010: 296-297).

These philosophical and methodological advancements in the twentieth century were also the outcome of transnational social and political movements that have allowed people to find more meaningful ways to reconstruct their lives. The continuation of old questions of enslavement, racism, capitalism, labour movements, authoritarian regimes are now seen in the light of a complex web of entanglements with new fundamental questions that have come to the forefront since the end of the second world war and from the end of the cold war (Alexander 2013).

Du Bois went on to publish a few significant sociological works that would stand the test of time and earn him a place in the library of 'classics'. These writings outline Du Bois's approach to history. The project of history and philosophy of social sciences have come to the forefront in the pursuit of social theory since the last few decades of the nineteenth century, particularly if we consider the 'classical sociological theory' canon formation in the twentieth century (Zuckerman 2004; Marable 2015; Gooding Williams 2009; Lemert 2015; Burawoy 2021). The central thesis of this chapter assumes Du Bois as part of the classical sociological canon and also attempts to develop a critique of the history and politics of canon formation through a Du Boisian perspective on history. Thus, Du Bois' approach towards history is central to our reading of social theory and the history and philosophy of social sciences.

This is not to argue that the approach to understand the body of knowledge organized within the rubric of social theory has not been thought upon earlier. The historical approach has been crucial for the formation of sociological theory since its inception. For Du Bois, the approach of historical understanding is deeply embedded in his project of understanding the social sciences. This approach takes into account historical experience as part of the project of modernity, along with the discontinuities characterizing different historical processes. Du Boisian approach to writing the history of African Americans was premised on their historical and cultural experience in the modern era marked by several discontinuities.

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. 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.

Turning to real history, there can be no doubt, first, as to the widespread, nay, universal, prevalence of the race idea, the race spirit, the race ideal, and as to its efficiency as the vastest and most ingenious invention for human progress. We, who have been reared and trained under the individualistic philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the laissez-faire philosophy of

Adam Smith, are loath to see and loath to acknowledge this patent fact of human history. We see the Pharaohs, Caesars, Toussaints and Napoleons of history and forget the vast races of which they were but epitomized expressions. We are apt to think in our American impatience, that while it may have been true in the past that closed race groups made history, that here in conglomerate America nous avons changé tout cela—we have changed all that, and have no need of this ancient instrument of progress. This assumption of which the Negro people are especially fond cannot be established by a careful consideration of history (Du Bois 1970: 75-76).

Du Bois' association with the discipline of history or historical understanding dates back to his formal training as a social scientist at Fisk and then significantly at Harvard University. His graduate work at Harvard University and subsequent PhD. research work entitled "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade" was published in 1896, and the historian Albert Bushnell Hart was his mentor. This is not to say that Hart was the only intellectual influence on Du Bois. Harvard at the time shaped the trajectory of higher education and research on the one hand and the philosophical movement of pragmatism through William James, Josiah Royce on the other ( Du Bois 1940[2007]). Recent scholarship has reflected upon the intellectual relationship between William James and Du Bois (Ambar 2019).

Du Bois recognised this as he wrote:

"The Harvard of 1888 was an extraordinary aggregation of great men. Not often since that day have so many distinguished teachers been together in one place and at one time in America. There was William James, the psychologist; Palmer in ethics; Royce and Santayana in philosophy; Shaler in geology and Hart in history. There were Francis Child, Charles Eliot Norton, Justin Winsor, and John Trowbridge; Goodwin, Taussig and Kittredge. The president was the cold, precise but exceedingly just and efficient Charles William Eliot, while Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell were still alive and emeriti...By good fortune, I was thrown into direct contact with many of these men. I was repeatedly a guest in the house of William James; he was my friend and guide to clear thinking; I was a member of the Philosophical Club and talked with Royce and Palmer; I sat in an upper room and read Kant's

Critique with Santayana; Shaler invited a Southerner, who objected to sitting by me, out of his class; I became one of Hart's favorite pupils and was afterwards guided by him through my graduate course and started on my work in Germany” (Du Bois, 1940 [2007]: 19).

In this intellectual milieu, Du Bois developed his historical and social outlook of American society. The question of race and slavery acquired salience for his doctoral research at Harvard University. During this period Du Bois travelled to Europe and particularly Germany, where he got the opportunity to engage with the German historical tradition and the broader intellectual atmosphere. Du Bois joined Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin where his association began with Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Von Treitschke and Max Weber. The time spent in Germany and different parts of Europe enriched his worldview. He remarked on the period:

“Of the greatest importance was the opportunity which my Wanderjahre [wander years] in Europe gave of looking at the world as a man and not simply from a narrow racial and provincial outlook” (Du Bois 1940 [2007]: xvi)

Sollors argues that this new worldview enabled Du Bois to introduce racism and the “American Negro” as the equivalent of the project of modernity in the twentieth century. Du Bois’s academic and political involvement in the twentieth century was centred on the critique of modern societies and knowledge construction. His critique of modernity is pivoted around the history of race and racism and in particular slavery. This became a central feature of Du Bois’s academic and political engagement. Du Bois’s writings provide a radical critique of the classical sociological theories and the social sciences in the first half of the twentieth century.

Aldon Morris writes:

Classical and contemporary sociological theories have ignored and suppressed these intersecting determinants in their analyses of modernity. Rarely are white supremacy, western empires, racial hierarchies, colonization, slavery, Jim Crow, patriarchy, and resistance movements examined separately or collectively by sociological theorists as determinants of modernity. For example, in two seemingly comprehensive studies—Lewis Coser’s *Masters of Sociological Thought* (1977) and Anthony Giddens’s *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971)—that examine the theories

of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, these dynamics are not mentioned. They were not mentioned because classical social theorists did not theorize these factors as fundamental determinants of modernity. Moreover, scholars who have studied the works of classical analysts fail to question the absence of these factors in their theoretical frameworks addressing modernity. By suppressing these factors, the classical architects of sociology and their heirs failed to provide accounts of how modernity was shaped by systems of global white supremacy that made it possible for whites to almost succeed in their quest to rule the world (Morris 2022: 2).

From Du Bois's perspective, his public life and ambitions and his private inner life could be viewed as manifesting the contemporaneity of African American history. It is during these years that his engagement with the social sciences and not just history deepened. He wrote: "It was at Harvard that my education, turning from philosophy, centered in history and then gradually into economics and social problems. Today my course of study would have been called sociology; but on that day Harvard did not recognize any such science" (Du Bois 1940 [2007]: 20).

He had been thinking about "the suppression of the African slave-trade in the United States of America" since his master's thesis but extended the scope of his interrogation to history for his doctoral work. At the time of publication in 1896, it was the first monograph published in the Harvard monograph series (Du Bois 1940[2007]: xxvi). Du Bois' approach to history is significant and central to his combining academic and political concerns at the philosophical and methodological level. At the conceptual level, Du Bois' historical approach brings together the scholarship of the time on American history combined with philosophical and methodological approaches and ideas of the German historical tradition (Du Bois [2007] 1940; Morris 2015). His studies on racism and African-American community led to the publication of two seminal texts namely *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Souls of Black Folk*. However, it needs be argued that the subject of race for Du Bois had become the equivalent of the question of human history.

Aldon Morris writes:

While Marx had argued that the basic dynamic of modern society was the class struggle, Weber insisted it was the process of bureaucratic rationalization that was sweeping the world in tandem with modern capitalism. As Du Bois surveyed the globe, he focused on a specific phenomenon that enabled European societies to build capitalist empires: the colonization, exploitation, and domination of peoples of color. For this reason he famously stated in 1903, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (Morris 2015: 278).

Giddens writes that it was precisely “the problems of gender and race” that Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber- the “three names who rank above all others,” were downplayed in the early history of sociological theory” (Giddens 1971). Du Bois’ sociological research attempts to engage with the problems of race, gender and even class; having examined how capitalism deforms and then destroys the prospects for an authentically multicultural democracy. Gilkes comments on the widespread presence of class in early modern social theory. He critically comments “Although issues of class, race, and gender ought to be addressed, most early social theory only focused on class and not on gender or race. In spite of its prominence in American society, the problem of race relations was not accorded the same theoretical importance as were issues centered on class, change, and social structure” (Gilkes 1996:113). The question of long histories of colonialism and the historical domination of white races over people of other races were completely ignored during the ‘Jim Crow’ era in American history. It was not part of the academic and political milieu as higher education and knowledge remained confined to the privileged few across most European/Western and non-western societies.

Julian Go has argued that the contributions of Du Bois have been ignored and marginalised by social theorists and in particular sociologists particularly in the USA even though he has been known to sociologists throughout the twentieth century. He was a professor of sociology, history and economics at Atlanta University. Recently the American Sociological Association (ASA) has

announced a scholarly award after him. Therefore, shall we consider that sociologists have now been open to the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois?

Julian Go writes:

The problem is that Du Bois is the exception that proves the rule. His standing within mainstream sociology attests to his exceptionality. Du Bois may be known by sociologists, but his historic role in sociology and his thinking has been largely marginalized.....To this day, Du Bois's formative role in sociology has been forgotten if not erased. Most conventional histories of sociology still elide the fact that it was not the Chicago School that initiated scientific sociology but Du Bois's Atlanta University, which in 1895 formed the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, long before the ostensibly pioneering urban research of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (Morris 2007). The same goes for his actual scholarly labor: At most, mainstream social theorists pick out Du Bois's concepts of "double consciousness" or the "veil." But less attention, if any, is paid to his critique of conventional sociology, his analysis of racialized systems as constitutive of modern society and of knowledge (analyses that challenged the dominant racial thinking of sociologists like Robert E. Park), or his writings on slavery and colonialism—all of which offered rich and very different approaches to the social than mainstream social theory. As scholars note, attempts to bring Du Bois under the mainstream umbrella of sociology have been gestures of tokenism—an "emblem of diversity" as Katznelson (1999: 468) puts it. They have not impacted the main tenets or concepts of sociology itself. Du Bois, as Aldon Morris (2015) puts it aptly, is "the scholar denied." (Go 2016: 12-13).

These arguments of Julian Go are significant attempts to develop a radical reflexive understanding of history of social sciences. The emancipatory project of social sciences is not possible without the self-reflexivity of the social scientists who are themselves part of the social world they engage with in their social research. Thus, the pursuit of emancipatory research is central to the experiential understanding of the social researcher who is embedded in the same social structures which she/he embarks upon to study. Du Bois and Ambedkar were social researchers following the framework of social praxeology. At one level they were concerned with the epistemological (objectivist) concerns associated with the social structures of the world in their initial frameworks and at the same time they had to take in consideration concerns that

would be based on a subjective understanding of the world. Even though both the objectivist (epistemological) and subjectivist position are equally necessary at the moment of analysis, they are often considered not to be equal (Bourdieu 1992).<sup>2</sup>

Du Bois inaugurates concerns having to do with what today would come under the rubric of the sociology of race and gender and its intersectionality. Why were sociologists before Du Bois not concerned with concepts such as race? Du Bois identified race, colonialism and slavery as “social problems” at the turn of the twentieth century. These were not considered “social problems” by ‘white sociologists’. From the perspective of his intersectional sociological perspective “social problems” did not only emerge from the rise of capitalism or even the class struggle. Although at a later stage he acquired a critical understanding of capitalism and the class struggle and how they were interconnected with problems of racism and sexism (Rabaka 2003).

Du Bois’ evocation of the ‘pages of history’ is to challenge the prejudicial scientific and social scientific claims regarding the social and cultural inferiority of African-American peoples, categorised as ‘subhumans’ and in a markedly backward state of development (Du Bois 1940 [2007]: 76). Thus Du Bois engagement with the race arose in opposition to ‘scientific racism’.

There exists a common framework between the serious questions confronted by social theory in contemporary times and the existing framework of the time available to Du Bois. This common framework is the framework of ‘historical’ understanding, and that from the Du Boisian perspective is central to our broader approach to knowledge. The Du Boisian perspective is crucial for a contemporary reading of social theory for the question it poses is how social theory can develop a critical self-understanding of its constructions. How has this social construction,

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu wrote in the context of objectivist (epistemological) and subjectivist moments of analysis:

“ It should be stressed that, although the two moments of analysis are equally necessary, they are not equal: epistemological priority is granted to objectivist rupture over subjectivist understanding. Application of Durkhiem’s first principle of the ‘sociological method’, the systematic preconceptions, must come before analysis of the practical apprehension of the world from the subjective standpoint. For the viewpoints of agents will vary systematically with the point they occupy in objective social space ( Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 11).



primarily through a scientific approach to knowledge, been responsible for deep ambivalences towards the project of modernity or as Alexander writes about ‘the dark side of modernity’ (Alexander 2013). Du Bois helps us understand that to make a sociological claim; one needs to engage with history as it is in the pages of history; one confronts social and cultural constructions of various kinds. The reference to ‘pages of history’ here specifically refers to Du Bois confrontation with social scientists of his time and others who seem to have proposed ‘scientific’ justifications of various approaches not only to show that African-American people were socially and culturally inferior or less advanced but also categorised them as ‘sub-humans’(Du Bois 1940 [2007]: 76). Thus Du Bois engagement with the question of race developed in direct confrontation with ‘scientific racism’.<sup>3</sup>

Du Bois’ contribution resides in his development of an understanding of the race question or the question of democracy particularly in his work on ‘The Reconstruction of Black America’ (Du Bois 1935 [2017]). He develops a rigorous approach based on insights drawn from the natural sciences and the social scientific understanding of the world. This approach developed with his colleagues at the department of sociology at Atlanta University paved the path for emancipatory sociology (Wright 2002a, 2002b; Morris 2022). Du Bois embarks upon empirical sociology projects to develop a case against long-standing arguments of the social and cultural superiority of the white races. In the formative years, Du Bois strengthened the theoretical and methodological claims along with normative claims that are central to his social scientific agenda. Thus, in the Du Boisian framework the sufferings of human beings must be reflected and accounted for in social theory, the evolution of which is a struggle within the realm of theory itself. The development of theory within pragmatic thought is oriented then towards ‘coping with the world’ and not merely copying it. As Foucault citing Cavailles stated that “ Error is not

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<sup>3</sup> This context of ‘scientific racism’ from the Bourdieusian perspective is also deeply reflective of the notion of ‘apparatus’ within the academic field. Bourdieu argued in his response to Loic Wacquant that ‘under certain historical conditions a field, where agents and institutions struggle according to the given rules or code of conduct, could start to function as an apparatus’ (Wacquant 1989:40). The context of ‘Scientific racism’ is crucial to understand the Bourdieusian perspective of ‘apparatus’ that in case of scientific racism’ achieved the purpose to dominate the people of color through slavery, racism, colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. Thus Du Bois posed the question of the ‘Global Color line’ in the context of world history from Asia to Africa to Europe and not as a social problem confined to American history.

eliminated by the muffled force of a truth which gradually emerges from the shadow but by the formation of a new way of ‘speaking true’”<sup>4</sup> Du Boisian sociological attempt to understand the question of the ‘color line’ is not a muffled force of truth but a sui generis approach to speak the truth at the turn of the twentieth century in order to dismantle ‘scientific racism’ scientifically (Besek et al. 2021). Du Boisian sociology at the turn of the twentieth century is about ‘a new way of speaking true’ through the network of various individuals and institutions.

### **Du Bois and Ambedkar: Politics of History and Social Sciences**

What is it about these ideas, individuals, institutions that become part of a silenced and oblivious state of affairs? How can these silenced and oblivious state of affairs become part of social theory in contemporary times? And if they do, then it will have an impact on our understanding of social theory? Or will it entail a paradigmatic shift on social theory and history of sociology not only limited to normative changes but also of a philosophical and methodological kind? For example, the notion of lived experience, self, biography and experience stands are major ideational categories in Du Boisian sociology (Morris 2022). In order to develop a deep sense of history, the purpose is not to understand merely a narrative of encounters with the writings and intellectuals. This requires categories like marginality and strangeness as epistemological sources to broaden the horizon and scope of social theory and deepen our understanding of the history of sociology especially during the formative phase of ‘classical sociological theory’ namely from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Peter Wagner argues that the historical development of the social sciences is often seen in terms of gradual liberation from the traditional bonds of society which prevented people from realizing their full potential as producers of true and robust knowledge of society (Wagner 2001). Emancipation still confronts us through disciplinary frameworks and approaches. Wagner in his work on the history and theory of the social sciences explores the various dimensions of the idea

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<sup>4</sup> Please see the introduction by Michael Foucault in ‘The Normal and the Pathological’ by Georges Canguilhem.

Canguilhem, Georges. *The Normal and the Pathological*. New York: Zone Books. 1991.

of social sciences and their institutional struggles in the twentieth century. These intellectual debates were situated in the institutional struggles of their time. These institutional struggles were also socio-political struggles of the times as the social sciences emerged from the stranglehold of history and philosophy. Wagner further argues that it is during this century only that various social sciences disciplines received recognition and their independent status. It is from these struggles and debates that several approaches like classical sociology, neoclassical economics, anthropology based on participant observation and experimental psychology based on psychoanalysis emerged.

The historical context of Wagner's argument subsumes the intellectual and political trajectory of Du Bois and Ambedkar – in the sense that Du Bois's and Ambedkar's scholarship is part of the same struggle that is reflected in their writings and politics. The trajectory of Ambedkar in modern India along with other historical anticaste intellectuals has been highlighted by Gail Omvedt who writes:

.....India entered the modern era, first on more or less equal terms and in exchange with Europe, then as a colonized and subject country. It was a period of turmoil, of growth, of the formation of new ideas. Elite intellectuals sought to absorb challenges from the class-caste subalterns, developing their vision of India, which took multiple forms: the 'hard hindutva' of Savarkar which saw India as basically a Hindu nation, the 'soft hindutva' of Gandhi which looked to an idealized Ram Rajya as a goal, the mild socialism of Nehru, and the hard leftism of the communists. During the same period, the subalterns put forward their vision and their goals, within the framework of unique utopia first conceived by Ravidas and other radical saints.....Dr Ambedkar who brought these visions to climax in debates with marxism, gandhism and other forms of nationalism (Omvedt 2008: 8).

These struggles for Ambedkar existed at the ideational, institutional and political level along with their deep and complex entanglements. The exclusion and reception of Du Bois and Ambedkar in the history of the social sciences in the twentieth century is as much part of the history of struggle and marginalization. To engage with this history is a task for social theory.

Mahmood Mamdani writes that Du Bois' motivation for writing *the Philadelphia negro* somewhat hastily was to tell the story of “those left out of recorded history” and to challenge, in effect, “an entire tradition of history-writing” (From Introduction by Mahmood Mamdani in Du Bois 2007: xxv).

Mamdani writes:

How do you tell the story of those left out of recorded history? How do you tell the stories of the poor and the oppressed, of minorities, of women—really, the stories of subaltern majorities? For those left out of documented records, where do you find the documentation? And if the documentation is not conclusive, what do you do? (From Introduction by Mamdani in Du Bois 2007: xxv)

Du Bois scholarship for a long time suffered the same academic and institutional bias and ignorance which Du Bois had confronted in his wide range scholarship of several decades, in part because his academic and intellectual concerns had not become central to social theory, particularly sociology (Rabaka 2010). Du Bois's struggle was to confront the recorded historical writing in the backdrop of a system that developed moral and cultural justifications for the enslavement of the so-called ‘lower races’ of ‘human civilization’ (Du Bois 1940 [2007]).

Pragmatists have argued that ideas should be observed as communicative efforts and encounters rather than individualist expressions (Burawoy 2005). In like manner, the Skinnerian perspectives suggest that meaning-making in the world is an expression of communicative processes rather than anchored within individual and static modes of exchange (Skinner 1969). The theory of double consciousness in the writings of Du Bois, Itzigsohn and Brown argue, is located within the classical sociological theories of self (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). They have also argued that Du Bois's phenomenological analysis of the Afro-American experience through the lens of double consciousness helps us understand the formation of ‘double self’ in a

racialized world. Finally, they have argued that Du Bois' theory of double consciousness not only fills a gap in the theorizations of the self in the work of James, Mead and Cooley but adds a multidimensional perspective to this theorization. Though in this case, it would be important to understand historically how subsequent development in social theory and theorization of self have remained indifferent towards the idea of the "racialized self" and "theory of double-consciousness" (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). Theoretical considerations and even the neglect of multiple genealogies of thinking shape disciplinary imaginations and form their 'collective unconscious'.

Regarding the Du Boisian and Ambedkarite perspectives we could ask if the process of unfolding of history would naturally and inevitably disclose those social truths on the world stage as this history unfolds? Or will the distinct genealogical aspects of history unfold themselves through historical ruptures? From the Du Boisian and Ambedkarite perspective, social conditions account for historical ruptures that are primarily realized through active human agents. Human agents create social conditions for the possibilities of rupture through social scientific and humanistic, moral construction of concepts, ideas, networks and social and political institutions.

It is important to focus on two strands of thoughts here. On the one hand, the Bourdieusian understanding of the limits the meaning-making process argues that if after all human agents are embedded in their social condition, then it is not possible for them to develop a new vocabulary for the meaning-making process as their emancipating moment derives its meanings from the very social conditions which it attempts to dismantle. On the other hand, according to 'the pragmatic sociology of critique' as argued by Boltanski, the purpose of social critique is primarily to develop a conceptual and political understanding to allow for the possibilities of emancipation (Boltanski 2011).

Du Bois and Ambedkar's sociological quest for social truth premised on a critical philosophy of the social sciences in which human agents attempt to alter the meaning of the social world in the

process of understanding it. The task before the contemporary social theorist or historian and philosopher of social sciences is to develop multiple levels of engagement with the writings and life of Du Bois and Ambedkar. Any contemporary understanding of Du Bois' oeuvre is set against the backdrop of the history of sociological thought in the twentieth century.

The long twentieth century has been witness to the evils of Jim Crow, Holocaust, Racism, Slavery, Colonialism, Untouchability, Casteism, Capitalism and Environmental Catastrophes. Thus, the eruption of these historical events takes us to one of the 'founding figures' of sociology with the hope of 'social amelioration' and 'emotional repair' (Alexander 2013). Du Boisian and Ambedkarite sociology is as much a product of the unfolding of historical injustices that continue to be perpetrated in our own time. The reception of Du Bois and Ambedkar in sociology would draw upon a critical understanding of social theory and its history in the twentieth century in particular. For example, Ambedkar has argued about caste as 'division of labourers' and not as merely 'division of labour'.

Ambedkar wrote:

It is a pity that Caste even today has its defenders. The defences are many. It is defended on the ground that the Caste System is but another name for division of labour and if division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilized society then it is argued that there is nothing wrong in the Caste System. Now the first thing is to be urged against this view is that Caste System is not merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments. Caste System is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour—it is an heirarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. There is also a third point of criticism against this view of the Caste System. This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance,

selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents.....As a form of division of labour the Caste system suffers from another serious defect. The division of labour brought about by the Caste System is not a division based on choice. Individual sentiment, individual preference has no place in it. It is based on the dogma of predestination (Ambedkar 1936-37[1979/2014]:47-48).

