Research Article

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Ecclesial Belonging in a World of Pure Experience: William James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Religious Rationality in Crisis

Abstract: The global COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted several instances of churches violating state issued and scientifically recommended guidelines designed to keep populations healthy and to prevent the further spread of the disease. While these instances are minority responses to these orders, they none-theless raise questions about the rationality of ecclesial belonging in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this article, I draw on the work of William James and W. E. B. Du Bois to articulate a conception of ecclesial belonging as a social epistemological process engaging a complex, fluid multiplicity of knowers of various scales. I argue that, in this view, ecclesial rationality involves the construction of a concatenation of internal and external practices individual believers and groups can traverse so long as they consistently satisfy a plurality of desiderata. I suggest that what is irrational about religious-based defiance of COVID-19 guidelines is the church-sanctioned severance of internal from external practices. I suggest that this behavior is supported by a failure to grasp the demands of ecclesial rationality rather than embrace them, and that this conception of rationality may have been eroded by the value-neutral skepticism of secular rationality.

Keywords: William James, W. E. B. Du Bois, religious experience, phenomenology, philosophy of religion, pragmatism, radical empiricism, rationality, ecclesial belonging

1 Introduction

On March 22, 2020, in opposition to the suggestions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to practice social distancing, Bishop Gerald Glenn of New Deliverance Evangelistic Church in Richmond, Virginia, held a sermon in which he claimed, "I firmly believe that God is larger than this dreaded virus." On Sunday, April 14, 2020, Bishop Gerald Glenn died from COVID-19.[1] Unfortunately, Bishop Glenn is not alone. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches defied stay-at-home orders and held services despite warnings from federal, state, and local authorities about the dangers of mass gathering. In Louisiana, Pastor Tony Snell held services despite a statewide ban on social gathering. Shortly thereafter, a 78-year-old man who had recently visited the church died. The coroner determined the death was due to

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1 Riess, "Bishop Who Said 'God is Larger Than' COVID-19 has Died from the Disease."

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COVID-19.[2] Several churches have followed suit, and in some denominations as many 30 pastors and church leaders have died from the virus.[3]

In the polarized context of America's political system, it is easy to interpret these misfortunes as confirmation of the essential irrationality of organized religion in contrast to the sterling rationality of secular institutions. Although this interpretation may easily emerge in the American political context, it overlooks two important considerations. First, it overlooks the consideration that these defiant churches and their leaders make up only a minority of churches and church leadership in the United States, and that the overwhelming majority of churches complied with the stay-at-home orders and moved to online services, many of whom continued to offer online service even after stay-at-home restrictions were rescinded. Second, it overlooks the consideration that these forms of ecclesial defiance are not the only forms of defiance observable during the pandemic. Many states witnessed the right to work protests that featured even larger groups of people, many with little to no relation to religious institutions. These observations challenge the assumption that defiance of guidelines in the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to the essential irrationality of religious thinking and belonging.

However, this is not to say that these forms of defiance are not irrational. They are most definitely expressions of irrational thought and behavior, in the case of both the individuals and the groups that defied these orders. What I want to suggest in the case of the religious forms of defiance is that they are not expressions of the essential irrationality of religious thought, behavior, and belonging, but that they are failures of religious rationality and rational ecclesial belonging. To make this case, I want to propose a conception of rational ecclesial belonging, explicate the demands of this conception, and elucidate the ways in which these demands can fail to be satisfied. In this view, rational ecclesial belonging and rational ecclesial operations consistently and simultaneously satisfy a plurality of evaluative desiderata at various scales, applicable to both individual members and groups of members, and they facilitate successful participation in the broader ecclesial context. According to this view, what is irrational about the religious-based forms of COVID-19 safety order defiance is that they fail to satisfy these desiderata and fail to facilitate successful participation in this broader context.

To develop this case and this view of ecclesial rationality, I look to the work of William James and W. E. B. Du Bois. I first examine the doctrine of pure experience and radical empiricism James developed toward the end of his career. I suggest that radical empiricism is a transcendental phenomenology in support of the pragmatism James had long been developing.[4] I then examine the work of W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, specifically in the tenth chapter, "Of the Faith of the Fathers." I argue that this chapter develops an account of religious experience and participation in the developing black church that not only coheres with James's radical empiricism and pragmatism, but that supports an account of rational ecclesial belonging and operation with the features just described. I suggest that this account construes ecclesial rationality as a satisfactory leading of both individuals and groups through a concatenation of internal and external practices that link the ecclesial body to the practices of the surrounding environment. I contend that what is irrational about some forms of ecclesial operation is that they severe ecclesial from nonecclesial practices. I argue that this view explains what is irrational about religious-based defiance of COVID-19 guidelines and that this suggests that the contemporary forms of religious irrationality expressed by both individuals