Ambedkar's reading of caste as 'division of labourers' challenged Durkheim's argument on division of labour in modern societies. This critique by Ambedkar provides a crucial framework for contemporary social sciences to argue that modern societies have complex entanglements with historical and cultural hierarchies (Ambedkar 1936-1937[1979/2014]:47-48). Such critiques provide novel approaches to studies of social sciences inspired by with radical historical understanding. This historical approach in sociological exploration has been considered significant to study the history of sociology from the multiplicity of contexts. It has become a pertinent concern in the last few decades to think about the future of social theory. This concern can be observed across several disciplinary domains (Shils 1970; Goldthorpe 1991; Go 2016; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021).

The critiques of modernity argue that it could not challenge long histories of colonialism, domination and myth of progress, while the rationality was deployed in the genocidal killings of millions and endless forms of continuing structural-hierarchical forms of oppression. And then another discourse on modernity argues that how modernity contributed to the rise and spread of several socio-political movements and approaches to uncover and dismantle several structural and hierarchical orders of traditional society through the pursuit of knowledge. Likewise in the domain of social theory we observe this paradox where social theory could not emancipate itself as part of a broader knowledge movement. Parallely, it was able to provide new and alternative approaches to develop multiple socio-political meanings and vocabularies to think about several modes of thought that might allow for emancipative thinking.

Jeffrey Alexander states that the feeling and anxieties of crisis and hopelessness embodied in the project of modernity is an understandable 'emotional and moral' reaction to the traumas of the

twentieth century. Alexander's comparison of modernity with the Janus faced Greek God helps us to understand that there is a possibility of hope too embodied within the project of modernity (Alexander 2013: 4). Our emotional and moral response might generate new forms of hermeneutic based understanding of the broader project of emancipation. One path to be pursued is the historical reflection on social theory as part of the project of modernity (Alexander 2013). One of such deeply problematic realms has been the recognition of the neglect and marginalisation of Du Bois' work from the sociological canon for most of the twentieth century.

Du Bois's non-recognition as one of the founders of the academic discipline of sociology is symbolic of both paradoxes and dichotomies embodied in the project of modernity which extends to the formation of social theory as well. Du Bois began his academic work during the era of Jim Crow when African-Americans were immersed in slavery. The history of the struggle against the racist social and legal system is the history of struggle against injustice whose memory has become a significant part of the African American lifeworld.

The emergence and institutionalization of social sciences during this period allowed Du Bois to introduce to the world the problem of the color line in the twentieth century and highlight it from the standpoint of an African-American "How does it feel to be a problem" (Du Bois 1903 [2007]: 7).

Du Bois wrote:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville;\* or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word (Du Bois 1903[2007]:7)



## **History As Shared Understanding**

Despite a century of struggle, Du Bois remained not a marginalised scholar ignored by the sociological canon formation and its politics. Aldon Morris termed the Du Bois phenomena in the academic and intellectual world as ‘the scholar denied’ (Morris 2015). As students of social theory, one is compelled to ask how the academic denial of Du Bois and Ambedkar has shaped the trajectory of social theory in the twentieth century. How does social theory reflect on its own historical construction of ‘the scholar denied’? The formation of social theory is also connected with its entanglement with structural formations as part of long historical movements, catastrophic events and other socio-cultural traumas that it can claim to confront and dismantle for emancipatory thinking. How did Du Bois understand the complex and deep engagement of social theory with the ‘dark side of modernity’? Du Bois was deeply aware that structural forms and hierarchical relationships shaped the teleology of historical narratives. These historical narratives have been embedded in different forms of structural and power hierarchies. And particularly by the paradox of modernity that became inherent in the various knowledge movements including social sciences.

Du Bois’s legacy survived not only as a sociologist but amongst the first wave postcolonial thinkers such as C.L.R. James who went on to provide an alternate history of the events leading upto the French revolution and after (James 1963 [1989]). Julian Go in this context states that James’ reading of both the Haitian revolution and the French revolution develop an entangled and shared notion of history (Arendt 1958 [1973]; Go 2016). James’s argument is that by re-reading the French revolution in the light of reconsideration of the Haitian Revolution we come to understand how the Haitian slave revolt allowed French revolutionaries to think about their ideas of freedom and liberty (James 1963 [1989]; Go 2016).

Anupama Rao writes:

the arguments of C. L. R. James in his powerful classic, *The Black Jacobins*, that Haitian revolutionaries redefined the Declaration of the Rights of Man as a founding document of racial equality. Such contingent, conjunctural demands—whether by caste radicals or by the enslaved—have lasting effect: they expand the repertoire of rights claims even as they situate them within particular socio- historical contexts of inequality and exploitation.

A genealogy of democracy, then, incorporates multiple instances where discourses of democracy and equality confront diverse forms of difference and are called upon to ameliorate contingent instantiations of inequality. If race constituted the form of embodied difference that exposed the constitutive paradoxes of republican thought in the late eighteenth century, then in colonial India in the early twentieth century, the problem of caste minority exposed the fundamental authoritarianism of colonial rule, as well as anticolonial nationalism's complicity with colonialism's culturalization of the state (Rao 2009: 19)

This shared understanding of democracy and rights as argued by Rao helps to engage with normative and moral frameworks across temporal and spatial contexts. The shared understanding of normative and moral frameworks allows us to expand our horizon of a shared notion of histories within the realm of social theory. It will take into consideration the multiplicity of contexts-both in the origin and institutionalization of social theory in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century how does the movement of ideas and peoples, including social scientists, shape the social sciences and humanities? Historically speaking, it is true that the reception of Du Bois' trajectory has been situated in a domain influenced by different forms of knowledge-power entanglement and complexities.

Historical reflexivity in social theory alerts social scientists to the fact that some ideas move very differently when compared with others. Also, this parallel framework should attempt to understand how historical constructions of social theory limited or restricted the movement of certain sets of ideas. Why did Du Bois and Ambedkar remain marginal to the canon and the 'sociological imagination' of sociology for the most part of the twentieth century? Does social theory in its present status have the scope to reflect upon its constructions and reconfigure them?

There exists a common framework to address the serious questions confronted by social theory in contemporary times and the framework available to Du Bois and Ambedkar. This common framework is the framework of 'historical' understanding, and that from Du Boisian and Ambedkarite perspectives is central to our broader approach to knowledge. Both these perspectives are crucial for a contemporary reading of social theory. The question it poses while reading social theory is how social theory can develop a critical self-understanding of its constructions. The idea of historical understanding becomes the pivot around which the construction of social science concepts in social theory is initiated. How the social constructions of knowledge as a framework, has been responsible for deep ambivalences towards the project of modernity. Du Bois argues that to make a sociological claim, one needs to engage with historical context in order to confront social and cultural constructions of various kinds.

These philosophical and methodological advancements in the twentieth century were not only prompted by the sociologist's quest for objective knowledge. These advances are also due to the concerns of transnational social and political movements that have allowed people to find more meaningful ways to reconstruct their lives. These transnational movements and processes of various kinds have kept sociologists in check about their own philosophical and methodological approaches. The continuation of old questions of enslavement, racism, untouchability, casteism, capitalism, labour movements, authoritarian regimes has developed into a complex web of entanglements with new fundamental questions that have come to the forefront in the last few decades.

## Chapter 6

### Arendt, Ambedkar and the Question of Evil

#### **Introduction: Encountering Evil**

Hannah Arendt reviewed John Dewey's *Problems of Men* in 1946 (Arendt 1946[1994]: 194-196). Arendt's review was entitled "The Ivory Tower of Common Sense" (ibid). Dewey's book consisted of thirty-two essays including an introduction by Dewey. Apart from the introduction the essays were gathered from Dewey's writings over a decade and covered a broader canvas of his philosophical and political project. Arendt in her reviews emphasised that:

"the selection is excellent and offers a consistent picture of Dewey's philosophy" (Arendt 1946[1994]: 194).

The aim of Dewey in this book was to reorient the project of philosophy in the postwar period. Dewey is concerned with developing a formative relationship between philosophy and the public, outside the domain of professional philosophers and institutes.

Dewey wrote:

Discussion may well begin with the fact that there does exist at the present time one philosophy which holds that it possesses "an authoritatively accepted body of doctrine," having "duly accredited spokesmen" to declare its contents. The fact that representatives of this philosophy do not figure in the Report is itself indicative of a profound cleavage in present life. For that philosophy is that of an institution that claims divine origin and continued divine support and direction. Its doctrines are held to be authoritative because of their source in supernatural revelation. The philosophies presented in the Report formulate a standpoint according to which philosophical doctrines should be formulated on grounds that are independent of supernatural revelation, and not requiring any special institution as their organ. The supernatural and

theological philosophy took shape in the medieval period. The philosophies presented in the Report took shape in ways away from, largely in protest against, the attitudes and interests which controlled the formulation of the older philosophy (Dewey 1946: 4-5).

This concern of separating philosophy from religion came up profoundly in the writings of Ambedkar as well. Ambedkar argued that it is possible to think of religion and philosophy as "adversaries if not actual antagonists" (Ambedkar [1987/2014]: 3).

Ambedkar argued:

In the first place while religion is something definite, there is nothing definite as to what is to be included in the term philosophy. In the second place Philosophy and Religion have been adversaries if not actual antagonists as may be seen from the story of the philosopher and the theologian. According to the story, the two were engaged in disputation and the theologian accused the philosopher that he was "like a blind man in a dark room, looking for a black cat which was not there". In reply the philosopher charged the theologian saying that "he was like a blind man in the dark room, looking for a black cat which was not there but he declared to have found there" Perhaps it is the unhappy choice of the title — Philosophy of Religion—which is responsible for causing confusion in the matter of the exact definition of its field (Ambedkar [1987/2014]: 3).

Dewey and Ambedkar made an attempt to reimagine the role of philosophy in human affairs by making it possible to engage with human experiences in a rational, scientific and humanist manner. Arendt in her review of Dewey's book agreed with the humanistic approach of Dewey to broaden the practice of philosophy to "humanise science" (Arendt 1946 [1994]). Arendt wrote: " But hard as it is to agree with Dewey but even harder to disagree with him" (Arendt 1946 [1994]): 195).

Arendt wrote:

The intention of this approach is certainly humanistic in essence; it tries sincerely to humanize science, to make scientific results usable for the human community. The trouble is only that, at the same time, science, and not man, takes the lead in the argument, with the result that man is degraded into a puppet which through education-through "formation of attitudes," through "techniques for dealing with human nature"-has to be fitted into a scientifically controlled world. As though it was not man who invented science but some superhuman ghost who prepared this world of ours and only, through some incomprehensible obliviousness, forgot to change man into a scientific animal; as though man's problem were to conform and to adjust himself to some abstract niceties. As though science could ever be more than man; and, consequently, as though such a gap between scientific and social knowledge could ever be more than wishful thinking (Arendt 1946 [1994]: 195-196).

These insights of Arendt about the relationship between human beings and science were based on her experience as a Jew during the rise of Nazism in Germany and subsequently the second world war. What is of significant interest here is Arendt's own understanding of the realm of experience and then the engagement with Dewey's philosophical argument that the natural sciences could provide a more sound epistemological basis for the social sciences. From her perspective, this approach is humanistic in essence as it would allow a scientific approach to solve several problems of the human community (Arendt 1946 [1994]).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thinking about this relationship between technological advancement in modern societies and the human condition, she wrote:

“ The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For sometime now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also “artificial”, toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. It is the same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth that is manifest in the attempt to create life in the test tube, in the desire to mix “frozen germ plasms from people of demonstrated ability under the microscope to produce superior human beings” and to alter [their] size, shape and function”; and the wish to escape the human condition, I suspect, also underlies the hope to extend man's life-span far beyond the hundred-year limit” (Arendt 1958 [2013]:1).

Arendt argued:

Dewey's arguments, taken in themselves, without any reflection upon reality and experience, and without any remembrance of the commonplace philosophical questions as they appear and have appeared throughout all time (in proverbs, in prophecy, in tragedy, in art, up to the highest philosophical speculations)-those arguments are always sound and obvious, as though one simply could not think otherwise. This fantastic disparity between the argumentation itself, which in an abstract sense is always right, and the basis of experience, which in its historical actuality is always wrong, may be understood in the light of Dewey's central concept, which is not a concept of Man but a concept of Science. Dewey's main effort aims at applying to the social sciences the scientific concepts of truth as a working hypothesis. This is supposed to put the social sciences on a sound epistemological basis from which they and we will progress until the supposed gap between natural and social science is closed (Arendt 1946 [1994]: 195).

On the other hand, Arendt believed that it is not possible to agree with Dewey's claim to have closeness with 'reality' and 'experience'. The engagement with these philosophical concepts reflects the turn in her thinking about the problems of human existence. This is not to say that they remained completely absent in her philosophical works prior to the rise of National Socialism in Europe, but that human existence had acquired new meaning in the philosophical vocabulary of Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1958 [1973]; 1958[2013]; 1994; 1943[2007]; 1944[2007]). This is also the time period when Arendt began engaging with the social sciences. Arendt further argued that Dewey remained complacent in his analysis of the 'evil' in human society during the modern period. She critically engaged with Dewey's approach to suggest the pursuit of human goals through scientific approaches (Arendt 1946[1994]). Arendt argued:

.....Dewey's complacent judgments on those evil times of the past in which men were still slaves and serfs; only a great scholar living in the ivory tower of common sense could be so completely unaware of the fact that certain categories of men today are far worse off than any slave or serf ever was. Nor do we need to evoke the extremities of the death factories. Concentration camps have outlived the downfall of the Nazi regime and are accepted as a matter of course; their inmates belong to a new class of human beings who have lost even the elementary

human usefulness for society as a whole of which slaves and serfs were never deprived (Arendt 1946[1994]: 195).

With reference to Dewey's book *Problems of Men*, she argues that its conceptualization of 'evil' is not only problematic but based on a completely mistaken view of modern society as 'modern'. The modern society characterised by technological advancement and scientific planning witnessed the coming of the concentration camps (Arendt 1946 [1994]). Scientific development and the emergence of the social sciences mark the modern age and significant development in scientific methods. For example, Habermas argued that during the course of modernity the social sciences based themselves upon the scientific epistemological concepts of truth. In the modern epoch the scientific claim to truth was premised on a distancing from the sanctity of the traditional and theological order (James 1907; Wolin 1981). But at the same time there arose the need for reflection about a stable and democratic mode of thought based on scientific claims of truth and a dialogical/communicative approach towards conflict resolution. Arendt states that Dewey's analogy of 'evil' with slave<sup>2</sup> societies had not been a limited one but highlights his problematic approach to the study of history (Arendt 1946 [1994]).

She believed that Dewey did not take into account the 'total domination' of national socialism in Germany and the resultant unprecedented violence faced by the Jewish community in Germany and in Europe at large. For Arendt evil, was not just a matter of the historical past of human society and with the advent of modernity there was a need to broaden our understanding of evil. She believed that Dewey's philosophical approach did not reflect sufficiently on the notion of

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<sup>2</sup> Much later in *The human condition* Arendt considered 'slave' and 'slavery' as the denial of 'the human condition' and particularly a complete separation from the *vita activa* significant for the realization of the 'being'. Arendt wrote: "...The slave's degradation was a blow of fate and a fate worse than death, because it carried with it a metamorphosis of man into something akin to tame animal. A change in slave's status, therefore, such as manumission by his master or a change in general political circumstance that elevated certain occupations to public relevance, automatically entailed a change in the slave's nature...The institution of slavery in antiquity, though not in later times, was not a device for cheap labour or an instrument of exploitation for profit but rather the attempt to exclude labor from the conditions of man's life. What men share with all other forms of animal life was considered to be human. (This, incidentally, was also the reason for the much misunderstood Greek theory of the non-human nature of the slave. Aristotle, who argued this theory so explicitly, and then, on his deathbed, freed his slaves, may not have been inconsistent as moderns are inclined to think" (Arendt, 1958[2013]: 84).



'reality' and 'experience' and his questions and assumptions were not convincing enough (Arendt 1946 [1994]). Arendt was sceptical of the applicability of the scientific conception of truth in a scientifically oriented world. Arendt wondered whether the diversity and plurality of human behaviour could be apprehended through the methods of the sciences. For Arendt, the notion of plurality and diversity in human behaviour was reflected as much in the qualities of goodness as well as evil. Evil is embedded in the cultural and historical aspect of collective life and reveals itself in the everyday social and political life of society through collective behaviour.

Arendt wrote:

For thinking itself, as distinct from other human activities, not only is an activity that is invisible -that does not manifest itself outwardly - but also in this respect perhaps uniquely, has no urge to appear or even a very restricted impulse to communicate to others. Since Plato, thinking has been defined as soundless dialogue between me and myself; it is the only way in which I can keep myself company and be content with it. Philosophy is a solitary business, and it seems only natural that the need for it arises in times of transition when men no longer rely on the stability of the world and their role in it, and when the questions concerning the general conditions of human life, which as such are properly coeval with the appearance of man on earth, gain an uncommon poignancy. Hegel may have been right: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk (Arendt 2003: 8-9)

Arendt relies on the notion of traditional philosophy and the discipline of psychology to develop a compelling understanding of human nature. Arendt might have been critical of Dewey on the social sciences but a close reading of pragmatism and its critique of traditional philosophy shares features with Arendt's understanding of human behaviour which engages with its pluralistic and diverse aspects.

Arendt criticises the overall basic assumption that human beings are socio-economic agents, a premise underlying economic thought. From her perspective Marx situated the predicament of modern society and the totality of human consciousness on its economic base thus determining

the realm of politics. She traces the genealogy of this argument in Marx to the history of western thought that overlooks the plurality of the consequences of human action and thought (Arendt 1958 [2013]). This criticism does not just address Marx but in general western political thought.<sup>3</sup> She argues that from Plato onwards political philosophers have believed that the fundamental condition of politics is that it happens among plural human beings, where each human being can act and probably start something new or probably contribute to something existing with a new formative approach. The plural and diverse approaches to thought and interaction give rise to conditions that are contingent and unpredictable (Arendt 1958 [2013]).

Margaret Canovan argued:

This train of thought about the difference between morality for individuals and institutional structures for plural political beings is intrinsically connected with another set of reflections... Besides the unfinished book on Marxism and totalitarianism, another of the books that Arendt projected but never actually produced was to have started from her examination in *The Human Condition* of the basic human activities and gone on to rethink the main political concepts and political institutions in the light of human plurality. The fact that 'men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world had been systematically ignored by a tradition of political philosophy dominated by the single vision of philosophers. It seemed to Arendt, however, that since that tradition was broken it had become possible to recover the political experiences of plurality, and

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<sup>3</sup> Though the recent findings and interpretations of Arendt's thoughts on Marx help us to understand the rigorous engagement she had with Marx both on agreements as well as apprehensions about his thoughts.

Geoffrey Wildanger writes:

"The new volume "The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragmente eines Buchs" edited by Barbara Hahn and James McFarland, with Ingo Kieslich and Ingeborg Nordmann on Marx will force scholars to reevaluate some of their presuppositions. By arranging some essays that Arendt ultimately published, such as "Understanding and Politics," within their chronological context along unpublished pieces, such as "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought: The Modern Challenge to Tradition," the editors piece together the material for a book length study that ventures into the profound territory lying in between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. The book makes clear Arendt's deep regard for, and apprehension at, the revolutionary claims of Marxism. Like Marx, Arendt understands revolution to be the product of the disjuncture between modernity's ideals of justice and equality and the realities of capitalism. Like Marx, she recognizes the "mute violence" of the marketplace. Nonetheless, she doubts Marxism can avoid the Büchner problem: the terrors of revolutionary violence. Occasionally she remains stuck in the clichés of Cold War polemic, and here her reading of Marx can be weak. But where she breaks with this blindness, she develops brilliant insights". [Please see: <https://bostonreview.net/articles/geoffrey-wildanger-hannah-arendt-marx-and-mute-violence-modern-society/>]

above all the implications of the space that forms between plural human beings. Seen within that space rather than in the mind of a single philosopher, a great many crucial political concepts look quite different, for example power and consent, freedom and authority, equality and citizenship (Canovan 1994: 15)

For Arendt the consideration of the practical aspects of politics involving both agreement and disagreement among a multiplicity of actors or the opinion of any single individual is often not taken into account in political theory. Her approach towards political philosophy is not traditional where in political prescriptions are shored up by substantial philosophical arguments. She denied that she was a ‘political philosopher’ and considered herself a ‘political theorist’ in the strictest sense of the word. For Arendt, the plurality of thought and action remain the two distinct aspects of the realm of the political. Arendt’s attempt at understanding ‘The Human Condition’ since the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* sought a different and complex formulation of modern societies.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand she developed a phenomenological explanation of human activity and of modernity at the dawn of the space age where human beings had transcended the terrestrial sphere. She discusses the arrival of the age of automation characterised by efficient and advanced systems of production and consumption where we would think of living beings as ‘animal species’ regulated and governed by natural laws. This regulation by natural laws will make it not only difficult but impossible to protect the earth from totalitarian forms of power (Arendt 1958 [1973]). Arendt combines the dialectical relationship between human activity through phenomenological and historical analysis of automated modern societies. This analysis forms the basis of her thesis on totalitarianism.

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<sup>4</sup> The Human Condition lays stress on Arendt's account of the human capacity for action. “Since the book is placed with criticism of modern society, it is tempting to suppose that she intended to present a Utopia of political action, a kind of New Athens. Nor is this caricature entirely without foundation. Arendt was certainly drawn to participatory democracy, and was an enthusiastic observer of outbreaks of civic activity ranging from American demonstrations against the Vietnam War to the formation of grassroots citizens' "councils" during the short-lived Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Reminding us that the capacity to act is present even in unlikely circumstances was certainly one of her purposes. But she emphatically denied that her role as a political thinker was to propose a blueprint for the future or to tell anyone what to do” ( Introduction by Margaret Canovan in *The Human Condition* by Arendt 2013 [1958]: viii).

Arendt wrote:

In the imperialistic epoch a philosophy of power became the philosophy of the elite, who quickly discovered and were quite ready to admit that the thirst for power could be quenched only through destruction. This was the essential cause of their nihilism (especially conspicuous in France at the turn, and in Germany in the twenties, of this century) which replaced the superstition of progress with the equally vulgar superstition of doom, and preached automatic annihilation with the same enthusiasm that the fanatics of automatic progress had preached the irresistibility of economic laws. It had taken Hobbes, the great idolator of Success, three centuries to succeed. This was partly because the French Revolution, with its conception of man as lawmaker and citizen, had almost succeeded in preventing the bourgeoisie from fully developing its notion of history as a necessary process. But it was also partly because of the revolutionary implications of the Commonwealth, its fearless breach with Western tradition, which Hobbes did not fail to point out.

Every man and every thought which does not serve and does not conform to the ultimate purpose of a machine whose only purpose is the generation and accumulation of power is a dangerous nuisance (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 144)

In addition, Arendt develops a historical understanding of the evolution of knowledge and its organisation in terms of its content and methods. This approach is to situate modern knowledge forms within the project of modernity. After all, Arendt seeks to understand what it is about modern knowledge that sustains totalitarianism as an unprecedented phenomenon in human history. Thus Arendt wrote:

The positivists' conviction, as we know it from Comte, that the future is eventually scientifically predictable, rests on the evaluation of interest as an all-pervasive force in history and the assumption that objective laws of power can be discovered. Rohan's political theory that "the kings command the peoples and the interest commands the king," that objective interest is the rule "that alone can never fail," that "rightly or wrongly understood, the interest makes governments live or die" is the traditional core of modern utilitarianism, positivist or socialist, but none of these theories assumes that it is possible "to transform the nature of man" as totalitarianism indeed tries

to do. On the contrary, they all implicitly or explicitly assume that human nature is always the same, that history is the story of changing objective circumstances and the human reactions to them, and that interest, rightly understood, may lead to a change of circumstances, but not to a change of human reactions as such. "Scientism" in politics still presupposes that human welfare is its object, a concept which is utterly alien to totalitarianism. It is precisely because the utilitarian core of ideologies was taken for granted that the anti-utilitarian behavior of totalitarian governments, their complete indifference to mass interest, has been such a shock. This introduced into contemporary politics an element of unheard-of unpredictability.....Since virtually all of European history through many centuries had taught people to judge each political action by its *cui bono* and all political events by their particular underlying interests, they were suddenly confronted with an element of unprecedented unpredictability (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 347-348).

The paradox is that her intellectual development is anchored in the predicaments of modernity and her reading of the events of the past seems to be guided by a deeply historical understanding (Benhabib 2000). After escaping from Germany, Hannah Arendt embarked upon understanding totalitarianism and the question of 'the human condition' for the next three decades. What remained significant for Arendt was the thought that modern societies that had claimed to advance on the wave of scientific development and values had turned on themselves. Margaret Canovan argued:

The implications of scientific progress strike Arendt as being heavily paradoxical, producing both power and helplessness, freedom and determinism. Even at a theoretical level science has in a sense been self-defeating. Ever since Galileo's telescope showed that although nature cannot be trusted to reveal truth of its own accord, it can be trapped by man-made instruments, experimental science has become more and more ingenious in its devices for penetrating beneath the deceptive surface of things. The difficulty is that as experimental techniques become more and more elaborate, so the true reality they are intended to uncover seems to recede from us. All the scientists can actually hope to discover is a set of measurements recorded by sophisticated instruments which have been designed to test specific theories. Arendt continually quotes the physicist Heisenberg to the effect that in modern science, instead of uncovering reality, 'man encounters only himself. For all its immense achievements, science therefore puts man back . . . into the prison of his own mind, into the limitations of patterns he himself created. A vivid

symbol of this predicament is the astronaut himself, for he sets out on his heroic voyage of exploration cut off from the universe by the very scientific paraphernalia that makes it possible for him to explore it, imprisoned in his instrument ridden capsule where each actual physical encounter with his surroundings would spell immediate death (Canovan 1994: 81).

Arendt's criticism of scientific progress became more insightful following her review of Dewey's book *Problems of Men*. Her criticism of scientific development also resonated with earlier writings of Max Weber in the context of bureaucratic and instrumental rationality. Arendt wrote:

Until now the totalitarian belief that everything is possible seems to have proved only that everything can be destroyed. Yet, in their effort to prove that everything is possible, totalitarian regimes have discovered without knowing it that there are crimes which men can neither punish nor forgive. When the impossible was made possible it became the unpunishable, unforgivable absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice; and which therefore anger could not revenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive. Just as the victims in the death factories or the holes of oblivion are no longer "human" in the eyes of their executioners, so this newest species of criminals is beyond the pale even of solidarity in human sinfulness (Arendt 1958[1973]: 459).

### **Arendt and the Problem of 'Radical Evil'**

Peter Baehr citing Arendt states that in any modern non totalitarian society the location of prisoners is known to their families. Their death could be evidenced by their bodies and marked by a grave. What was new and never occurred before in history was the idea that concentration and extermination camps engulfed human beings into a "hole of oblivion" from which any their existence could never be traced (Baehr 2010:13). The new location of the individual and the group was outside the law ( in the context of Jews as Arendt stated). They were not anymore within the ambit of the law, history or society.

Baehr writes:

“Karl Popper once distinguished between two kinds of scientific prediction: the prediction of “events of a kind which is known, such as eclipses or thunderstorms,” and the prediction of “new kinds of events (which the physicist calls ‘new effects’)”. In sociology, we can predict only what we already, in some sense, know: a preestablished series of mechanisms. Totalitarianism, Arendt suggested, was outside the range of our previous experience, norms, judgments — and science” (Baehr 2010: 189-190)

Arendt argued that in sociology prediction was possible only when we have at least some sense of the phenomena which Baehr referred as ‘preestablished sense of mechanism’ (Baehr 2010: 190). Daniel Bell in his work titled “Ten Theories in search of social reality: The Prediction of Social Behaviour in the Social Sciences” explored the proposition that totalitarianism completely atomizes any society and keeps it in a state of continued turbulence and upheaval. Bell asked this question if any society can live in a permanent state of crisis? Is it possible if this continuing crisis can hold a rigid posture without exploding into a war-like situation at one end or relaxing at the other end?( Bell 1958). Personal security determines the basis of all social life where minimum conditions of normality are expected to exist: for example, parents consider that their children be taught, develop their learning process, careers, life and so forth. Thus, there is a functional process of normalisation in society that perpetuates a state of crisis-totalitarianism (Baehr 2010).

Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism highlighted three advanced forms of claims compared to other responses when the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was initially published. From Arendt’s perspective, totalitarianism was a radically new phenomenon. The attempt to trace the genealogy of totalitarianism is a problematic one and is profoundly mistaken. Similarly, any intention to draw analogies with Caesarism, Bonapartism and any other dictatorial or tyrannical regimes did not fit the bill (Baehr and Richter 2004; Baehr 2010). She argued that both National Socialism

and Bolshevism were two distinct phenomena and were not previously known in human history (Baehr 2010).

Thus Baehr and Richter argue:

She [Arendt] perceived that the concepts of Bonapartism, Caesarism, and even of dictatorship itself were completely inadequate for understanding the enormities perpetrated in Europe before and during World War II. Moreover, though the Axis had been defeated, the world was still threatened by Stalinism, a regime with disturbing parallels to National Socialism. The concept Arendt deployed to describe both systems was “totalitarianism.” She assiduously sought to avoid the simplifications the Cold War brought to the discussion of this notion. Arendt confined the term to the twin regimes of Hitler and Stalin and emphasised their unprecedented character. (She described the post-Stalin Soviet Union as a one-party dictatorship; of Maoism she knew little.) She also defined totalitarianism in a way markedly different from most of her contemporaries. Totalitarianism, Arendt argued, was a system of domination quintessentially typified by “motion” rather than by Gleichschaltung (synchronization), by unceasing turbulence rather than by a centralized, all-controlling state (Baehr and Richter 2004: 20).

Arendt disagreed with Franz Neuman’s suggestion that ‘totalitarian dictatorship’ was an ancient phenomenon going back to the Spartan state or the Roman imperial regime of Diocletian (Baehr 2010:11). Neuman had also emphasised that National Socialism resuscitated the fourteenth-century method of ‘fascist dictatorship’ of the Roman demagogue Cola di Rienzo. Thus Arendt argued:

The problem with totalitarian regimes is not that they play power politics in an especially ruthless way, but that behind their politics is hidden an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power, just as behind their Realpolitik lies an entirely new and unprecedented concept of reality. Supreme disregard for immediate consequences rather than ruthlessness; rootlessness and neglect of national interests rather than nationalism; contempt for utilitarian motives rather than unconsidered pursuit of self-interest; “idealism,”- i.e., their unwavering faith in an ideological fictitious world, rather than lust for power—these have all introduced into international politics a new and more disturbing factor than mere aggressiveness would have been able to do (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 417-418).



From the Arendtian perspective, the second defining characteristic of totalitarianism is coupled rootlessness and radicalization. The concept of ‘total domination’ in the context of shapelessness and radicalization was associated with a state of ‘permanent revolution’ and a global rule (Arendt 1958 [1973]).

Arendt wrote:

“As techniques of government, the totalitarian devices appear simple and ingeniously effective. They assure not only an absolute power monopoly, but unparalleled certainty that all commands will always be carried out; the multiplicity of the transmission belts, the confusion of the hierarchy, secure the dictator's complete independence of all his inferiors and make possible the swift and surprising changes in policy for which totalitarianism has become famous. The body politic of the country is shock-proof because of its shapelessness” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 408-409).

Arendt argued that the purpose was to achieve full control of the state along with a discontinued movement towards world domination (Arendt 1958 [1973]). Arendt argued with regard to the ‘shapelessness’ of the totalitarian governments and highlighted the observation of several other thinkers. Thomas Masaryk had argued that the so-called “Bolshevik system has never been anything but a complete absence of a system” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 395). He further argued that “even an expert would be driven mad if he tried to unravel the relationships between party and state” in the Third Reich (ibid). Thus, totalitarian regimes do not stabilise and the central focus remains to acquire complete control of the state. There is a continuous attempt to mobilise and develop ‘crowd psychology’ among the people. The laws of history were determined by the quest for totalitarian domination through racial justification. In the case of Nazi Germany, these objectives were realized by the quest for totalitarian domination through racial persecution (Arendt 1958 [1973]).

Thus in her extensive discussion on the Dreyfus affair and the efforts of Emile Zola, Arendt wrote:

“Men have been found to resist the most powerful monarchs and to refuse to bow down before them, but few indeed have been found to resist the crowd, to stand up alone before misguided masses, to face their implacable frenzy without weapons and with folded arms to dare a no when a yes is demanded. Such a man was Zola!” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 114).

From Arendt’s perspective mob mentality was not unique for the first time and thus her purpose was to investigate the growth of the ‘modern mob’. Totalitarian regimes attempted to bolster mob mentality in order to strengthen their position. The will of leaders in the name of the people was invoked for all kinds of ideological and racist programmes in an attempt to purify society of contaminating agents (1958 [1973]). Arendt’s characterization was in accordance with a few other academic accounts of totalitarianism at the time. For example, Franz Neumann in his work *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944* published in 1942 had discussed the idea of a ‘movement state’ with regard to the ‘Third Reich’ (Neumann 1942 [2009]). Similarly, Ernst Fraenkel in his work *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (1941 [2018]) discussed how “the normal functions of the legal and administrative apparatus were constantly undermined by party ‘prerogative’”(Baehr 2010:12)

Another significant feature of totalitarianism central to Arendt’s writings is its unfamiliar and unique combination of terror and ideology. Those who act as opponents of totalitarianism soon are found to be victims. The victimisation of opponents are justified on their being the - ““enemies of the people” or “objective enemies”—“dying classes” or “decadent races” whose historical fate has been determined to disappear from the face of the earth (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 468).

Thus Arendt wrote:

The inhabitants of a totalitarian country are thrown into and caught in the process of nature or history for the sake of accelerating its movement; as such, they can only be executioners or

victims of its inherent law. The process may decide that those who today eliminate races and individuals or the members of dying classes and decadent peoples are tomorrow those who must be sacrificed. What totalitarian rule needs to guide the behavior of its subjects is a preparation to fit each of them equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation, the substitute for a principle of action, is the ideology (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 468)

From Arendt's perspective, the idea of oblivion is employed with reference to someone or a group that is erased from the earth. It is different from the death of an individual who was killed in a criminal act. In this manner, Arendt attempts to grapple with the oblivion of millions as if those consigned to oblivion never existed on earth (Arendt 1958[1973]: 157).

Thus, totalitarianism is different from other forms of political oppression and tyranny like despotism or dictatorship, in that it was the first of its kind as a political system. It emerged as a new political system by destroying all existing forms of social, political and legal association. Totalitarian regimes significantly transformed class movements into mass movements, completely disrupted or destroyed the multiparty-system, where one-party dictatorship was accompanied by mass movements (Arendt 1958 [1973]). It further led to the formulation of foreign and international policies whose central aim was world domination. Irrespective of a particular ideology or group of ideologies dominant in a country, totalitarianism succeeded in dismantling all forms of ideological norms and values once it occupied a central position in the polity of any country (ibid).

From the standpoint of social theory, it is possible to argue that Arendt's concern was to understand totalitarianism as a social system. Margret Canovan argued that Arendt believed that existing forms of understanding like Bonapartism and Caesarism or other forms of dictatorship were inadequate to understand what had happened to Europe in terms of political, cultural and economic devastation and depravity (Canovan 1994). Even after the end of the second world war anxieties made way for psychological and cultural trauma, collective trauma and prolonged fear of Stalinism and National Socialism continued to persist. After observing the twin regimes of Stalin and Hitler, Arendt categorised both as 'totalitarian'. According to her historical

perspective, there never existed any parallel or similar or equivalent of what began during the interwar period and during the second world war. She contested views that claimed or attempted to draw parallels with any other regime, event or phase of human history. Her problem was “how to write historically about something – totalitarianism — which I did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy” (Arendt cited by Seyla Benhabib 2000: 87).

Margret Canovan argued that Arendt deliberately adopted a fragmented approach to trace the different genealogies of totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century, in order to understand “the elements which crystallised into totalitarianism” rather than attempting to write a history of totalitarianism in particular (Canovan 1994:17). This approach had to do with the fact that the text *The origins of totalitarianism* did not belong to any particular genre.

Thus Canovan argued:

....the difficulties presented by Totalitarianism go much deeper than these questions of method. The case is not simply that Arendt used an idiosyncratic method to deal with a subject that was in itself unambiguous, but rather that there are problems in grasping what the book is actually about. The bewildered reader, picking his way through dazzlingly complex analyses of Disraeli, the British Empire, the philosophy of Hobbes, the idea of human rights, and all the rest of this extraordinary book, may feel that if (as Arendt wrote to Voegelin) 'the elementary structure of totalitarianism is the hidden structure of the book', then the author has hidden it rather too well. In particular, it is hard at first reading to understand the relations between the book's three parts, subtitled 'Antisemitism', 'Imperialism' and 'Totalitarianism'. Writing to Karl Jaspers while she was in the process of trying to complete the undertaking, Arendt herself remarked that what she was producing was really three books rather than one, although she could not separate them without obscuring the political argument of the work (Canovan 1994:18).

One of the reasons for not coming to terms with *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was especially because it does not relate to any particular genre. Richard Bernstein argued that Arendt cannot be categorised or fit into a particular mode of thinking in terms of philosophical, methodological, theoretical and ideological frames. Seyla Benhabib with reference to Arendt's text

‘totalitarianism’ argues that “it is too systematically ambitious and overinterpreted to be strictly a historical account; it is too anecdotal, narrative and ideographic to be considered social science; and although it has the vivacity and the stylistic flair of a work of political journalism, it is too philosophical to be accessible to a broad public” (Benhabib 2000:63).

Thus reflecting on one of the first reviews of the book by political philosopher Eric Voegelin, Benhabib writes:

“...one of the first reviewers of this work, political philosopher Eric Voegelin, maintained that the arrangement of the book was "roughly chronological," and that it was "an attempt to make contemporary phenomena intelligible by tracing their origin back to the eighteenth century, thus establishing a time unit in which the essence of totalitarianism unfolded to its fullness." Voegelin's interpretation of Arendt's thesis as one of *Geschichtsphilosophie* no doubt was more indebted to the curious distortions caused by his own hermeneutic lens; nonetheless, his question about the unity of the work, which prompted one of Arendt's infrequent attempts at methodological self-clarification, is a justified one (Benhabib 2000: 63).

The shift from writing about Nazism to develop a theory of totalitarianism is visible in the organisation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The experience of the violence and statelessness inflicted by National Socialism were central to her experiential understanding of the world particularly from 1932-33. It included several historical and contemporary events which might be responsible for the age of totalitarianism in different ways. Reflecting on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she clarified that she had never thought of writing a comprehensive history of the phenomena - ‘totalitarianism’ or even anti-semitism. Her decision was to write about the elements which often exist in fragmented ways of thought that might have led to the phenomena of ‘totalitarianism’. The purpose according for Arendt was not to explain ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘anti-semitism’ from a historian’s perspective. On the contrary, the attempt was to understand the constellation of events that made both ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘anti-Semitism’ possible. These factors included racism, imperialism, expansion for expansion’s sake, new forms of mobilisation

in the form of mass and crowd societies, movement states and many others (Arendt 1958 [1973]).

Thus Arendt wrote:

“Antisemitism (not merely the hatred of Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship)-one after the other, one more brutally than the other, have demonstrated that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities” (Arendt 1958[1973]: ix)

These different factors are welded into a polity that created the totalitarian regime. What is of importance here is to understand how these welded elements become crucial for the development of a social system in which ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘antisemitism’ become a form of life? To understand the rise of totalitarianism historically one cannot appeal to any preexisting social system, but a combination of preexisting elements. This unique political formation in the life of the society is founded on the principle of the denial of freedom following extremely radical methods to emerge as a new form of total domination (Arendt 1958 [1973]; Keedus 2015).

This new form of domination based on ‘ideology and terror’ could not be explained with traditional or classical understanding of political philosophy or political theory. This unconventional and unprecedented form of government did not depend on traditional standards of political action and thinking and could not provide a framework to grapple with the events of the interwar period and second world war in particular. This political regime drawing upon the resources of modern political life including technology led to the concentration camps and gas chambers which made ‘oblivion’ a possibility (Arendt 1958[1973]; Birmingham 2003; Schoonheim 2018).

Arendt's political thought in the aftermath of the holocaust was based on the vision of 'Rights to have Rights'. And even amidst the most uncertain times, one must have the 'rights to have rights' (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 296).

Arendt argued:

The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice, or when one is placed in a situation where, unless he commits a crime, his treatment by others does not depend on what he does or does not do. This extremity, and nothing else, is the situation of people deprived of human rights. They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion. Privileges in some cases, injustices in most, blessings and doom are meted out to them according to accident and without any relation whatsoever to what they do, did, or may do.

We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 296-297).

She believed that modernity cannot rely upon a contingent understanding of the world. Modernity as a critical perspective based on humanism was more than a contrast between action and determinism (Canovan 1994: 11). Thus, the critique of modernity in Arendt's writings dealing with the 'special danger of modernity' concerned "... those who felt the impulse to act tended to look for some kind of irresistible trend to side with, some natural or historical force with which they could throw in their lot. She would later diagnose this as the fundamental sin of totalitarianism, but it was a danger that she saw on all sides. As she would suggest that if man made himself the 'tool of natural laws', and evades his human responsibility 'of creating laws

himself and even prescribing them to nature', he turns himself into an agent of the 'natural law of ruin' that threatens everything human beings have made" (ibid).

The quest for power in modern men has become so crucial that they are ready to side with the inhumane at the risk of whatever we have achieved in the collective political life of society. This is to say that human societies across time and space and the notion of freedom that has been achieved have run into a completely new threat. This new threat or in the words of Arendt herself, 'Terror', marks a new encounter in the age of modernity. Even the age of modernity could not eliminate the extreme supernatural kind of belief that there exist natural forces which traverse a particular path of destruction and cannot be resisted. Such beliefs ultimately nudge societies towards totalitarian regimes (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 382). This transition is led by the belief that 'everything is possible' based on hubris.

Arendt wrote:

A mixture of gullibility and cynicism had been an outstanding characteristic of mob mentality before it became an everyday phenomenon of masses. In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true. The mixture in itself was remarkable enough, because it spelled the end of the illusion that gullibility was a weakness of unsuspecting primitive souls and cynicism the vice of superior and refined minds. Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow. The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness (Arendt 1958[1973]: 382).



This thinking that ‘everything is possible’ is itself part of non-thinking breaking all kinds of stability, plurality and human quest for liberation: “everything that is genuinely human”(Canovan 1994: 11). This non-thinking is reflective of the idea that someone in command thinks and wills and then imposes both by depriving the community of reflecting upon the same through persuasion, propaganda and violence. This especially happens when the individual in command is in the position of political authority. Arendt had stated that “Hitler, however, was of the opinion that even "thinking ... [exists] only by virtue of giving or executing orders, and thereby eliminated even theoretically the distinction between thinking and acting on one hand, and between the rulers and the ruled on the other” (Arendt 1958[1973]: 325-326). Arendt’s writing during this period is concerned with the whole of humanity and Jews in particular in order to take the responsibility for the political world they belong to. For her [Arendt], the action of thinking is not merely an act of rationality but also an act of morality. Arendt’s political message in the ‘Origins’ is to recognize and confront the political realities of the day and face them. The historical condition of the Jews without a state - living as pariahs in other nations robbed them of any sense of political realism. It was against this established form of political realism among Jews for which Arendt proposed political commitment to be the only way of belonging to the world. Political commitment for Arendt entailed taking responsibility against so-called ‘natural forces’ and facing political reality (Arendt 1958 [1973]). This political engagement is central to our belongingness to this world and in particular for the pariahs of the world. If Durkheim thought about collective consciousness in thinking about modern society at the turn of the twentieth century, then in the second half of the twentieth century we come to encounter Bourdieu’s collective unconscious. The question is also at one level how the collective unconscious influenced the age of totalitarianism? The writings on ‘totalitarianism’ have remained a site of ideational contestation from historical, sociological and cultural perspectives.

Jerome Kohn writes:

“Arendt was neither a nihilist nor an amoralist, but a thinker who followed where her thinking led.....It is not theoretical solutions she advances but an abundance of incentives to think for oneself. She found immensely significant Tocqueville’s insight that when in times of crisis or

genuine turning points “ the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity.” At such moments ( and to her the present was such a moment), she found the mind’s obscurity to be the clearest indication of the need to consider a new meaning of human responsibility and the power of human judgement” (Introduction by Kohn in Arendt 2003: xi).

Arendt discusses the issue of human responsibility and human judgement within a moral framework. She recollects that during her young student days she was not preoccupied with moral concerns. Arguing on Kantian lines, Arendt argued that moral conduct guides ‘man’ to have duties first towards himself and then towards others (Arendt 2003).

Thus she wrote: “ Man ....seems to depend primarily upon the intercourse of man with himself” (Arendt 2003: 67).

Kant believed that man should not create an exception for himself. He should not place himself in a situation where he would have to despise himself. But as known through Arendt’s writings that totalitarianism “defied and despised” human’s ability to reason in the process completely demolishing existing categories of legal, moral and political thinking, understanding and judgement. It destroyed the intelligible fabric of established notions of human freedom and human experiences. The social and scientific experiments conducted by Nazis generated new destructive methods to destroy and eliminate human beings as if they never existed. This kind of evil destructiveness Arendt argued was unprecedented in human history. For the first time, new approaches were developed to completely destroy this new world through ‘total domination’ (Arendt 1958 [1973]). Even Nietzsche who had philosophically engaged with the question of morality and evil was oblivious of the “ radical evil” of totalitarian domination of the twentieth century, as Arendt called. This form of destructiveness was unknown to Nietzsche or anyone who had come before and discussed the phenomena of human evil (Arendt 2003).

In the section on ‘total domination’ in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt wrote:

The concentration and extermination of camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief in totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified. Compared with this, all other experiments are secondary in importance - including those in the field of medicine whose horrors are recorded in detail in the trails against the physicians of the Third Reich - although it is characteristic that these laboratories were used for experiments of every kind.....Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never - changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other. The problem is to fabricate something that does not exist, namely, a kind of human species resembling other animal species whose only "freedom" would consist in "preserving the species".....The problem is to fabricate something that does not exist, namely, a kind of human species resembling other animal species whose only "freedom" would consist in "preserving the species."....The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not...(Arendt 1958 [1973]: 437-438).

It has been pointed out that Arendt, in a way, not only inaugurated the systematic approach to study the nature of 'evil' but also came to be the most consistent thinker on the 'radical nature of evil' in the twentieth century (Arendt 1958 [1973]). Arendt wrote in the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

....it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil....We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape, from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain (Arendt 1958 [1973]: viii-ix)

Evidently, addressing the 'radical nature of evil' was not an issue addressed within the social sciences nor articulated with social theory and nor how social scientists could not think of 'normal' society to transform into a totalitarian one? How should we understand the limitations of social sciences in particular to think about totalitarian forms of domination? Why has the social sciences been hesitant to study the 'evil' in modern societies?

Arendt further argued:

“The totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination has been the destructive way out of all impasses. Its victory may coincide with the destruction of humanity; wherever it has ruled, it has begun to destroy the essence of man. Yet to turn our back on the destructive forces of the century is of little avail” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: viii).

### **Social Sciences and the Question of Evil**

Evil was normally a subject of discussion within theology or morality and ethics but never one addressed sufficiently in the social sciences. Jeffrey Alexander highlights that moral and ethical life has been a crucial concern from the Greek onwards. Plato spoke about a good and just society. At the same time evil has received some attention in these thoughts to protect the moral and ethical life of society (Alexander 2013).

Alexander writes:

“ In dramatizing Socrates' teachings in *The Republic*, Plato made use of the figure of Thrasymachus to articulate the evil forces threatening ethical life. Rather than suggesting that Thrasymachus embodied bad values, Plato (1965: 18) presented Thrasymachus as denying the existence of values as such.....The commitment to values is the same as the commitment to collective beliefs, and beliefs and values are the path to the good. Evil should be understood not as the product of bad or negative values, but as the failure to connect to collective values. Evil comes from being self-interested” (Alexander 2013: 104).

Alexander argues:

“The social sciences have not given evil its due. Social evil has not been sufficiently respected; it has been deprived of intellectual attention. Evil is a powerful and sui generis social force. It deserves to be studied in a direct and systematic way.” (Alexander 2013: 99)

Arendt stated in 1945:

“...The problem of evil will be the fundamental question of post-war intellectual life in Europe...” (Arendt 1945 [1994]): 134)

The problem of social evil as articulated by Alexander was raised by Ambedkar from a cultural perspective . Ambedkar believed that religion (with reference to Hinduism) was to be “ a code of ordinances” that is misrepresented to people depriving them of “moral life of freedom and spontaneity” (Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]:76). This deprivation of moral freedom is tantamount to “reducing it (for the conscientious, at any rate) to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. Under it, there is no loyalty to ideals; there is only conformity to commands” (ibid).

### **Ambedkar and the Question of Evil**

Ambedkar engaged not only with the culture but drew on historical research to elaborate upon evil especially in the context of the continuity of the caste as an evil cultural phenomenon on which the religion of Hinduism is based (Parvathamma 1989).

Ambedkar argued:

...the worst evil of this code of ordinances is that the laws it contains must be the same yesterday, today, and forever. They are iniquitous in that they are not the same for one class as for another. But this iniquity is made perpetual in that they are prescribed to be the same for all generations.

The objectionable part of such a scheme is not that they are made by certain persons called Prophets or Law-givers. The objectionable part is that this code has been invested with the character of finality and fixity. Happiness notoriously varies with the conditions and circumstances of a person, as well as with the conditions of different people and epochs. That being the case, how can humanity endure this code of eternal laws, without being cramped and without being crippled?(Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]: 76).

Ambedkar believed that social and cultural forces inherent in the Hindu system would never allow the “untouchables”, non-upper caste groups and women to think of freedom from the evil forces that are based on denial of freedom to these groups. These evil cultural and social systems acting like strong social forces continued to reproduce the social hierarchy in the collective life of society. Ambedkar goes on to assert :

“ ..... it is necessary to take note of the kind of social reform which the reformers were agitating for. In this connection it is necessary to make a distinction between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu family, and social reform in the sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu Society. The former has a relation to widow remarriage, child marriage, etc., while the latter relates to the abolition of the Caste System....political reform did in fact gain precedence over social reform. But the argument has this much value if not more. It explains why social reformers lost the battle. It also helps us to understand how limited was the victory which the Political Reform Party obtained over the Social Reform Party and that the view that social reform need not precede political reform is a view which may stand only when by social reform is meant the reform of the family. That political reform cannot with impunity take precedence over social reform in the sense of reconstruction of society is a thesis which, I am sure, cannot be controverted (Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]: 41-42).

Criticising the social conference organised by the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal<sup>5</sup> Ambedkar sought to broaden the scope of social reform particularly. He argued:

The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high-caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high-caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of Caste, or had not the courage to agitate for it. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages, etc.—evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu Society. The battle that was fought centered round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to social reform in the sense of the break-up of the Caste System (Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]:41-42).

“Annihilation of caste” as a text is a move towards the idea of social democracy that is an essential condition for any political democracy to survive. Ambedkar's concern about the failure of political reform is enriched by debates on democracy within pragmatism and his own reading of the ‘American Revolution’ and ‘French Revolution’ (Ambedkar 1936-1937[1979/2014]). Ambedkar was aware that merely seeking freedom from British Colonialism would not mean freedom for the majority of the population and especially the “untouchables” and other minorities of Indian society who lacked social, political and even economic power. The caste Hindus would continue their domination and control over the rest of the groups even if India

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<sup>5</sup> In December 1935, the Jat Pat Todak Mandal, an organisation dedicated to the abolition of caste and untouchability, invited forty-five-year-old Bhimrao Ambedkar to deliver its annual keynote lecture in the northern Indian city of Lahore. But later the organisation cancelled the invitation considering the radical views of Ambedkar. Aishwarya Kumar writes “Despite serious misgivings about the Mandal’s liberal reformist methods and susceptibility to conservative Hindu opinion, Ambedkar accepted their invitation. Having by now freed himself decisively from the fundamental impasse of his time—the claim of abstract equality between India and Europe on which nationalists of various persuasions had mounted their demand for freedom from the empire for more than two generations—Ambedkar envisioned the lecture giving him a proper stage to formulate the conditions of another freedom, another equality, perhaps another politics for colonial India altogether. As news of his imminent visit to the Punjab spread, however, office bearers of majoritarian and extremist organizations such as the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha mounted pressure, rebuking the Mandal for having chosen Ambedkar as the speaker for their annual event and asking it to withdraw the invitation. The Mandal initially resisted the reactionary offensive. But by April 1936, it began to insist that Ambedkar allow copies of his lecture to be printed in Lahore, where they could potentially limit its impact and distribution, rather than in Bombay, where they would have no control over the text’s circulation. Ambedkar, already put off by a series of ambiguous messages from the Mandal, refused to concede ground. By May 1936, his presidential lecture had been successfully killed. Its theme would have been the annihilation of caste” (Kumar 2015: 5).

would gain freedom from British Colonialism. The argument extends to his engagement with the question of ‘force’ commencing with Ambedkar’s with his reading of Bertrand Russell’s text *The Reconstruction of Society* which he had reviewed in the year 1917 during his studies in London.

The social forces of evil like the caste system dominate and persist in society and pose impediments for the institutionalisation of democracy. Following Mill’s argument Ambedkar reiterated that if one country is not fit to rule another country then one class is also not fit to rule another class (Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]:41).

Referring to the writings of Ferdinand Lassalle Ambedkar emphasised:

...the makers of political constitutions must take account of social forces is a fact which is recognized by no less a person than Ferdinand Lassalle, the friend and co-worker of Karl Marx. In addressing a Prussian audience in 1862, Lassalle had said:

The constitutional questions are in the first instance not questions of right but questions of might. The actual constitution of a country has its existence only in the actual condition of force which exists in the country: hence political constitutions have value and permanence only when they accurately express those conditions of forces which exist in practice within a society” (Lassalle cited by Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]: 42)

The struggle to create a ‘society of equals’<sup>6</sup> remained at the core of democratic struggle during the already on-going freedom struggle movement against British Colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. The struggle against the evils of the caste system during the anticolonial struggle challenged the demand for an inegalitarian form of freedom that the Indian National Congress, nationalists and conservatives were claiming for without giving any consideration to their evils of the caste system. Ambedkar’s writings in volume 9 entitled “What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables” in Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS) continues to

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<sup>6</sup> The expression has been borrowed from Pierre Rosanvallon’s *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)



stand as a testament to the view of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress against the political emancipation of the untouchables during the anti-colonial struggle in India:

Ambedkar wrote:

Mr. Gandhi's attitude towards Swaraj and the Untouchables resembles very much the attitude of President Lincoln towards the two questions of the Negroes and the Union. Mr. Gandhi wants Swaraj as did President Lincoln want Union. But he does not want Swaraj at the cost of disrupting the structure of Hinduism which is what political emancipation of the Untouchables means as President Lincoln did not want to free the slaves if it was not necessary to do so for the sake of the Union. There is of course this difference between Mr. Gandhi and President Lincoln. President Lincoln was prepared to emancipate the Negro slaves if it was necessary to preserve the Union. Mr. Gandhi's attitude is in marked contrast. He is not prepared for the political emancipation of the Untouchables even if it was essential for winning Swaraj. Mr. Gandhi's attitude is let Swaraj perish if the cost of it is the political freedom of the Untouchables (Ambedkar 1945-1946[1991]: 271)

Ambedkar further argued that M.K. Gandhi did not consider the untouchables "as a separate element in the national life of India" (Ambedkar 1945-1946 [1991]: 272), nor did he consider the political emancipation of the 'untouchables' ever since the Round Table Conference and even after the Poona pact (Ambedkar 1945-1946 [1991]).

Ambedkar wrote:

Mr. Gandhi's view and he still maintains the same attitude to the Untouchables' claim for political safeguards as he did at the Round Table Conference and before the Poona Pact. These grounds have their foundation in the fact that when His Majesty's Government declared in 1940 that the Untouchables are a separate element in the National life of India and that their consent to the Constitution is necessary Mr. Gandhi came out with a protest. When the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow referred to the Untouchables as a separate element and said that their consent to the Constitution was necessary, Mr. Gandhi said:

*"I felt that the putting up by the Viceroy, and then the Secretary of State of want of agreement by the Congress with the Princes, the Muslim League and even the Scheduled Classes as a barrier to the British recognition of India's right to freedom was more than unjust to the Congress and the people."*

*“The introduction of the Scheduled Classes in the controversy has made the unreality of the case of the British Government doubly unreal. They know that these are the special care of the Congress, and that the Congress is infinitely more capable of guarding their interests than the British Government. Moreover, the Scheduled Classes are divided into as many castes as the Caste Hindu Society. No single Scheduled classes member could possibly and truthfully represent the innumerable castes” (Gandhi cited here by Ambedkar 1945[1991]:272).<sup>7</sup>*

Ambedkar in his text entitled “Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables” highlights the views of M.K. Gandhi on caste around the year 1921-22 (Ambedkar 1945-1946 [1991]: 274-297). Ambedkar highlighted nine points on caste as mentioned by M.K. Gandhi in 1921-22 in a Gujarathi Journal called *Nava-Jivan*. These nine points mentioned Gandhi on caste were translated by Ambedkar and cited in the text “Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables”.

Ambedkar wrote:

To start with Mr. Gandhi’s teachings on social problem. Mr. Gandhi’s views on the caste system—which constitutes the main social problem in India—were fully elaborated by him in 1921-22 in a Gujarathi Journal called *Nava-Jivan*. The article is written in Gujarathi. I give below an English translation of his views as near as possible in his own words. Says Mr. Gandhi:

“1. I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste system”

“2. The seeds of Swaraj are to be found in the caste system. Different castes are like different sections of military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole...”

“3. A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique power of organization”.

“4. Caste has a ready made means for spreading primary education. Every caste can take the responsibility for the education of the children of the Caste. Caste has a political basis. It can work as an electorate for a representative body. Caste can perform judicial functions by electing persons to act as judges to decide disputes among members of the same caste. With castes it is easy to raise a defence force by requiring each caste to raise a brigade”.

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<sup>7</sup> Ambedkar cited M.K. Gandhi from *Harijan*, dated 13th October 1940.

“5. I believe that interdining or intermarriage are not necessary for promoting national unity. That dining together creates friendship is contrary to experience. If this was true there would have been no war in Europe ... Taking food is as dirty an act as answering the call of nature. The only difference is that after answering call of nature we get peace while after eating food we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of nature in seclusion so also the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion”.

“6. In India children of brothers do not intermarry. Do they cease to love because they do not intermarry ? Among the Vaishnavas many women are so orthodox that they will not eat with the members of the family nor will they drink water from a common water pot. Have they no love? The Caste system cannot be said to be bad because it does not allow interdining or intermarriage between different Castes.”

“7. Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning such caste restrictions as interdining and intermarriage”.

“8. To destroy caste system and adopt Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system. Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into a Brahmin”.

“9. The caste system is a natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. Other countries not having understood the utility of the Caste System it existed only in a loose condition and consequently those countries have not derived from Caste system the same degree of advantage which India has derived”.

These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the Caste System.”<sup>8</sup>

These views of Gandhi impacted on normalising caste not only among the common people of India but also among the elite-brahmanical intellectual and academic class who continue to

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<sup>8</sup> These points on caste were written by M.K.Gandhi in 1921-22 in a Gujarathi Journal called *Nava-Jivan*. The article was written in *Gujarathi*. It was reprinted in Vol. ‘II of the series called Gandhi Sikshan as No, 18. Ambedkar translated these points for his text entitled “Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables” (Ambedkar 1945-1946 [1991]: 275-276).

contribute to normalising caste through their texts and practices. The normalising of evil has been a significant subject of cultural studies concerned with what ought to be ‘good’ and ‘right’ in any society. The meaning of social evil and the efforts to confront it everywhere has been carried forward because of the modern pursuit of understanding, thinking and action following Arendt’s engagement with the question of ‘radical evil’ that continues to determine the collective life of the society.

### **Conclusion: Thinking about Evil**

Jeffrey Alexander argues:

“that for every value there is an equal and opposite antivalue, for every norm, an antinorm. For every effort to institutionalise comforting and inspiring images of the socially good and right, there is an interlinked and equally determined effort to construct social evil in horrendous, frightening, and equally realistic ways”(Alexander 2013: 102-103)

Jeffrey Alexander cited philosopher Georges Bataille:

“Evil seems to be understandable, but only to the extent to which Good is the key to it. If the luminous intensity of Good did not give the night of Evil its blackness, Evil would lose its appeal. This is a difficult point to understand. Something flinches in him who faces up to it. And yet we know that the strongest effects on the sense are caused by contrasts . . . Without misfortune, bound to it as shade is to light, indifferences would correspond to happiness. Novels describe suffering, hardly ever satisfaction. The virtue of happiness is ultimately its rarity. Were it easily accessible it would be despised and associated with boredom . . . Would truth be what it is if it did not assert itself generously against falsehood?” (Bataille cited by Jeffrey Alexander 2013:103)

Arendt in her work *Banality of Evil* published initially as a report in *The New York Times*, pointed out how the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann’s participation in the holocaust as an

everyday form of official procedure towards achieving the goals of any particular policy. He failed to think about the consequences of this everyday bureaucratic work after achieving a banal form of evil and thus could not think through the meaning of his actions (Arendt 1963 [1994]). Arendt had considered Eichman not to be just a bureaucrat who was aware only of the administrative official language. He was also someone: “ a product of good German schools capable of quoting Kant and a man who held his job because of his logistical expertise. His participation in great political crimes thus flew in the face of the old idea that Bildung provided moral improvement and refined the faculty of judgement” (Wurgaft 2016:159)

It is on this ground of expertise, Arendt found the intrusion of experts into political life problematic. Experts as technocrats and bureaucrats engage with political problems in an instrumentalist manner leading upto technocratic based solutions (Wurgaft 2016). The technocratic and bureaucratic nature of the job diminished Eichmann’s reflective abilities. It is in this process of examining thinking, she also examined the idea of responsibility and judgment central to the realm of the political. The public life of thinking could not be devoid of responsibility and judgment (ibid).

“For Arendt totalitarianism was a movement that had completely crushed and dismantled all forms of individuality and responsibility. It treated the victims in a beastly way where they were lost like “holes of oblivion”(Arendt 1958 [1973]: 459). The leaders/rulers considered themselves as the “executors of inhuman laws”(Canovan 1994:134). Arendt's concern with totalitarian movements is to reflect on the possibilities of ‘speech’ and ‘action’ embedded in the very existence of ‘human beings’. Human life is not just about the birth of the biological body but also goes on to acquire the ability to speak and act in relation to others (Canovan 1994). For Arendt ‘action’ is not just not one among many activities performed by human beings, but it occupies “ the highest rank in the hierarchy of *vita activa*”(Arendt 1958 [2013]: 205).

Arendt wrote:

“All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 476)

Her critics have pointed out that on the one hand, she argued that all human beings possess the capacity for action (and the meaning of this action is embedded in the realm of political) and then on the other she also argued that most political systems that have existed so far have resisted action in the realm of political in favour of the government and obedience. The realm of the political in which the action originates as forms of beginning and then flourishes remains a rare site across historical trajectories. What becomes evident in her writings is Kant's engagement with the “unsocial sociability of mankind”(Canovan 1994:148).

Margret Canovan writes:

We might perhaps say that action as understood by Arendt is an ‘unpolitical political’ capacity, which drives men in the direction of politics but also makes it very difficult for them to get there. The impulse to take initiatives drives them to politics partly because they need the co-operation of others in their enterprises, and also because they want to be seen in action, and need a space of appearance in which to act and institutions to house that space. Such a space can only endure, however, if a balance can be struck between the disruptive, individualistic and violent tendencies of action on the one hand, and the tendency for institutions to become rigid and for the processes action sets off to become rigid and for the processes actions sets off to become automatic on the other (Arendt 1994:148)

The category of ‘thinking’ and ‘action’ along with other significant conceptual tools like alterity and worldliness were part of the intellectual world of Arendt. Today, some of the writings of Arendt have significantly influenced the theoretical concerns of the social sciences over the last few decades, enabling social scientists to position themselves at the intersection of philosophy and social theory (Bernstein 2002; Alexander 2013:166).

Domain Catani in his book entitled *Evil: A History in Modern French Literature and Thought* states:

Ethical philosopher Hannah Arendt was instrumental in advocating a more inclusive, comparative analysis of history and evil in the post-Enlightenment era, an analysis that resists the scholarly insularity and partisanship that such rigid disciplinary boundaries often unwittingly encourage. Her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) drew parallels between Nazism and Stalinism and *On Revolution* (1963) argued that Robespierre's Revolutionary Terror was a precursor to twentieth-century totalitarianism. Both works paved the way for an 'assimilationist' approach to evil,....as the most broad-minded and ethically responsible way of evaluating its relationship to history. This model proposes a retrospective, comparative study of history as a series of man-made atrocities, each one pertaining to a specific period and social context, but from which it is nevertheless possible to extrapolate certain common characteristics and patterns of reoccurrence that serve as vital reminders of our duty as a civilized society to prevent such atrocities as Nazism from ever being repeated in the future. Arendt's assimilationist approach, also endorsed by fellow ethical philosopher Giorgio Agamben, anticipates that of more recent comparative historians, such as Eli Sagan, who maintain that comparing the tyrannical disposition and policies of Robespierre with those of Hitler, Stalin and Mao significantly enhances rather than diminishes our understanding of the root causes and moral repercussions of the acts for which they were ultimately responsible (Catani 2013: 2).

The intellectual engagement with the question of evil has extended to interrogating evil that confronts collective life. It is the failure of the collective life or our inability to connect to the collective life that becomes the source for evil to penetrate into different spheres of society. It is also possible to argue collective life normalises evil through the collective unconscious. This chapter made an attempt to understand how the question of evil is a central question to social sciences as Jeffrey Alexander highlighted (Alexander 2013: 99). This question of evil remained central to the thoughts of both Arendt and Ambedkar as they engaged with the evil of the holocaust against Jews and the historical and cultural hierarchical system of caste.

## Chapter 7

### **Homelessness in the World of Thought: W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar and Hannah Arendt**

“Gandhiji, I have no homeland. ... How can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own, wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink? ... If in my endeavour to secure human rights for my people, who have been trampled upon in this country for ages, I do any disservice to this country, it would not be a sin”

BR Ambedkar, Exchange with Mohandas K Gandhi, 1931  
(Ambedkar quoted in Keer, 2009: 167)

“.....homelessness sociologically or psychologically, its philosophical basis lies in the fact that though the functional context of the world, in which also I myself am involved, can always justify and explain that there are, for example, tables and chairs generally, nevertheless it can never make me grasp conceptually that this table is. And it is the existence of this table, independent of tables in general, which evokes the philosophical shock”

—Hannah Arendt (Eichmann in Jerusalem 1963 [1994]. Pg. No. 263)

#### **Forgotten from the Discipline: Homelessness in the discipline**

Elizabeth Goodstein writes about Georg Simmel as the forgotten founder or to use his own depiction of such individuals as ‘The Stranger’. She discusses how the identification of Simmel as the ‘internal other’ helps to reimagine the discipline of sociology through the historical reconsideration of his thoughts and writings. This historical reconsideration is not only with regard to Simmel’s intellectual and academic contributions, but also a significant thoughtful reconsideration of the discipline of sociology and social theory in the twentieth century. The purpose here is to understand that social theory needs to reflect on this process to emancipate itself from “metaphysical roots of philosophy” (Goodstein 2017: 257). But the question is how could social theory think of emancipating itself from the historical constructions that have contributed to the formation and development of social theory in the first place. In other words, how does sociology become being reflexive enough to develop a critical discourse towards its constructions of the world? This is to criticize the philosophical realm that deals with the



timelessness of truth as a fundamental conception of any knowledge-making project. Social theory considers the value and virtues that underpin it while departing from the idea that its roots are autonomous of the social context.

The approach in this chapter is to move away from the archetype of not only philosophies but also thinkers who have contributed to a canonical understanding of knowledge and its institutional and methodological frameworks. Till about fifty years ago what has been considered to be prominent of philosophical and sociological ideas is that they remain timeless-meaning their conception of truth remains valid across time and space (Rorty 1979; 1982; 1989; 1998). Simmel's philosophical and sociological approach helps to critically understand this timelessness of ideas and at the same time their rootedness in a historical and intellectual context. Among the philosophers, Ernst Cassirer in his book *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* argued on similar lines. Cassirer argued that Enlightenment had liberated philosophy from what used to be considered as "pure thought". Thus, paving the path for philosophy to be an active and creative force through which we attain knowledge about the world (Cassirer 1932 [2009]).

This is not to say that any philosophy or the 'philosopher king' always remains bound by their context and never transcends it. On the other hand, the homeless through their wandering is often found struggling between the context and transcendence. The epistemological and methodological commitment to the context and the political and moral commitment of transcendence is often determined by what we call their homelessness in the world of thoughts. Simmel's idea of the stranger in every human relationship could be extended through a hermeneutic inspired reading, wherein every social system is also comprised of those that exist outside its cultural constructions.

The cultural outsider stands outside the realm of the public and their presence at the periphery is signalled by their silences. Thus the context of 'nearness' and 'remoteness' is an intrinsic feature of the relationship between the cultural insider and those who remain outside it (Simmel [1908] 1950). The aspects of 'nearness' and 'remoteness' are central to the making of an individual or

group. From the perspective of the homeless, the rules and protocols are in favour of those considered as cultural insiders.

The idea of being ‘homeless’ and ‘homelessness’ have serious implications not only for social theory or philosophy of pragmatism but for philosophical thinking as well. How do these developments contribute to an already fragmented disciplinary imagination of social theory in the twentieth century? The broader purpose here is not only to argue that Arendt, Ambedkar and Du Bois should be part of the sociological canon but rather why we should move away from the canon in order to respond to the multiplicity of understandings that constitutes worldliness. The current debate in social theory, moving away from the trajectory of canon formation is based on the critique of canonizing intellectual thought and knowledge frameworks that shaped the trajectory of social theory in the twentieth century (Lemert 1979, 2002, 2021, De Sousa Santos 2014; Baert 2005b; Baert and Da Silva 2010; Meghji 2021; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). Obviously, this process of canonization construction followed the trajectory of disciplinary imagination and construction throughout the twentieth century. Steven Lukes has reflected on the trajectory of disciplinary imaginations and constructions in the following statement:

Steven Lukes argues:

“Why do sociologists teach their students to read and refer back to certain past thinkers and, more specifically, to certain of their writings?..... Discussions recur over who should be admitted, and over who should be expelled. But what is this club for? What are its terms of membership? On what basis, by what methods and by whom are members selected? And why is it such an exclusive club, confined to western—indeed, one should add, European—white males?” (Steven Lukes in Baehr 2016: xi)

In a similar manner Patrick Baert argues:

Sociology takes its ‘founding fathers’ seriously. Many sociologists refer to and build on what they regard as their intellectual heritage. They tend to celebrate and commemorate those classical authors who inadvertently or intentionally helped to set up the discipline. These authors are

viewed as integral to the academic field, providing the building blocks for future generations. After a century or more, they are still being taught to under- graduates and postgraduates, and there is a huge market of secondary literature on the classics – some for teaching purposes, and some very scholarly.....

.....There are a number of reasons why sociology has cultivated such a special relationship with its founders. First and foremost, sociologists have never achieved a clear consensus regarding the basic methodological principles and theoretical assumptions of their discipline. The more agreement exists in a discipline regarding those fundamental issues, the less likely are members of the relevant scientific community to show a great deal of interest in its history (Baert 2007: 119-120)

### **The concept of ‘Founding Fathers’ and the Canonical Construction**

Peter Baehr has engaged with the idea of ‘founding fathers’ and juxtaposed it with monogenetic theory. Baehr argues that Hegel viewed “World-Historical Individuals” as people “whose vocation it was to be the agents of the World-Spirit” (Baehr 2016 cites Hegel, 1956 [1830-31]: 31). Hegel stated that only a few people could perform the role of fulfilling political goals. These few individuals have remarkable insights and talents and these “World-Historical Individuals” have unique focus and passion to achieve their goals. But Social theory has moved far away from these Hegelian insights.<sup>1</sup>

Baehr cites Hegel:

*These “World-Historical Individuals”... “is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else” .....“All states have thus been established by the sublime power of great men: not through physical strength, since the many are stronger than [any] single person. But the great man has something in his traits which makes all others call him their master; they obey him against their own will . . . All gather around his banner: he is their God. Such was the way in which Theseus founded the state of Athens . . .”* (Hegel quoted in Baehr 2016: 68).

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to the second Edition of Founders, Classics, Canons: Modern Disputes Over the Origins and Appraisal of Sociology's Heritage by Peter Baehr. It is also important to highlight here that social theory has moved far away from these Hegelian insights.

Shlomo Avineri stated that states come into existence not following the idea of the social contract but because of action performed by heroic figures. This idea that the political founder with godly characteristics remained a commonly accepted one during the period of the enlightenment (Avineri 1972). For example, Rousseau's discussion on legislators attributed to them (the legislators) the capacity for "divine intervention" (Rousseau 1973 [1762]; 194-6). A similar language was employed during the American revolution as Arendt had highlighted:

" the paradoxical fact that it was precisely the revolutions, their crisis and their emergency, which drove the very "enlightened" men of the eighteenth century to plead for some religious sanction at the very moment when they were about to emancipate the secular realm fully from the influences of the churches and to separate politics and religion once and for all . . . the need for a divine principle, for some transcendent sanction in the political realm, as well as the curious fact that this need would be felt most strongly . . . when a new body politic had to be established, had been clearly anticipated by nearly all theoretical forerunners of the revolutions" (Arendt 1973 [1990]: 185-186).

Based on these ideas Sheldon Wolin argued religious creation mythology has contributed significantly to one of the most important political myths of modern times namely that of the 'founding fathers' (Wolin 1960, 1969, 1981). Baehr argues that " "Founding Fathers" draws heavily on, and substantially reproduces, both the assumptions of the monogenetic theory, and its masculine, theological, and political overtones" (Baehr 2002: 69). This idea of founding father has also been extended in the realm of the polis, the world and ultimately the realm of secular knowledge and metaphors of "fathers" and "founding" have also penetrated into the realm of sociology as a key source of its "collective memory" (ibid). Carreira da Silva and Vieira argue that there is some form of resemblance in the canonization process of an author or text with certain religious ritual processes but still sociological canonical texts are products of critical engagement even from the readers' perspective (Da Silva and Vieira 2019).

Carreira da Silva and Vieira argue:

“To begin with, the canonization process of an author or a text as a “sociological classic” bears some resemblance to certain religious rituals, from the Roman Catholic Church’s process of beatification to ancient sacred totemism. The core meaning of the word canon is “rule” or “measure”, and it became quickly entangled with the notion of authority, a normative sense of canon that was wrongly reinforced by its application to a church edict or, more generally, to the group of texts accepted as “authentic” or “sacred” by a particular religion. If it is true that sociological canonical texts, unlike theological ones, are neither determined by decree nor set once and for all but rather introduced to an ongoing critical colloquy by means of reader appropriation and social diffusion...”(Da Silva and Vieira 2019: 44-45).

Based on the arguments of Carreira da Silva and Vieira as well as Peter Baehr it is possible to extend this argument about canonization in the realm of discipline formation as resembling religious ritual processes. The extension of this argument is to highlight that there are those who continue to remain ‘impure’ or ‘profane’ in these religious ritualistic processes and thus remain outside history and culture. Those who remain outside history and culture do not go through a convenient process to appear in the world. Their social and cultural appearance is prohibited by these historical and cultural processes. This prohibition to appear and restrict in the public realm certainly leads to the construction of otherness. This otherness gets embedded in the experiential formation of those considered to be ‘impure’ and ‘profane’. The permanence of otherness is a form of worldliness around which different cultural and social relationships are formed in the present. Otherness as a form of worldliness is manifest in the phenomenological experience of being homeless. Ethnic and cultural centrism that dominate theoretical discourse neglect the intellectual projects of those who are homeless. These cultural dimensions continue to be intrinsic to the contemporary phenomenological experiences as part of the long historical processes. Ambedkar observed these historical and cultural prohibitions in the case of ‘untouchables’, ‘unapproachables’ and ‘unseeables’; Arendt observed in the case of Jews as

pariahs during the Nazi terror and violence which finally culminated in the concentration camps and Du Bois observed in the case of “Souls of Black folks” and people of “darker races”.

### **Caste and Race: Thinking Outside the Canon**

Isabel Wilkerson in the book *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents* writes:

A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant caste whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distinct from one another and in their assigned places.

Throughout human history, three caste systems have stood out. The tragically accelerated, chilling, and officially vanquished caste system of Nazi Germany. The lingering, millennia-long caste system of India. And the shape-shifting, unspoken, race-based caste pyramid in the United States. Each version relied on stigmatizing those deemed inferior to justify the dehumanization necessary to keep the lowest-ranked people at the bottom and to rationalize the protocols of enforcement. A caste system endures because it is often justified as divine will, originating from sacred text or the presumed laws of nature, reinforced throughout the culture and passed down through the generations (Wilkerson 2020:17)

Gurminder Bhambra and John Holmwood raise two pertinent questions in their response to the project of global social theory:

“How do we engage with others when their presence is an obstacle to our interests? How do we use others to further our own interest ?” (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021: 210)

Bhambra and Holmwood argue that social theory has largely remained unquestioned and thus hold a secure place in our disciplinary imaginations. The development of both modernity and social theory was shaped by colonialism, racism, casteism along with violence and terror that came to the forefront during the Holocaust. It is against this historical background that the

formation of social theory came to the front stage of the academic and intellectual milieu. But the historical experience of colonialism, racism, casteism and violence of the holocaust did not translate into sociological questions and concepts during that period (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021).

The point then is how does one incorporate the oeuvres of homeless intellectuals like Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois into the canon. One could also be led to ask how their texts have come to be part of the canon at the end of the twentieth century. This intellectual and political engagement also contributes to a shift from the canonical understanding of knowledge movements. Ali Meghji in his work entitled *Decolonizing Sociology* has argued that the “ Time to Fire the Canon” has arrived (Meghji 2021).

The process of canonization further allows for the construction, reception and reading of certain texts as ‘classical’ which further reinforces the canonization process (Nisbet 1966 [1993]; Aron 1965 [2019], Alexander 1982; Baert 2007; Lemert 2002; Carreira da silva and Brito vieira 2011, 2019). The other purpose is to understand how Simmelian strangers engage with the idea of the canonization process? What is it about the stranger's ways of knowing and engaging with the idea of objective knowledge that cannot be captured by social theory or the philosophy of social sciences? In this context, it would be important to understand how we understand ‘canonization’ that has become a significant subject of sociological concern in the twentieth century (Lukes 1973; R. Huebner 2014). This is not to say that all canonization occurs for the same reasons and follows similar patterns. As Peter Baehr appositely suggests not “ all classics follow the same pattern in attaining their status” or “become classics for the same reason” (Baehr 2002: 119). How does the approach of ‘strangers’ as thinkers often help to develop a reflexive perspective towards canonization and decanonization?

How does the disciplinary imagination observe strangers and thus develop a specific relationship through their location in the social system? How do these strangers as homeless beings encounter the realm of ideas that was denied to them earlier? How did the social sciences acquire this

practice to engage with the homeless? Is it not that social sciences were separated from philosophy on the one hand but at the same time during this separation also retained a few of its fundamental features like canonization? All the modern disciplines branched out from philosophy. The construction of canonical figures as founding fathers of sociology played a prominent role during the formation of social sciences or political theory.

Robert Gooding-Williams provides deep insights into the severe regimentation that accompanied the formation of various disciplines and their organization (Gooding-Williams 2009). For Robert Gooding-Williams, Du Bois's book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) still remains an influential answer to the question of the origins of 'White Supremacy'? Du Bois's text is a crucial attempt to think about the possibilities of emancipation from 'white supremacy', belonging to the tradition of modern Afro-American political philosophy. As Robert Gooding-Williams states: "*Souls is historically rooted in the segregationist era of Jim Crow, but like most great works of political philosophy, its authority reaches well beyond its origins, so much so that its compelling ideas and memorable themes continue to be taken up by thoughtful theorists of black politics in post-segregation America*" (Gooding-Williams 2009: 1).

Thus Robert Gooding-Williams writes:

I have ever so briefly contrasted contractarian and French liberal political thought in order to underline my claim that modern political philosophy comprises multiple genres. The one I wish to stress here, however, and to which *Souls* belongs, is specifically "Afro-modern." The Afro-modern tradition of political thought, an impressively rich body of argument and insight that began to emerge late in the eighteenth century, has forged a distinct intellectual configuration. Familiar figures belonging to that configuration include Ottobah Cugoana and Olaudah Equiano; Martin R. Delany and Frederick Douglass; C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney; Booker T. Washington; and, naturally, W. E. B. Du Bois. Like the classical social contract tradition, the Afro-modern tradition is bound together by certain genre-defining thematic preoccupations—for example, the political and social organization of white supremacy, the nature and effects of racial ideology, and the possibilities of black emancipation—preoccupations that distinguish it from other traditions and genres of political philosophy. And this tradition, in sharp



contrast to the social contract, French liberal, and most other tendencies of modern political thought, tends to concern itself less with the nation-state per se—that is, with the authority or the centralized, bureaucratic power of the nation-state—than with the regimes of white supremacy that have operated apart from or in close alliance with the nation-state...(Gooding-Williams 2009: 3)

Du Bois's attempt is to answer the question “ What kind of politics should African-Americans conduct to counter white supremacy?” (Gooding-Williams 2009: 1). With reference to the place of ‘Souls’ in modern political thought, Gooding-William's idea is to argue that modern political philosophy cannot be defined by a particular genre but on the contrary, it comprises different genres (Gooding-Williams 2009). The reception of these different themes and genres of writing varied greatly across the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For example in the United States or in academic practices in different parts of the world what has been received, discussed and debated often is contractarian political theory which comprises the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant (Gooding-Williams 2009). They get categorised more or less in the same genre predominantly concerned with thinking about similar questions based on a distinct set of themes like the justification of rights of claims, the context of political obligation and the discussion on limits of legitimate state coercion (ibid). These concerns did represent a shift from tradition but also constitute a distinct genre present within modern political philosophy.

Based on a similar understanding it is possible to think of French liberals and political theorists Pierre Royer-Collard, and François Guizot who had influenced Alexis de Tocqueville (Gooding-Williams 2009: 2). French thinkers found themselves amidst a strong and centralized state bureaucracy without any aristocracy. It was upon this aristocracy that people relied upon before the French Revolution to temper state power. These French intellectuals were citizens of a centralized state and the tyranny of bureaucracy. Thus, these French intellectuals redefined the new major political problems that confront modern democratic societies (ibid).

Thus Larry Siedentop argued that these thinkers founded a “new genre” in political theory. Siedento writes that these thinkers were “... no longer concerned with the basis of political

obligation or the limits of legitimate state action in the fashion of seventeenth-century political philosophers . . . [but] made another question central. Could a balance between central power and local autonomy be found in a democratic society—that is, a society in which local autonomy is no longer protected by aristocratic power?” (Larry Siedentop cited by Robert Gooding-Williams 2009: 2).

By characterising these two genres of political thought -the contractarians and the French liberal tradition, Gooding-Williams argument is to highlight that ‘Souls’ by Du Bois belongs to the Afro-American modern tradition of political thought which primarily began to emerge in the late eighteenth century (Gooding-Williams 2009) that include Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano; Martin R. Delany and Frederick Douglass; C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney; Booker T. Washington; W.E.B Du Bois and Stuart Hall (ibid). Like these two traditions, the Afro-modern tradition of political thought is also concerned and bounded by certain pertinent questions. This genre of political thought is situated in its struggle against white supremacy and not necessarily bound by the boundaries of modern nation-states unlike the contractarian or French Liberal tradition (ibid). Thus different genres of modern political thought are shaped by distinct historical circumstances. This helps us to formulate not only a social critique of the ‘canon’ both in the realm of political theory and social theory.

### **Homelessness and the Canon: Communicative Encounter and Appearance in the World**

Robert Gooding-Williams’ perspective enables us to understand how the ‘canon’ needs to be contextualized, especially how a particular canon responds and questions the salient social concerns of the times This is not to say that it limits and restricts intellectual and political thought. Our three interlocutors look up to various existing modes of thought accessible to them based on their social and political choices and location. This is also to state that the canon in the form of texts, ideas, groups or individuals often exist in interaction with different sets of texts, ideas or even institutions. This is to argue that ideas or knowledge could also be understood in a

dialogical form rather than through regimented canonized perspectives. Karl Mannheim argued for such a dialogical perspective:

Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him. He finds himself in an inherited situation with patterns of thought which are appropriate to this situation and attempts to elaborate further the inherited modes of response or to substitute others for them in order to deal more adequately with the new challenges which have arisen out of the shifts and changes in his situation. Every individual is therefore in a two-fold sense predetermined by the fact of growing up in a society : on the one hand he finds a ready-made situation and on the other he finds in that situation preformed patterns of thought and of conduct (Mannheim 1936 [1960]: 3).

Pragmatists too believed in such a dialogical form or communicative process in the formation of ideas and primarily focused on a wider project in which the public participates. This public participation does not limit ideas to the individual armchair thinker whose speech and act negates the role of the public in the formation of ideas. The formation of ideas, therefore, is the outcome of both theory and practice. These processes of formation of ideas are also political and social processes. Now, the purpose here is not to regiment pragmatism while arguing for a dialogical or communicative understanding of ideas rather than a canonised one. Philosophically speaking the ontological nature of the existence of strangers might not find any other way rather than thinking of a dialogical or communicative encounter as the Arendtian position helps to understand (Arendt 1958 [2013]). The communicative encounter of ‘others’ in the form of strangers has been a unique phenomenon across societies. Through this encounter, the stranger does not only broaden the scope and responsibilities of the public sphere but also changes the existing meanings and understanding of the way society is conceived through the public sphere and through counter-publics (Fraser 1990). The presence of strangers in the public sphere is based on the Arendtian understanding of “beginnings” following the limitations or collapse of the public sphere in Nazi Germany. Writing in the post-world war two context, Arendt suggests that in such a world where the public sphere has collapsed or is limited in scope it becomes all the more

essential to envision 'new beginnings' (Arendt 1958 [2013]). For Arendt, the beginning is associated with the human being's ability to act in the world, which determines their belongingness in this world.

Thus Arendt wrote:

To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, "to begin," "to lead," and eventually "to rule" indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are propelled into action. [*Initium*] ergo ut esset, creatus est homo ante quem nullus fuit ("that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody"), said Augustine in his political philosophy. This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before (Arendt 1958 [2013]: 177).

For Arendt, this notion of belonging in the world is about the appearance in the world in the realm of the public. The appearance in the realm of the public is more than biological appearance in the world. It is this appearance concerned with the realm of the public where individuals come to define their common interests and thus share the world. Ambedkar too emphasises the importance of communication among human beings as the central feature of constituting society and associated living:

Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. To have similar thing is totally different from possessing things in common. And the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication with one another. This is merely another way of saying that Society continues to exist by communication indeed in communication. To make it concrete, it is not enough if men act in a way which agrees with the acts of others. Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society. This is proved by the fact that the festivals observed by the different Castes amongst the Hindus are the same. Yet these parallel performances of similar festivals by the different castes have not bound them into one integral whole. For that purpose what is necessary is for a man to share and participate in a common activity so that the same emotions are aroused

in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them. The Caste System prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being (Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]: 51).

The importance of communicative action in social theory and the philosophy of social sciences was transformed following Habermas's publication of *The Communicative theory*. Habermas developed the idea of communicative theory that intersected the boundaries of various traditions of thought. Since then this theory of communication and the public sphere paradigm remains a central point of discussion in the social sciences (Habermas 1970, 1977, 1979, 1981[1991]; Benhabib 1997)

From the perspective of social systems, the Simmleian stranger as a significant and non-observed and silenced phenomena also might find its place in the academy as Bourdieu discussed in his work *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu 1984[1988]). For example, the classical canon is reconstituted by the multiplicity of trajectories that have emerged within the domain of social theory. How these trajectories have developed in interaction with the classical canon in the latter part of the twentieth century? This leads us to the broader question of how the canon called 'classical sociology', 'classical sociological thinkers' or 'classical texts' has been constructed? For example, each text articulates a particular set of ideas that do not necessarily acquire the status of being "classical" even if the author belongs to that class. This is not to say that the criteria of what is or is not considered a 'classic' or being 'classic' remain static.

Patrick Baert argues:

The social sciences as a whole exhibit a stronger link with their classical authors. However, even within the social sciences, it is sociology that honours its intellectual pioneers to the greatest extent.....Disagreement on fundamental approaches and principal conclusions keeps people wedded to the history of their discipline: they will use this history to situate themselves within

contemporary debates and to establish legitimacy for the views they hold. Far from becoming outmoded, the authority of the classics is strengthened by the passage of time, their long survival indicating a deeper level of insight that retains validity despite huge social transformations. Indeed, sociologists often appeal to the classics to identify themselves to others and to attribute intellectual weight to the specific positions they take....they [sociologists] do assume that theory formation proceeds in a cumulative fashion, whereby intellectual achievements of the past are fundamental to and incorporated in present endeavours.....Underlying this intellectual genre is the assumption that the classics provide significant insights that need to be consolidated, combined, recycled and built upon – as if sociologists have taken on board Newton’s aphorism that ‘if I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’ (see Merton, 1993)” (Baert 2007: 120-121).

One of the significant features highlighted here is that any ‘classical text’s reception is often beyond the disciplinary boundaries and gets recognized by nearby disciplines as well and even appeals to larger audiences are often destined to live everyday lives. These classical texts are not timeless texts as often understood in our general discussions. They are symbolic representations of the sociological and political nature of the academy and society in which they are received, discussed and eulogised for their claims (Baert 2007; Baehr 2016). In a similar fashion, the non-acceptance of a text (referring to its claims about realities at the ideational level) is also symbolic of the history and politics dominant both in the academy and society. Thus the reception of any work is contingent upon the historical context as well as the dominant or ascending political forces at a given time. This is not to say that there exists a complete concurrence between the academy and society. The subject of the reception of a text in the academy and also outside the academy i.e. in the wider society is itself a subject of sociological curiosity.

For example, we see this in the publication of Ambedkar’s manifesto on the ‘Annihilation of caste’ Initially prepared as a speech to be delivered at the invitation of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, Ambedkar was later asked by the committee that the text might hurt the sentiments of Hindu caste groups. Later Ambedkar decided to publish it but the text did not resonate comfortably with

the political climate of the time especially because of the standpoint for which Ambedkar was deeply concerned.

Following the arguments of Elizabeth Goodstein, it is possible to argue how Simmelian strangers would approach the canon of a system of thought where they find themselves to be homeless (Goodstein 2017). The Simmelian stranger characterised by ‘nearness and remoteness’, being ‘near and far’ at the same time remains in search of a home where they can finally rest, but the ‘potential wanderer’ remains homeless. This continuous search for a home in the world of thought never came to an endpoint and thus they are bound to remain homeless and the world often exists as a phenomenological problem for these wanderers.

As Simmelian strangers Ambedkar, Du Bois and Arendt did not think about disciplinary constructions or canons or in terms of the finality of thought itself. Any imagination of a canon or even the finality of thought might have possibly created new forms of strangeness. The existence of several canons or multiple ‘canon’ of knowledge helps us to approach the world in a pluralistic manner. Its coherence could be observed in our discourse of multiple modernities as a critique of modernity where ‘canonisation is often essential to the formation and organisation of knowledge. Robert-Gooding Williams approach highlights different traditions of modern political thought. But there are two concerns that might be central to his historical analysis. These concerns so far have been raised in multiple ways by various thinkers. How does the framework of a particular canon influence its disciplinary construction at large and thus shape the perception of the world? What is its relationship with other modes of thought and ways of seeing the world?

The approach of Simmelian strangers (Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt) towards social scientific knowledge was also constitutive of their political imaginations was predominantly and countering the strangeness that made them homeless in the world of thought. What is unique about this approach to social scientific knowledge which cannot be about finding a home in the world of thoughts. What is unique about this kind of knowledge in social sciences? Elizabeth

Goodstein has highlighted the reception of Simmel during his active days as a philosopher and sociologist.

Goodstein writes:

The figure of Simmel plays an important role in sociology's evolving self-representation as a discipline, embodying the legacy of a philosophical past it had purportedly subsumed and transcended. His career sheds light on the prehistory of what we have come to call "theory" and its relation to fin de siècle European intellectual culture. Simmel's irascible refusal of Bouglé's invitation to Paris in the name of his disciplinary identity as a philosopher should be seen in the larger context of his evolving historical, philosophical, and professional-institutional self-reflexivity. It echoes nearly a decade later in a letter to his supporter Jellinek during the crucial days in March 1908 when the chair in Heidelberg was plainly slipping away. His opponents, Simmel explained, had successfully disseminated the "idiocy" that he was really a sociologist although "in reality I pursue sociology only 'as a sideline' [im Nebenamt]." He added ruefully that when this misrepresentation had originally come up in official deliberations, there had been no one present to testify to his indisputable philosophical bona fides by way of "a glance at the title of my lectures and my books (or even better, a look into the latter)."

Simmel's acerbic assessment of his reception was hardly an exaggeration—even his proponents often ignored the words on the page in their reception of his writings. When he wrote this letter to Jellinek, however, he was putting the finishing touches to his nearly 800-page opus *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, encouraged by the prospect of the post in Heidelberg (Goodstein 2017: 43)

Steven Lukes alludes to Alfred North Whitehead's famous phrase cited by Thomas Kuhn- "a science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost" (Steven Lukes in Baehr 2016: xi). Whitehead's disciplinary imagination regarding the founders is based on a deeply problematic response to the question that 'Who are the founders?' The response is a preconceived one rather than one which recognizes a socio-historical process in the formation and construction of a discipline. For Baehr, this phrase of Whitehead is premised on the reinforcement of a wrong



analogy concerning a disciplinary act of certain individuals rather than recognising the broader socio-historical milieu in which they operated.

Steven Lukes wrote with regard to specific thinkers in sociology considered as the ‘founding fathers’ of classical sociological theory:

Why should there be such a club? Why do sociologists have need of it? Thomas Kuhn quoted Alfred North Whitehead’s famous saying that “a science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost” and commented that the denigration of historical fact is “deeply, and probably functionally, ingrained in the ideology of the scientific profession.” Kuhn added that “few scientists read past scientific work; scientific libraries ordinarily displace the books and journals in which such work is recorded; scientific life knows no institutional equivalent of the art museum.” Even sociologists’ colleagues in other social scientific disciplines think and act thus, or at best offer optional courses in the history of political theory or economics or anthropology or psychology. Is sociology, to use Kuhn’s language, stuck in pre-paradigmatic immaturity? Baehr plainly thinks otherwise, viewing the defining and refining of sociology’s classic texts as essential to its successes and future promise. They are not “timeless cultural icons” in a museum: to earn and keep their status they “must be subjected to continual critical engagement,” their “concepts reformulated to meet new problems and trials.” Perhaps, we can surmise, sociology’s continuing refusal to forget its classics constitutes, given its scope and subject-matter, an indispensable and invaluable scientific virtue. The classical texts are exemplars of distinctive and contrasting ways of seeing, which are also ways of not seeing, various objects to be investigated and explained: social, as distinct from psychological and biological realities; the modern/industrial/capitalist world as distinct from its predecessors; the intersections (as C. Wright Mills put it) between “the personal troubles of milieu” and “the public issues of social structure”; the nature and mechanisms of power, the sources of inequality, the bases of social solidarity; and the right way to connect causal explanation with the interpretation of meaning. Lacking settled, indeed settleable, answers to these and other such questions of similar scope, we need the divergent and incompatible visions of the classical exemplars’ grand theories to keep the issues alive ( From Preface by Steven Lukes in Baehr 2016: xi-xii).

Baehr also argued that Whitehead's remark regarding "founders" is also a deeply troubled and misleading one. The act of disciplinary remembrance/ memories is not only revolutionary but at the same time a deeply troubled one as often the entire notion of the science of inquiry gets questioned when historical reflexivity comes to the forefront. Whitehead fails to recognize those who sit at the margins. Barbara Grüning has argued about the troubles associated with the legitimization of Hannah Arendt in the academic field.

Grüning writes:

Although Arendt (1906–1975) is nowadays identified as a recognized political theorist and philosopher, according to her main interpreters (cf. Kristeva 2004; Benhabib 2006, 2010; Bernstein 2010; Hayden 2014) her legitimation in the academic field has been for a long time prevented by several factors: first, her main works (cf. Arendt 1951, 1963) have either caused heated debates within the international public sphere or have been criticized for their methodological weakness; second, she gained an official academic position only in the 1960s, and, third, she adopted an "anti-institutional mood" (Bourdieu 1984, 229), openly breaking with the philosophical tradition(s) that nurtured her as a young scholar. To what extent, however, should Arendt's belated and troubled legitimation in the academic field be attributed to the contentious topics of some of her famous works, to their little scientific style as well as to her public acting? Are there other factors not immediately linked to her works and biography that have impacted on how she was and she is nowadays received (and even perceived)? (Grüning 2020: 271-272)

Probably a part of the history of social theory shall always be concerned with disciplinary remembrance irrespective of its failure. Ignorance and silence to observe various forms of cultural traumas which often are not recognised by the innocent and cruel eyes of the hegemonic and dominant observer. Reiland Rabaka's reading of Du Bois' conceptions of double-consciousness and the Veil along with Gramsci's conception of "ideological hegemony" helps to understand how racial and capitalist ideologies become part of the everyday common sense of the ruling class thus maintaining their racial privilege, power and cultural capital.

Rabaka writes:

By casting Gramsci's conception of "ideological hegemony" into the discussion of Du Bois's conceptions of double-consciousness and the Veil I seek to illustrate the fact that blacks' double-conscious internalization of white-propagated anti-black racist and white supremacist (mis)conceptions of blacks and blackness is politically and sociologically symptomatic of white supremacy's intersection and interconnection with the political economy of race and anti-black racism in anti-black racist capitalist culture and society. Almost as if in direct dialogue with Du Bois (especially the later, more "black Marxist" Du Bois), in his Prison Notebooks Gramsci wrote of the "great variety of morbid symptoms" that "appear" when ideologically dominated cultures and societies began to lose their hold on the masses' minds. There is a sense in which Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness can be read as a sociological diagnosis of the masses' (in this instance, the black masses') continued unconscious internalization of the dominant group's anti-black racist ideology. Gramsci (1971) explained the next stage, the stage in which the masses begin to call the existing culture and society into question, although they do not yet consciously embrace a counter-ideology—sort of a social limbo state, somewhere between the old and the new society: "If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e., is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominating,' exercising force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this inter-regnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (275–76). It might be possible to point to double-consciousness as an extremely early "morbid symptom," one still very steeped in the old society and "their traditional ideologies"—that is, the society dominated by the diabolical dialectic of white superiority and black inferiority. Although only hinted at throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois's sociological discourse did eventually come to explicitly critique the intersection and interconnection of racism and capitalism as dual and inextricable systems of exploitation, oppression, and violence in black lifeworlds and black life struggles (Rabaka 2010: 171).

Even though Du Bois contributed significantly towards the development of theoretical and methodological frameworks to engage with modern societies, his writings remained outside the scope of sociology throughout the twentieth century. The persistent failure to remember or recognize might also be considered as 'disciplinary forgetfulness' that might lead up to disciplinary trauma for those operating as outsiders within the discipline. In the Foucauldian

sense, we can argue here how ‘strangeness’ is embedded in the notion of “subjugated knowledge”. Foucault highlighted about “subjugated knowledge” in his lectures at College de France lectures in 1975:

“When I say “subjugated knowledges” I mean two things. On the one hand, I am referring to historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systemizations. [In other words, I am referring to] blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship. Second, when I say “subjugated knowledges” I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as . . . insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity” (Foucault cited by Rabaka 2010: 170)

Foucault insights on “subjugated knowledge” attempts to highlight what constitutes knowledge and what kind of knowledge is considered to be disqualified, “naive knowledge”, “hierarchically inferior knowledges”. As Foucault argues these “subjugated knowledges” are considered to be below the standards of scientific objectivity. Simmel introduces the notion of a specific kind of “objectivity” inherent in the position of the stranger. But how does this objectivity get determined? What is it about the being of any stranger that provides them with a certain kind of “objectivity” (Goodstein 2017).

Goodstein writes:

the history of social and cultural theory has been, by and large, a partisan affair, with methodological convictions masquerading as objectivity and theoretical assumptions guiding the description of facts. There is, too, a fundamental difficulty in writing the history of these ideas: any description of or thesis about the social has self-reflexive implications for the narrative itself. Just as, quite generally, there can be no history of philosophy without philosophical implications, the history of the social has social implications (Goodstein 2017:132)

This objectivity can be situated in strangers' views of the world or what Goldstein called “ways of seeing”. What is it about the metaphysical and ontological experiences of being strangers that might allow for different “ways of seeing”, which often remain unseen or unforeseeable by the dominant observer? But is this objectivity accessible to varieties of strangers that possibly exist in any social system? Or is there any processual aspect at the social and political level to access this objectivity?

Goodstein writes:

As Simmel's university career illustrates, that self-reflexive equanimity was far from being the blithe expression of an outsider's intellectual freedom. His relativism and objectivity reflected a deeply lived encounter with the transformation of academic life, and particularly of philosophy, as the social sciences began to become institutionally established as independent academic disciplines. The first departments of sociology and anthropology were established in France and the United States in the 1890s and in England in the following decade, but in Germany there were no professorships in sociology until after World War I. Simmel's early sociological theorizing was thus explicitly directed toward establishing disciplinary foundations. In pursuing sociology, he was in the first instance attempting to establish a specialization that would gain him institutional recognition within philosophy, the field in which he had been trained and accredited (Goodstein 2017 37-38).

This is not to say that one frame of canon formation has to be contrasted with another set. The purpose is to think in opposition to concepts like ‘classical’ and ‘founding fathers’ that have been central to canon formation within disciplinary formations like ‘classical sociology’ and philosophical formations like ‘classical pragmatism’. As Peter Baehr argues that ‘classical’ formations are distinctive ways of seeing and also of not seeing or not being able to see.

## **Homelessness in the Tradition of Thoughts**

The permanence of otherness is a form of worldliness that often persists in different cultural and social relationships. This worldliness as otherness determines the phenomenological experience of being homeless. The ethnic and cultural passions led by the notion of domination could never allow any project which would lead to thinking with those who are homeless. Thinking with others would require seeing and hearing the other.

Arendt argued:

It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance - something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves - constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life - the passion of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses-lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until that they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit for the public appearance.....the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures of the reality of the world and ourselves....Since our feeling of reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm...(Arendt 1958 [2013]: 50).

Being homeless is a form of worldliness that denies the appearance of the individual or groups in the realm of the public. This appearance in the realm of the public is concerned with the sufferings and pain of those who have remained outside history and culture. This denial is based on an understanding of culture and politics where the inseparability of both is never possible. Even though the space of culture and politics is equally accessible for everyone it does not allow those outside the culture to be part of this sphere without a struggle. This culture determines the location of the individuals in the hierarchies of belonging. The presence of 'impure' individuals in the domain of the public means evokes ideas of the pollution of culture e. This culture shapes

the existence of those designated as impure through their homelessness and rootlessness. The search for home through the space of politics comes in conflict with the idea of culture that is deeply embedded in the formation of the public sphere.

The rise of anti-colonial nationalism has elaborated the narrative of culture as symbolic of the unification of all people. This cultural symbolism could evoke sentiments of superiority. This representation of culture is based not only on an apolitical understanding of culture but also an antipolitical understanding of culture. Norbert Elias in his work *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* wrote:

“embedded in the meaning of the German term ‘culture’ was a non-political and perhaps even an anti-political bias symptomatic of the recurrent feeling among the German middle-class elites that politics and the affairs of the state represented the area of their humiliation and lack of freedom, while culture represented the sphere of their freedom and their pride. During the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, the anti-political bias of the middle class concept of ‘culture’ was directed against the politics of autocratic princes....At a later stage, this anti-political bias was turned against the parliamentary politics of a democratic state” (Elias 1989 [1996]: 126-127).

Reflecting upon another world, Ambedkar wrote: “The dividing line which marks off Barbaric people from Civilized people, in the fullest sense of the word Civilization, is the art of making ideas tangible by means of graphic signs—which is called the art of writing. With this man conquered time as he had with the earlier inventions conquered space. He could now record his deeds and his thoughts. Henceforth, his knowledge, his poetical dreams, his moral aspirations might be recorded in such form as to be read not merely by his contemporaries but by successive generations of remote posterity” (Ambedkar 1987[2014]:88).

Following this understanding of civilization, Ambedkar asked “in what state of civilization are the they [Primitive Tribes]?” if we are to follow the aforementioned understanding of civilization

(Ambedkar 1987[2014]: 87). Ambedkar wondered how we should think about the existence of individuals who are categorised as Primitive Tribes or Criminal tribes. In raising these questions Ambedkar was influenced by his anthropology training at Columbia with Alexander Goldenweiser and his introduction to Boasian anthropology. Writing in on the “Philosophy of Hinduism”, Ambedkar is concerned with the question of how Hinduism has divided people on the lines of purity and pollution and the devastating consequences it has brought to an entire society (Ambedkar 1987[2014]).

Ambedkar wrote about another group other than the Primitive Tribes and Criminal Tribes mentioned,:

Besides these two classes there is a third class which comprises a body of people who are known as Untouchables...Below the Untouchables there are others who are known as Unapproachables. Untouchables are those who cause pollution only if they touch. The Unapproachables are those who cause pollution if they come within a certain distance. It is said of the Nayadis—a people who fall into the category of the Unapproachables, “that they are the lowest caste among the Hindus—the dog-eaters. They are the most persistent in their clamour for charity, and will follow at a respectful distance, for miles together any person walking, driving or boating...

Below the Unapproachables are the Unseeables..

In the Tinnevelley District of the Madras Presidency there is a class of unseeables called Purada Vannans. Of them it is said,” that they are not allowed to come out during day time because their sight is enough to cause pollution. These unfortunate people are ‘compelled’ to follow the nocturnal habits, leaving their dens after dark and scuttling home at the false dawn like the badger, the hyena, the avordvark (Ambedkar 1987[2014]: 92).

Ambedkar interrogated this idea of civilization which is glorified in the name of religion and its sacredness and evaluated in terms of its purity. If this glorification is correct then how come the primitive tribes, criminal tribes and then ‘untouchables’, ‘unapproachables’ and ‘unseeables’ have been made to be live dark lives (Ambedkar 1987[2014]: 3-94).



In the so called modern era of the twentieth century millions of “human beings” have lived and continue to live in dens and were allowed to come out only after the dark, so that they do not pollute the so-called “pure” godly souls. They could not be part of the modernist discourse of anti-colonial struggle at the turn of the nineteenth century. Their presence would have significantly harmed the sacredness of the public sphere of the time- at the dominant sites of anti-colonial struggle (Omvedt 1994; Aloysius 1997).

Thus Gail Omvedt wrote:

This question, of identity and existence of the ‘nation’, was precisely the point taken up by Phule in the nineteenth century in opposing the elite-led nationalist project at its very beginning. His argument was that a society divided by caste could not constitute a genuine nation and that those claiming to represent the nation were in fact its destroyers since they not only ignored these hierarchical divisions but actually sought to maintain them as basis for their power. It is, in fact, in regard to what constitutes the ‘Indian identity’ that the anti-caste movement has its basic strength today, in contrast to the now barren record of Nehruvite secularism, as a counter to the communalization of Indian politics.

The anti-caste movement was in its own way nationalist and anti-imperialist; it saw opposition to colonial power as fundamentally connected with the struggle against what Marxists and nationalists would call ‘feudalism’, or the caste system; both, to it, were move beyond the narrow ‘class’ approach as well as the understanding of ‘nationalism’ only in terms of political opposition to a foreign power (Omvedt 1994:15-16)

How shall we understand this kind of social action where active agents on hand continued to demand freedom against the anti-colonial struggle but at the same time continued to conduct violence on their own fellow beings and deny their freedom from age old evil of caste and ethnic cultural and nationalistic passions to use the Arendtian term? The form of Indian nationalism that emerges in this anti-colonial struggle is viewed through the sacredness and protection of religion (Omvedt 1994).

Gail Omvedt cited Baburao Bagul in *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*:

The national movement was turned into a form of historical, mythological movement and ancestor worship....Those who propounded inequality and did not wish society to be democratic, started eulogizing history, mythology and ages gone by because, in those mythological and historical ages, they were the supreme visitors and leaders. The intelligentsia now harked back to and worshipped the past because of this. People such as Phule, Agarkar, Gokhale and Ranade who talked about misery and servitude of the Sudras and Atishudras, who criticized the *varna* system, and demanded social, economic and political reconstruction, were declared enemies and attacked from all sides. The intelligentsia won; they succeeded in turning the Indian liberation struggle into a lop-sided fight, and in reducing the other movements to a secondary status (Baburao Bagul cited by Gail Omvedt 1994: 15)

How to think of a situation in philosophical and theoretical terms when those demanding freedom continued to deny freedom and oppress and conduct violence on ‘shudras and atishudras’? Often societies build camps to follow the complete destruction and then there are societies that in themselves are camps where the destruction follows gradually and disallows the emergence of any form of consciousness or spirit to overcome it.

It is in this context Cabrera argues the question of cosmopolitanism and nationalism of Ambedkar goes beyond the framework that was envisaged even in the western mode of thinking (Cabrera 2017, 2020). Ambedkar engaged with the problematic idea of nationalism on cultural and religious lines and the form of nationalism that emerged during the anti-colonial struggle. Following Jyotiba Phule and Savtribai Phule, his approach was to show a worldliness that is determined through historical homelessness that had completely destroyed the scope of what Arendt regarded as the birth of the human being in the realm of the polis. The framework of caste did not only to deny freedom but also denied entry into the realm of the polis. The denial in the realm of the public is tantamount to the denial of the world of thought and knowledge. The engagement with the world of thought and knowledge is possible only through the appearance in

the realm of public. From this standpoint of homelessness they envisaged a more expansive idea of cosmopolitan worldliness.

Ambedkar wrote:

“My five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station, my mind was considerably disturbed by a question, "Where to go? Who will take me?" I felt deeply agitated. Hindu hotels, called Vishis, I knew there were. They would not take me. The only way of seeking accommodation therein was by impersonation. But I was not prepared for it, because I could well anticipate the dire consequences which were sure to follow if my identity was discovered--as it was sure to be I had friends in Baroda who had come to America for study. "Would they welcome me if I went?" I could not assure myself. They may [=might] feel embarrassed at admitting an untouchable into their household. I stood under the roof of the station for some time, thinking where to go, what to do. It then struck me to enquire if there was any place in the camp. All [the other] passengers had by this time gone; I alone was left. Some hackney [=carriage] drivers who had failed to pick up any passengers were watching and waiting for me (Ambedkar 1993 [2014]: 673)

Ambedkar's thinking of himself as a problem, deeply resonates with Du Bois'es in the "The Souls": "How does it feel to be a problem?" Both Du Bois' and Ambedkar's contribution to the theories of self begin with their understanding that the idea of the self begins with this notion of being a problem in society. The struggle to arrive at consciousness is situated in both Du Bois and Ambedkar. Du Bois goes on to write: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder"(Du Bois 2007 [1903]: xiii)

The theory of double consciousness on the one hand is central to the idea of racialized modernity and on the other raised entirely new issues regarding the development of theories of self at the turn of the twentieth century (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). The theory of double consciousness had addressed the gap in the theorisation of the self primarily associated with the writings of William James, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead (ibid). The idea of racialized self did not receive the required attention from the wider academic community. Scholars have examined how schools of thought emerge and under what circumstances ideas are received or disseminated. It needs to be examined how certain ideas receive less or no attention compared to other ideas in the academic and intellectual class at a certain moment or even over a period of time. We already have insights from Karl Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia". The history of ideas also needs to broaden its scope towards absence of ideas even when they existed in the historical framework.

The idea of double consciousness and thinking of oneself as a problem is the: "... phenomenological description of self-formation under conditions of racialization", casteism and untouchability (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015: 232). The idea of double consciousness and thinking of oneself as a problem involved the phenomenological description of self-formation under conditions of racialization, casteism and untouchability.

The idea of double consciousness and thinking of oneself as a problem has been part of the discussions and debates among scholars working on race and caste and those working on theorisation of self in the twentieth century (Du Bois 2007 [1903]; Ambedkar 1942 [2003]; Rawls 1989, 2000; Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). Ambedkar's early engagement with the question of self and the social began in his interaction with the classical pragmatists but later Ambedkar used this framework of the social, self and society in his reading of Hinduism and Buddhism. Ananya Vajpeyi has argued: "Ambedkar was never free of the consciousness of the suffering of his people. Indeed, for him, suffering is constitutive of the very identity of the Untouchables; it is the modality in which they experience their being in the world - especially since society, from their perspective, is created by and for those with caste" (Vajpeyi 2012: 214).

She goes on to write further: “What Ambedkar does to Buddhism that has not been done before, in many centuries of argumentation, hermeneutics, and exegesis, is to redefine its purpose, from Nirvana to Equality; from the transcendence of the social to the amelioration of society; from "I must be free" to "Everyone must be equal." This is a laudable goal to seek, no doubt, in and of itself, but it is not the endpoint toward which Buddhist practice is oriented”(Ambedkar 2012: 212).

Ananya Vajpeyi further argued that: “ ... Ambedkar's turn to Buddhism is precisely his understanding of the primacy of *duhkha*”(Vajpeyi 2012: 214). Ambedkar in his argument rejected the four noble truths and argued *duhkha* to be a collective and social suffering and not based on individual or karmic suffering. For Ambedkar *duhkha* - self’s burden is not an individual suffering but a social suffering that originates in caste. The practice of untouchability has never been an individual suffering but a social suffering whose antiquity has determined the condition of homelessness over centuries. The idea to search for the self in the Buddhist tradition was not an easy engagement for Ambedkar. He felt that in any case the idea of tradition had been monopolized by the Hindu upper caste-Brahmanical tradition over a long period of recorded history. Ananya Vajpeyi writes: “ Ambedkar saw Buddhism as the natural home of India's Untouchables. They had every reason, he felt, to reclaim their rightful home, rather than continue to linger, despised and exploited, at the very margins of Hindu social life” (Vajpeyi 2012: 213).

In this battle to overcome the burden of the self, Ambedkar emphasized that Buddhism was the very first revolution in India which Buddha had achieved in the state of homelessness and as a wanderer. For Ambedkar, Buddhism had achieved the values of egalitarianism by fighting the social order of caste. In the search for self, Ambedkar developed an entirely distinct of understanding of Buddhism that was not done over centuries. In Buddhism Ambedkar began to search for the path to return home and to the self which was the social and collective self.

Scott R. Stroud has argued for uncharted sources of influence of pragmatism. Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism and his hermeneutic interpretation of the public sphere (especially to those listening to him in this newly formed public sphere where caste gradually had become a source of assertion) led to one of the most significant emancipatory phases for the 'untouchables' during the phase of British Colonialism in the twentieth century (Omvedt 1994, 2017). Stroud states that religious orientations as a significant form of socializations have been considered to be the most capacious determinant in the formation of the individual's approach. It is this reasoning that had become influential in the 'rhetoric of reorientation' of 'historical untouchables' towards Buddhism. Ambedkar's 'rhetoric of reorientation' was that of a translator between two worlds: a world into which Ambedkar was born as an 'untouchable', where the life was destined to be hard and menial. The human conditions that prevailed made it unlivable for the 'untouchable' community at large. After his childhood schooling in Dapoli and Satara, he joined Elphinstone College where he studied English and Persian (Omvedt 2017). He could not study Sanskrit as he was born into an untouchable caste and the notion of impurity was attached as social stigma with the 'lower caste'. This prevented them from studying the holy language of Hindu and Vedic traditions. Another world is associated with his intellectual life as a student and researcher in America and Europe. This has been a source of wide discussion among scholars who have engaged with the writings of Ambedkar in the last few decades. Though it is of great importance to highlight here how Ambedkar himself reflected on this world connected with his intellectual and academic life.

Ambedkar wrote:

"The best friends I have had in my life were some of my classmates at Columbia and my great professors, John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman and James Harvey Robinson" (Ambedkar cited by Scott R. Stroud 2018: 61)

Stroud argues that Ambedkar problematized the question of caste through a "pragmatic critique of caste". This "pragmatic critique of caste" allowed 'untouchables' not only to bring theory and practice together but also move towards the idea of self-emancipation. Ambedkar as a translator

was engaged in translating “ in the sense analyzed by James Boyd White to capture the integrative, synthetic sense of language use in the border regions between cultures and different ways of communicating. Language use between different cultures exemplifies White’s synthetic notion of performative utterance— communicators like Ambedkar have to pursue their own self-directed goals through language while navigating and integrating two distinct linguistic frames” (Stroud 2016:6). The translation is form of action that is oriented towards processes in order to resist historical socio-cultural forces that continue to subject the notion of self often determined the collective level. This act of translation first contributes to a transformation where each unit gets transformed as it becomes part of the something new. In doing/performing this translation of the individual ( here referring to Ambedkar) transforms herself/himself along with creating a new social imaginary. Ambedkar viewed Deweyan pragmatism with the idea of translating pragmatist ideas for non-western societies (Stroud 2016, 2018, 2019). This is in correspondence with already existing account about the influence of pragmatism in different non-western societies.

The ideas associated with communicative engagement and the performative act of translation of ideas for the wider audience is of utmost importance for the speaker (or public intellectuals like Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois). There has to be a constant engagement between the speaker and the listener from the early construction of ideas in the form a text, lecture or presentation. The philosopher or the thinker has to give primacy to the utterance or the language as the central tool in developing an understanding of different ideas.

As Habermas stated:

The Speaker must choose a comprehensible [*verständlich*] expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true [*wahr*] proposition ( or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully [*wahrhaftig*] so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker ( can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an entrance that is right [*richtig*] so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with

respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified.

The goal of coming to understanding [*Verständigung*] is to bring about an agreement [*Einverständnis*] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and record with one another (Habermas 1976 [1979]: 2-3).

Similarly, the idea of the self as an interactive formation in sociological theory was neglectful of the conditions under which African-Americans were living at the time. Du Bois' approach towards the idea of the world as a race order addressed this huge gap (Rawls 2000). As Anne Rawls states: "*While Black and White appear to occupy the same world geographically, they rarely occupy the same interactional space*" (Rawls 2000: 244).

Itzigsohn and Brown argue that Alfred Schutz came closest to engage with the question of the lack of communication and interaction (among two different historical and social groups) in the formation of an intersubjective world. Alfred Schutz distinguishes between 'consociates' and 'contemporaries' in his phenomenological description of the world (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). For Schutz consociates are those with whom we interact, communicate and share the social space in everyday life. We engage with the consociated through different ideas and thinking. According to Schutz 'contemporaries' are those who live in our times, but we do not encounter them on everyday basis. 'Contemporaris' are invisible and remain behind the veil of everyday life (Schutz 1967).

Itzigsohn and Brown argue:

"As we distance ourselves from our everyday experiences the world becomes more opaque. We get to know our consociates and test our ideas about them through interaction. But we can only know our contemporaries using the ideal types that emerge in our everyday life. Our contemporaries are opaque to us in the same way that those who live behind the veil are invisible to Whites who can only think of them within the rubric of their existing ideas. But Schutz's analysis of the social world does not address the power relations and exclusionary dynamics involved in racialization. Our contemporaries are potential consociates; what separates us from



them is distance. The world behind the veil, though, is not the distant world of contemporaries. It is an adjacent world that Whites do not see” (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015: 234-235).

**Conclusion:**

In the conclusion it is possible to argue that Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar would consider home to be a place where basic universal rights as human beings could be conferred on all and not merely as belonging to any particular groups. The source of existence should not be determined by the persistence of culture but should be determined by the fact of birth as one arrives in this already inhabited world. This phenomena of the appearing in the world is not limited by one’s arrival only as member of any particular group but also as belonging to the human species. The guarantee to have rights is central for the emancipative purpose of the individual as the individual comes to appear in the world through various modes of speech, action and communicative engagement.

## Chapter 8

### **Sociological Futures: Towards a Pragmatist Philosophy of Social Sciences**

#### **Introduction: Social Theory and Twentieth Century**

The twentieth century has been witness to events whose consequences have still to be deciphered. On the other hand, there has been an attempt to rethink the history of philosophical and political traditions throughout the century. This dissertation engages with a particular intellectual movement, pragmatism and its interaction with various branches of the social sciences at the turn of the twentieth century.

The thesis follows W.E.B. Du Bois, Hannah Arendt and B.R. Ambedkar and their encounter with the philosophy of pragmatism. Their writings cover some fundamental questions that in a way tell a part of the story of the twentieth century. The historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin once observed: “I have lived through most of the twentieth century without, I must add, suffering personal hardship. I remember it only as the most terrible century in Western history (Müller 2011: 1).”

The catastrophes of the long twentieth century make it one of the most turbulent periods in recorded human history (Arendt 1958 [1973]; 1973 [1990]). It was only in the twentieth century that we were able to develop a shared and connected understanding of the world beyond our own cultural frameworks.

Randall Collins has argued:

The twentieth century is the first in which comprehending world history has become possible. Previous generations of scholars knew too little about other parts of the world beyond their own. Cosmopolitan historical research, beginning in the German university revolution around 1800, reached a critical mass in the early years of our own century. Then appeared the first great efforts

to break out of a Eurocentric viewpoint and to sketch the shapes on a world scale: Weber, Spengler, Toynbee, Kroeber. Their work is judged of mixed quality today, not surprisingly for pioneering efforts; that it appeared simultaneously indicates it was based on an underlying shift in the means of intellectual production. The literature of that generation, in T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Hermann Hesse, shares the quality of opening a treasure chest of world culture; *The Waste Land* could quote from ancient India as well as pre-classical Greece, and Pound's *Cantos* extended the range of allusion from Renaissance Italian to medieval Chinese (Collins 1998 [2000]: xvii)

This shared and connected understanding was also envisioned in the humanities and the social sciences at the turn of the twentieth century. . In philosophy and the history of sciences, these debates about the connectedness of ideas go back to the 18th century. The catastrophes and genocide witnessed through the twentieth century were possibly precipitated by a larger crisis in modernity

Jeffrey Alexander writes referring to the writings of Steve Seidman:

“In the middle of the twentieth century, Germany, a nation of scientific achievement in the middle of the twentieth century, Germany, a nation of scientific achievement and Enlightenment *Bildung*, committed genocidal murder against six million Jews and killed millions more innocents and soldiers in a war that almost succeeded in returning Europe to medieval times. Two decades later, the American Air Force tried bombing Vietnam back to the Stone Age. In the years since, social theory and social movements have relentlessly uncovered new forms of irrational prejudice at the very core of Western institutions, from abiding racism and misogyny to orientalism and homophobia [Seidman 2013]” (Alexander 2013: 1-2).

Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt lived through a period of transition from slavery to colonialism, imperialism, racism, untouchability and the caste order to meritocratic-populism and far-right threats to democracy, foreign aid both economic and military that led to the rise of what Arendt called- “invisible governments” and a “deep state” in the form of intelligence/secret agencies throughout the world (Arendt 1958 [1973]: xx). Arendt argued that the idea of foreign aid for

humanitarian reasons is political “precisely because it is not motivated by the search for profit” (Arendt 1958[1973]: xix). The age of multinational capitalism possibly commenced in the USA, and spread across the world, including to the global south, where it triggered off new modes of domination (Arendt 1958[1973]). And on the other, post-colonial societies have developed a notion of collective suffering to walk the path of democracy (Singh 1973). These societies have suffered from what Shmuel Eisenstadt called “ongoing dialogue between modern reconstruction and seemingly traditional forces” (Eisenstadt 2000: 26).

### **Democracy and Human Rights: On Endless Trial**

Shmuel Eisenstadt in his discussion on “multiple modernities” wrote:

...fully in the ideologization of violence, terror, and war. These destructive forces - the ‘traumas’ of modernity that brought into question its great promises-emerged clearly after World War I, became even more visible in World War II and in the Holocaust, and were generally ignored or set aside in the discourse of modernity in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Lately, they have reemerged in a frightening way-in the new "ethnic" conflict in parts of the Balkans (especially in the former Yugoslavia), in many of the former republics of the Soviet Union, in Sri Lanka, and in a terrible way in such African countries as Rwanda and Burundi. These are not outbursts of old "traditional" forces, but the result of the ongoing dialogue between modern reconstruction and seemingly "traditional" forces. So, also, fundamentalist and religious communal movements developed within the framework of modernity, and cannot be fully understood except within this framework. Thus, modernity-to paraphrase Leszek Kolakowski's felicitous and sanguine expression-is indeed “on endless trial (Eisenstadt 2000: 25-26).

We can certainly extend the argument that democracy has remained on trial ever since its origins. The struggle for democracy intensified throughout the twentieth century and certainly during the contemporary phase of populism. This did not undermine the scope and efforts for democracy in the twentieth century. It is possible to argue that democracy has also provided strong challenges to various forms of traditional-hierarchical practices that followed cultural and ethnic passions throughout the world. If there have been global intellectual and political projects for democracy,

there have also been cultural and global projects against democracy i.e. against Liberty, Equality and Fraternity throughout the twentieth century. In contemporary times we observe the undermining of the project of democracy through various strategies of populism at the global level. These strategies primarily include oppression of historical and cultural minorities and violating fundamental human rights in every possible way to counter the democratic ethos (Müller 2016).

Democracy and Human Rights remain central concerns in the writings of Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt. The purpose is to understand what they share on issues that surfaced in the first half of the twentieth century in particular. Thus, one of the central concerns in their political lives was the question of modern cosmopolitan citizenship based on the international understanding of human rights. Their idea of citizenship is grounded not only in a political-legal framework premised on the idea of political sovereignty but takes into consideration moral philosophy as well as a phenomenological view of human suffering (Arendt 1952; 1963 [1994]; 1969 [1994], Birmingham 2006; Agamben 1998; Du Bois 1935, Foner 1983, Reed Jr. 1997, Ambedkar 1936-1937, vol 12. [1993/2014]: 741-759; Zelliott 1969)

Peg Birmingham argues that:

“The reduction of the right to the sovereign power of the state follows directly from the sovereign power of self-interested individuals. The sovereign himself ensures an “ordered system of egoisms” of individuals who have agreed to give up individual sovereignty in exchange for a sovereign that can better secure the self-interests of each. Arendt’s critique of the modern conception of human rights is to a large extent carried out through a critique of sovereignty first developed by Hobbes, which she argues is at the very heart of the modern formulation of right” (Birmingham 2006: 40).

Richard Bernstein’s work engages both with pragmatism and the writings of Hannah Arendt. He pointed out that Arendt believed that thinking should be grounded in one’s lived experience.

Amidst the rise and terror of National Socialism, Arendt fled to France from Germany and then later arrived in New York as a stateless refugee. Arendt's experience as a stateless refugee with no guarantee of having any rights shaped her engagement with the question of being without any human rights. In her text on the origins of totalitarianism, the chapter on 'Rights to have Rights' reflects her experience of being denied the right to live (Arendt 1958 [1973], 296-297).

In 1943 after her arrival in New York, she penned the article 'We Refugees', where she argued that 'refugees' don't like being referred to as refugees and instead consider each other as 'newcomers' or 'immigrants'. In a conventional sense, a refugee is one who is driven to seek refuge because they either committed a particular act or held particular political opinions (Arendt 2007[1943]). In her case and many others, they had never held any radical political opinion. They did not say or do anything in the conventional understanding of a rebellion but because they belonged to the members of the Jewish community. This particular event changed the meaning of the refugee (Arendt 2007 [1943], Bernstein 1996).

Speaking at a more global level, Ambedkar was to ask:

"What is the use of the fundamental rights to the Negroes in America., to the Jews in Germany, and to the Untouchables in India?" (Ambedkar 1979 [1943]: 222). He further goes on to argue:

"The idea of fundamental rights has become a familiar one since their enactment in the American Constitution and in the Constitution framed by Revolutionary France. The idea of making a gift of fundamental rights to every individual is no doubt very laudable. The question is how to make them effective. The prevalent view is that once rights are enacted in law, then they are safeguarded. This again is an unwarranted assumption (ibid)".

Both Ambedkar and Arendt argued that racial discrimination was at the foundation of American Constitutionalism and as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his critique of the 'Reconstruction' period in American history:

“How black men, coming to America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, became a central thread in the history of the united states, at once a challenge to its democracy and always an important part of its economic history and social development” (Du Bois [1935]: 1).

“The story of transplanting millions of Africans to the new world and of their bondage for four centuries is a fascinating one. Particularly interesting for students of human culture is the sudden freeing of these black folk in the Nineteenth Century and the attempt, through them, to reconstruct the basis of American democracy from 1860-1880” (Du Bois 1935).

Du Bois argued that the reception of the story of the “Negro race” would depend upon the “theories of Negro race” one [the reader] subscribes to. Du Bois believed that the period of ‘reconstruction’ in America was one of the most dramatic periods of American history as suddenly people of the “Negro race” who were earlier owned by the slave traders for almost four centuries were now considered to be equals to the white Americans (Du Bois 1935).

Certainly, the question which the American people and in particular the whites had confronted was how to consider someone as an equal whom they had earlier considered to be “subhumans” in every sense of the word. This is what Du Bois meant when he confronted the question of American democracy during the reconstruction era that provided freedom from the bondage of slavery for more than three centuries (Du Bois 1935).

Both Ambedkar and Arendt encountered the question of racism against African-Americans at different points in their intellectual lives. It is easy to decipher today Ambedkar who remained a student of what he called the “The Negro Question” from the beginning of his academic life in America. In his letter to W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1946 Ambedkar wrote:

“ I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of latter is not only natural but also necessary.”<sup>1</sup>

In response Du Bois wrote:

“ I have your letter concerning the case of the Negroes of America and the Untouchables in India before the United Nations....., The National Negroes Congress has already made a statement which I am enclosing. I think, however, that a much more comprehensive statement well documented will eventually be laid before the United Nations by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. If this is done I shall be glad to send you a copy.

I have often heard of your name and work and of course have every sympathy with the Untouchables of India. I shall be glad to be of any service I can render if possible in the future.”<sup>2</sup>

It is possible to argue that Ambedkar and Du Bois developed an international political response to the historical problem of caste and race. This response along with Arendt’s political imagination of ‘rights to have rights’ remain central to the international struggle for human rights even during the middle decades of the twentieth century. This political imagination appear against the backdrop of historical and cultural oppression appear in the public sphere through communicative strategies. This appearance in the public sphere as Arendtian hope in the new beginnings is central to the various discussions that continue to take place on pragmatism, social theory and recent discussions on theories of existence. Their intellectual and political efforts

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<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar, B. R. (Bhimrao Ramji), 1891-1956. Letter from B. R. Ambedkar to W. E. B. Du Bois, ca. July 1946. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. PERMALINK: <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b109-i132>

<sup>2</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to B. R. Ambedkar, July 31, 1946. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. PERMALINK:<http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b109-i132>



towards imagining a future where the past becomes a frame of reference. This enabled them to think of the future, unlike in many intellectual and political projects, differently.

Thus Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira argue:

The weight of structures on the present is determined in terms of the impact of the past, not the future. The future plays a meaningful role in very few sociological approaches. Consider how sociologists today are variously involved in explorations of the materiality of social processes, in studies of the impact of material conditions on social practices, in discussions of different kinds of risk, in cultural analyses of the deep structures of meaning, or intersectional research on race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation. Notwithstanding their epistemological and methodological differences, all these approaches have remarkably little to say about temporality, let alone the future (Urry, 1996). Bringing the future back in means, for instance, that intersectional analyses of one's biography and body should be as much concerned with renaming historically significant Black women as 'feminist' as an act of historical appropriation (Collins, 1993: 13), as with projecting imaginary frames of action that would enable us to begin with a wholly new start. Indeed, identity is as much a question of asserting who we are and where our roots lie, as it is about reinventing ourselves.....History matters, but the future matters just as much (Da Silva and Vieira 2020: 3).

### **Pragmatism and Hannah Arendt: Human Nature versus Human Conditions**

The intellectual and political projects of Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar reflect on the idea of the future as new beginnings. The purpose was to confront the uncertainties of life determined by historical and cultural oppression and violence in the twentieth century. The philosophical and social scientific project at the turn of the twentieth century had provided the language and hope for a scientifically and normatively guided human world. The hope was to alter the rigid view of culture, individuals, groups, economic and political frameworks through the intellectual and political project of the social sciences. This was envisioned on the notion of reality and truth that would unmask historical and cultural violence across societies. This unmasking is reflective of processual sociology as Andrew Abbott argues:

A processual approach begins by theorizing the making and unmaking of all these things - individuals, social entities, cultural structures, patterns of conflict - instant by instant as the social process unfolds in time. The world of the processual approach is a world of events. Individuals and social entities are not the elements of social life but are patterns and regularities defined in a sequence of successive events. They are moments in a lineage, moments that will themselves shape the next iterations of events even as they recede into the past. The processual approach, in short, is fundamentally, essentially historical. All the micro-elements with which the other approaches begin are themselves macrostructures in the processual approach. Their stability is something to be explained, not presumed (Abbott 2016: ix-x)

The immediate ancestry of processualism lies in pragmatism and the Chicago School of sociology that grew up in dialogue with it. Unfortunately, no one in the Chicago School ever bothered to write systematic social theory. And the pragmatists themselves devoted more attention to psychology than to social theory. Moreover, the pragmatist encounter with rigorous processualism was truncated by George Herbert Mead's death when he had only begun to elaborate his reactions to Whitehead (Abbott 2016: x).

Abbott has argued that processual sociology is based on this understanding that the social world is in the process of "making, remaking and unmaking itself" (Abbott 2016: ix). Processualism responds to different dimensions of social life including the historical. But the historical in processualism is based on this assumption that the social world is constantly changing. The thinking about the stability of the social world in the processual framework is problematic.

As Abbott writes:

....thinking processually about social life. Most importantly, they start from the axiom of change. Change is not something that happens occasionally to stable social actors. Change is the natural state of social life. Stability is a creation or, more often, a linguistic mirage. There are no "social movements." There is nothing but social movement" (Abbott 2016: 2).

Abbott traces the lineage of processual sociology from the philosophical school of pragmatism and in particular the writings of George Herbert Mead. Following the historical linkages of processual sociology with pragmatism, Abbott raises the question:

“How can we talk about human nature if that nature is always changing?” (Abbott 2016: xi)

Abbott states that the phraseology- “human nature” is based on an assumption that the lifeworld is comprised of substantial traits and behavior that make it possible to categorize human beings. The idea of human nature is premised on a set of assumptions about human beings that social researchers often employ to arrive at various conclusions in the course of their investigation. Abbott identifies four categorizations of “human nature” (Abbott 2016).

The first categorization of human nature is based on the location of their units. Thus, some social researchers think that “human nature is a property located in individuals”, some locate the idea of human nature inescapable from groups and finally those who locate in specific/particular groups meaning that every social group might have their own. The second categorization of human nature in Abbott’s text is based on “zones of experience”. The domain of “zones of experience” is based on their focus on emotions, actions and symbol/meaning. The third categorization is based on the concept of human nature that is based on the assumption of formal approach (formal) and those that have content (substantive). And the final dimension is based on the concept of mutability. Following this trajectory of human nature is divided between changing/unchanging. Another argument often made is that human nature is synonymous with tradition or cultural systems. Thus, because of the cultural and historical factors, human nature tends to change extremely slowly than we imagine or expect. Therefore in the framework of processual sociology following the pragmatist tradition and Chicago school Abbott developed diverse forms of understanding of “human nature” (Abbott 2016).

This idea of questioning the idea of “human nature” received significant attention in the writings of pragmatist tradition as Abbott has argued. The idea of human nature is significant in the

writings of Hannah Arendt. Arendt too questions the fixated understanding of human nature for she was not so concerned about human nature but rather about human beings both in the political and normative sense of the term. That is why she discussed “human conditions” and not “human nature” in developing her philosophical anthropology of human beings through her engagement with the *vita activa* of labor, work, and action (Arendt 1958 [1973]). She was against the regimented understanding of “human nature” that seemed to have completely denied the possibilities of pluralism that are central to human thought and actions.

Arendt argued:

Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt 1958 [2013]: 8).

The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence. The world in which the *vita activa* spends itself consists of things produced by human activities; but the things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers (Arendt 1958 [2013]: 9)

Arendt was opposed to the idea of human nature that was seen as essence, for essences seem to deny the possibility of human thought and action. Thus slavery and the idea of being a pariah or belonging to a particular race or caste were the products of historical conditions that had prevailed in society over a period of time. In response to the idea of “human nature”, she wrote to Eric Voegelin:

“It will be hardly consoling to cling to an unchangeable nature of man and conclude that either man himself is being destroyed or that freedom does not belong to man’s essential capacities. Historically we know of man’s nature only insofar as it has existence, and no realm of eternal essences will ever console us if man loses his essential capacities” (Arendt cited by Richard H. King 2015: 62).

For Arendt, this critical view of the framework of human nature within the broader domain of the social sciences including political theories led her to explore the origins of evil. Arendt is concerned about the plurality of the human conditions that makes politics possible and necessary. It is in the making of these conditions and then their implications that human beings come to realize the meaning of “human being”.

What Arendt offers us is the ability to love the world with all the evil and suffering in it. In her own writings, we observe her deeper reflections on ‘... the Jewish question’ and the devastating episode of totalitarianism leading to the major catastrophe of the twentieth century (Arendt 1958 [1973]). She clearly had a deeper understanding of this catastrophe that was manifest in the first half of the twentieth century.

What becomes problematic is the complete separation of the realm of the social, political and private in Arendt’s writings (Arendt 1958 [2013]). It is in this broader context of the separation of the social and the political that her treatment of the ‘Jewish question’ and the race question becomes a deeply complex one (Benhabib 2000; Gines 2014; King 2015). This has generated intense debates among political and social theorists. Arendt had arrived in America in 1941 and in a letter in 1946 to Karl Jaspers praised the country which helped her in seeking refuge at a time when she was stateless. Even though she appreciated the new freedom she had encountered, it did not prevent her from expressing the dichotomy contained in this freedom.

Arendt wrote to her teacher and philosopher Karl Jaspers on 29th January 1946:

“The fundamental contradiction of this country is the coexistence of political freedom and social servitude [gesellschaftlicher Knechtschaft]....society organizes and orients itself along 'racial lines...This racial issue has to do with a person's country of origin, but it is greatly aggravated by the Negro question; that is, America has a real race problem and not just a racial ideology” (Arendt cited by Seyla Benhabib 2000:153).

Arendt's thinking on American society was reflective of her thinking on the question of political freedom in America. This political freedom was confronted by racism that has been central to the American socio-political reality. Arendt viewed this racism through her experience and engagement with the totalitarian regime of Hitler. In *The origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt categorically engaged with the scientific, social scientific and political understanding of the context of Hitlerism in Germany. But there is a socio-historical context to the racism that existed in most of the European countries and America as well as a history of colonial and imperial rule.

Thus Arendt argued:

“For the truth is that race-thinking entered the scene of active politics the moment the European peoples had prepared, and to a certain extent realized, the new body politic of the nation. From the very beginning, racism deliberately cut across all national boundaries, whether defined by geographical, linguistic, traditional, or any other standards and denied national-political existence as such. Race-thinking, rather than class-thinking, was the ever-present shadow accompanying the development of the comity of European nations until it finally grew to be the powerful weapon for the destruction of those nations. Historically speaking, racists have a worse record of patriotism than the representatives of all other international ideologies together, and they were the only ones who consistently denied the great principle upon which national organizations of peoples are built, the principle of equality and solidarity of all peoples guaranteed by the idea of mankind” (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 161).

In spite of Arendt's commitment towards the 'Jewish question' and the broader context of both scientific racism and the black question, she perhaps did not see the interconnectedness of these historical and political problems. This demarcation between the social and the political had serious consequences (Gines 2014).

As Kathryn t. Gines has stated:

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt distinguishes between the public and the private realms, stressing that excellence achieved in the public sphere surpasses any achievement possible in private. In reading this, I think about all the forms of excellence that are excluded from this model

of measuring achievement. Perhaps this model is not problematic for a white, property-owning male whose women, children, and slaves in the private sphere create the conditions for the possibility of him entering the public sphere (as was the case in the model arendt describes). However this model, which renders invisible that which is done in private space and celebrates that which is done in public space, poses numerous problems for women and people of color, especially those who are activists and intellectuals (Gines 2014: xii).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, I [Kathryn T. Gines] am initially impressed at the connections arendt makes between racism, imperialism, and totalitarianism, only to become outraged at her condescending and stereotypical characterizations of people of african descent. The frustration continues with her very generous recounting of the conditions under which american slavery is preserved with the founding of freedom in *On Revolution*, and then her less open-minded reading of Black student protesters and of Frantz Fanon in *On Violence* (Gines 2014:xii).<sup>3</sup>

As an anti-modernist thinker, Arendt thought of the rise of social being as a domain that actually stands against the realm of public- *res publica*. This idea of social for Arendt is a bureaucratic form of national housekeeping which led to the decline of the public sphere. The social paved the path for modern bureaucracy - in which the “rule of nobody” originates as a political reality (Benhabib 2000: 23). Seyla Benhabib suggests that for Arendt there are three different meanings of the social:

“ At one level, the social refers to the growth of a capitalist commodity exchange economy. At the second level, it refers to aspects of mass society. In the third and least investigated sense, the social refers to sociability, to the quality of life in civil society and civic associations” (ibid) Arendt’s understanding of the rise of the social and the decline of the public sphere has been considered problematic especially for the “gross historical oversimplification” (ibid).

Where does the social arise from? Arendt’s states that the ‘social’ arises out of “... the shadowy interior of the household” (Benhabib 2000: 23)). But Arendt did not engage with what was earlier confined to the household before the rise of the social. If the Greek polis and the early

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<sup>3</sup> A detailed response to these criticism of Arendt in the context of the race question could be found in the writings of Seyla Benhabib and Richard H. King (Benhabib 2000 ; King 2015).

phase of the Roman republic were the models of the public sphere then what about the socio-historical formations of the public sphere during the middle ages, the dark ages, the age of renaissance and even early modernity (Benhabib 2003). From Hegel's philosophical approach to history, it is certainly possible to ask if these phases remain like the "blank pages"?(ibid). In a detailed analysis of the social in another context, Arendt developed her understanding of mass society. It is in the discussion of mass society that Arendt configured the social in a fundamental conceptualization of totalitarianism. This form of the social which is contextualised in totalitarianism in a mass society limits the scope of action and transforms it into one where social behaviour is framed by the social roles performed by the 'bureaucrats, businessman, the executive' and so on (Arendt 1958 [2013]).

Thus Arendt argued in the context of bureaucracy in modern societies:

“ on all its [Bureaucracy] levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (Arendt 1958 [2013]: 40).

Even though Arendt engages with the question of human action in relation to the rise of the social, she did not elaborate on how the former is limited by the latter. The differentiation between human action and human behaviour occurs, according to her, with the rise of the social. Arendt is concerned with the nature of human behaviour in mass society but she offers no explanation of the phenomena, unlike Weber who offers an explanation of both 'bureaucratic rationality' and 'instrumental rationality' (Benhabib 2000).

The engagement with the question of society remained a significant pursuit within pragmatism. This engagement led pragmatism towards two major developments in the twentieth century. At first, it is this engagement with the 'social' primarily in the sense of structures of a historical, cultural, political and economic nature that in a way determined the lives of people, groups,



communities and civic associations. Both Pragmatist and Arendtian frameworks were concerned with constantly changing aspects of human nature that are conditioned by encounters with the human condition. These human conditions are comprised of multiple forms of thought and actions.

The separation of the social and the political, in the writings of Ambedkar and Du Bois suggests that they engaged with questions of democracy and fundamental rights. This separation is to develop a deeper understanding of how they come to form and also how they disassociate with one another. Ambedkar and Du Bois were categorically against viewing both social and political as unrelated entities across societies. Ambedkar argued that any political formation should have precedence over social formation (Ambedkar 1936 [1979/2014]; Parvathamma 1989; Garza 2019).

In the writings of Ambedkar and Du Bois, a programme of political action cannot be undertaken without addressing the deeper social question. In this context, Du Bois's voice expresses his critique of American democracy and Ambedkar envisioned the Indian union after the passing of colonialism.

The critique of political power without taking into consideration the realm of the social primarily came from two perspectives. First, political power is required for protecting the rights of the people. Ambedkar's argument comes from an understanding based on the theory of government which was propounded by Thomas Jefferson (Ambedkar 1943[1979/2014]). Jefferson believed as Ambedkar wrote, that "... politics was only an affair of policing by the State so that the rights of people were maintained without disturbance" (Ambedkar 1943[1979/2014]:221). Ambedkar on the other hand argued that the idea of political reforms preceding social reforms is deeply problematic unless "the idea is that the Government is to protect those who have vested rights and to penalize those who have none"(Ambedkar 1943[1979/2014]:221-222). Ambedkar also criticized the dominant view at the time within the framework of the theory of government and argued that without political power is not sufficient to confer political rights. Ambedkar felt that

this entailed a limited understanding of both political power and political rights. Despite the differences in understanding on the question of the social and the political, Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt, share an optimism towards the realm of politics as a space to rethink the question of beginnings or what we want to call sociological futures<sup>4</sup> in the public sphere.

### **Towards Sociological Futures**

How does someone determine their existence thinking through the question of the future which we want to call sociological futures? How do we come to think of our sociological futures from different frameworks of social existence? This dissertation is not about following the framework of great-person history to understand Du Bois, Arendt and Ambedkar but rather to understand the “historicality of individuals”<sup>5</sup> formed by varieties of conditions that enable them to develop extraordinary insight in order to shape the future. The dissertation is about historically understanding of their existence through their “processual thinking” starting from their lived experience and their reflection on these lived experiences drawing upon philosophical and social scientific knowledge. Their writings and thought opened up the scope for different sociological futures. The idea is to develop a sui generis approach towards sociological futures which follow historical continuity in memory but attempt to break away from the historical practice to move towards the formation of a new sociological and political space. Arendt chose to call the formation of this political a new beginning (Arendt 2013[1958]).

The presence of others in the formation of self is a social reality. How do Ambedkar and Du Bois theorize the self in reconstructing the idea of a beginning? The other does not suffer the denial of agency in their writings but faces an extreme form of criticism available in the established

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<sup>4</sup> The word sociological future has recently been gaining prominence. This is in reference with the discussion how different theoretical and philosophical paradigms attempt to think about future (Da Silva and Vieira 2020). The discussion on how social theory respond to the question of future also came up during my participation at the theory conference (British Sociological Association) organised in London on 6th September 2019. The theme conference was ‘The Future of Social Theory’. The purpose has been to understand how different intellectual and political projects concerned with social theory conceive future. How different intellectual and political projects allow to think of sociological futures that envision emancipation as an approach to life against various forms of historical and cultural tyranny.

<sup>5</sup> From Processual Sociology by Andrew Abbott (Abbott 2016: 1).

discourse and the structure of the society. Du Bois' imagination of black folks or Ambedkar's imagination of 'untouchables' is never established by rejecting the other at the philosophical, sociological or even ontological level (Du Bois 1903 [2007]; Ambedkar 1936-1937 [1979/2014]). Even for Arendt, the question of thinking at the level of self is always constitutive of the other even though thinking as an act is performed in solitude. The solitude of the individual is not the absence from the world but it is reflective of deeper engagement with the world as this self is constitutive of the world in which this act of thinking takes place (Arendt 1958 [2013]).

The ontology does not engage with abstraction but is significantly anthropological and phenomenological in nature. The phenomenological aspect is deeply significant in the Arendtian perspective. Even though Arendt deeply engaged with the question of violence, evil and totalitarianism in the twentieth century her reading is not sufficiently anthropological. The abstraction deals by mythologizing lifeworld situations. This contradiction also occurs because of Arendt's rejection of interlinking characteristics of political theory and philosophy.

### **'Self-Referential Knowledge': Lived Experience, History and Social Theory**

Patrick Baert in his text on Foucault argued how Foucault deploys the self-referential method in his explanation (Baert 1998). The self has been central in the development of early social theory in America through its encounter with different philosophical frameworks. The exploration of the self is based on the assumption of both being familiar and unfamiliar. It is important here to understand how Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois explored the domain of the familiar through the lens of the unfamiliar. This is to argue how the exploration of the unfamiliar becomes an access point to the present. This is to highlight the notion of self-referential knowledge which is essential to understand an aspect of their writings. The accessibility of the past is always a project that is undertaken in the present. This does not mean that the conceptual and social world as an inherent part of our understanding always existed in a continuous manner or an allegorical fashion. The conceptual and social world is not as fixed as it might appear and thus it becomes

significant to access epistemological sources of the past to challenge the familiarity of the present which often present itself as a fixed method to live in the world. This argues how sources of epistemological understanding have varied across spatial and temporal regimes.

This approach towards understanding the unfamiliarity of the familiar is significant when “Particular questions must receive particular answers; and if the series of crises in which we have lived since the beginning of the century can teach us anything at all, it is, I think, the simple fact that there are no general standards to determine our judgments unfailingly, no general rules under which to subsume the particular cases with any degree of certainty” (Hannah Arendt, 1966 speech, quoted in Arendt, 2003: vii) The possibilities of living in denial is often a chosen one, viz. to live in denial of the evils of caste, race or even twentieth-century totalitarianism. As Aldon Morris states just around the time the German political elites started building what would become National Socialism, White racism and eugenics served as the model for white supremacy in America. Morris argues that the racial science of National Socialism was imported from America (Morris 2015).

At the same time, the American Eugenics movement associated and supported German Nazism. One of the first journals of the American Sociological Association i.e. American Journal of Sociology exposed sociologists to Galton’s ideas. Galton’s article titled “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims” was the lead article of the journal in the year 1904. It did set forth the approach to eugenics. Galton stated that it must be introduced for the national conscience like a new religion. The belief that humanity should be served by the ‘fittest of races’ as the working of nature was indeed an orthodox view. , Eugenics got an appreciative audience within the academic community of the time. It received appreciation even within the sociological audience at the beginning of the twentieth century (Meghji 2021).

Ambedkar argued that the non-scientific justification of eugenics provided scientific legitimacy to the system of caste that has existed in India. Theories of caste attempting to justify it as a rational system were premised on the fallacious distinction between human beings and peoples.

Ambedkar believed that Spencer's theories of social evolution viewed caste and race as a system of natural structural differentiation and did not see any problem within it (Ambedkar 1917 [1979/2014]). Ambedkar's early writings focused primarily on the anthropology of the 'origins' and 'practice' of caste in Hinduism and the Indic tradition at large.

The writings of Ambedkar and Du Bois are clearly indicative of the critique of sociological positivism that was current at the time. Arthur Lewis and many others have argued that Franz Boas, Du Bois, John Dewey, Ambedkar, Margret Mead challenged the political, conceptual and social scientific understanding of the world that had legitimized the structural differentiation of the human race primarily on the basis of birth and one's cultural belonging (Garza 2018). These efforts to emancipate people from structural discrimination and hierarchy had their repercussions and found expression in the revised notion of human rights. The notion of human rights was also evoked by Arendt when she argued for "right to have rights" (Arendt 1958 [1973]: 296). The total dehumanization of the ability to realize oneself to be human was opposed by the intellectual and political struggles envisaged by Du Bois, Ambedkar and Arendt. These major developments in the twentieth century ensured that human beings were not denied the possibility of their self-realization as fellow humans.

And without a doubt, scientific and social scientific knowledge played an equally important role in opposing movements such as eugenics. Their anthropological writings provided for an alternate political and philosophical understanding of the world. The virtues of responsibility and judgement have become central to the thinking of intellectuals and thinkers in order to reorient the historical hierarchical structures.

In America, Arendt engaged with émigré Jewish intellectuals but also thinkers, writers, poets addressing the questions and concerns across a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and the political spectrum. Her view of the past is reflected in her essay entitled "Home to Roost" (Arendt 2003: 257-275). Arendt's view of history was at odd with someone like Santayana who had famously remarked: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"

(Young-Bruehl 2006: 12). On the contrary, Arendt believed that “for better or worse” our world has “become” what in reality it is: “the world we live in at any given moment is the world of the past” (Arendt 1959[1973]: 186). Her emphasis is that past actions could be reflected upon in the present. There is a continuous struggle to engage with the past, the past not as a structure but as a frame of reference to envision the future. In reckoning with the immersion in the past we do not break free from it but rather the past becomes an intrinsic part of the present and thus the challenge in the present is to reimagine the past in ways that could get us close to the imagined future.

This approach to engaging with the past in order to arrive at a collectively imagined and shared world is central to the ideas of both Ambedkar and Du Bois. Thus, there has to be a struggle that seeks to break free from the past. And thus the notion of struggle for political modernity and emancipation is explicit in the later writings of both Du Bois and Ambedkar. But for Du Bois and Ambedkar what remains questionable is the profound commitment to understanding the past in order to understand the present and to do away with the dogmatic view of the world. Du Bois’ language expresses the uncertain promise of the future, but even in this uncertainty, there is the slightest hope for ‘Blacks’ despite Jim Crow laws. It is in this context Du Bois refers to the white universities and institutions whose aim is to produce knowledge for the advancement of freedom. He criticized the all-white universities of America and Europe who consider themselves to be imparting wisdom and knowledge but historically have never had any place for ‘Black Youths’ in these places of higher learning and research (Du Bois 2007 [1903]). In his approach towards higher learning and research Du Bois considered ‘deep education’ for Black Youth to be the real meaning of freedom. The real meaning of freedom resided in pursuing the deep education of black youth. He criticized Booker T Washington who argued for promoting industrial education among the rural southern masses (Morris 2015).

There were two lineages of thinking about Black Liberation expressed at two separate conferences - The Tuskegee and Hampton conferences- that were centred around the ideas of Booker T Washington. He believed in promoting farming techniques, industrial education and

training and other forms of practical knowledge associated with industrial work settings (Morris 2015). On the contrary, Du Bois had argued for the overall emancipation of African-Americans. He primarily thought of the philosophical and psychological emancipation of Blacks that might possibly allow them to realize their true selves that had been denied to them during long histories of enslavement, racism, scientific racism, imperialism (Du Bois 2007[1903]; Morris 2015). Morris argues that “The Tuskegee and Hampton conferences embraced the goal of gaining practical knowledge; pure scholarly pursuits were not their forte, and their leaders had no desires to pursue such a mission” (Morris 2015: 58).

Du Bois envisaged the struggle of the twentieth century to be the struggle of Blacks and people of other non-white races who have been humiliated historically by white supremacy and long histories of colonialism and empire throughout the world (Du Bois 1897, 2007[1903], 1909). The Du Bois Atlanta school of sociology was guided by strict sociological concerns in the early stages - sociological and economic factors were hypothesised to be major reasons for racial inequality that had pushed black people to be the lowest levels of the social order (Wright II 2002a, 2002b, 2006). The Atlanta school’s concern for racial inequality stemmed primarily because of the presence of African-American students who continued to face discrimination even after receiving an education. Du Bois himself graduated from Harvard University could not acquire any position at most of the universities due to the continued legacy of racism.

There was a significant contrast between the conditions that had prevailed in India, America and Germany towards the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. Even though the ‘The Jewish Question’ had remained a significant one historically Jews were in institutions of higher education, were present in the philosophical and literary worlds and probably remained intrinsic and significant to the development of many disciplinary concerns. During the rise of nationalism socialism, the s German identity of people of Jewish origin was reduced to their Jewish identity alone.

The historical prejudice of caste continued into the twentieth century and did undergo significant political transformations if not in socially compelling ways. In fact, it is only towards the end of the nineteenth century and later in the first half of the twentieth century, that caste was conceptualised and the social question of caste could be transformed into a political one. The appeal of cultural and social transformation by religious reformers in India was not enough to break the stranglehold of caste across the country. Ambedkar realized that a cultural and social transformation within the Hindu social order was not possible both from the perspective of caste and gender. He argued that the two social categories were intertwined and intersectional in their formation. The cultural subjugation of one was interlinked with the structural formation of the latter (Newbigin 2013). Anupama Rao and Sharmila Rege have written extensively on the question of gender in the Manusmirti and Hindu code bill respectively.

The changing situation during British Colonial rule allowed historical untouchables to receive some limited form of education. Ambedkar was one among the first generation of untouchables who got an opportunity to receive an education and then further went on to study at Columbia University in 1913. The question of freedom and equality remained intertwined for Ambedkar. The question of the freedom of India from British colonialism was not an isolated question without thinking about a just and equal society. The anti-colonial struggle did not consider the 'The Caste Question' as a necessary or even a sufficient condition for political modernity in India (Omvedt 1994). In fact, Ambedkar in a sui generis manner transformed historical untouchables towards the path of political modernity and constitutionalism in the twentieth century. This is not to say that Ambedkar's political modernity and even constitutionalism were envisaged only for the political modernisation of historical untouchables or limited to India.

In the socio-historical understanding of Ambedkar, Arendt and Du Bois there seems to be a possibility of thinking about the "apperceptive mass". What becomes significant is to understand how the question of democracy has been addressed in their writings. Central in this description of democracy is the centrality of truth, experience and consciousness and the embeddedness of these categories in the domain of social sciences and philosophical discourses in the twentieth



century. Their approach was not limited to addressing these questions within the boundaries of the nation-state. This takes into consideration their perspective of the world order along with specific societal order in order to engage with these questions. What eventually emerges is an approach towards an international order particularly within the broader framework of the Enlightenment as a central movement in western philosophical and political history as well in Asia with Anticaste intellectuals and their discourse that remains linked to the historical understanding of the world that developed in the twentieth century.

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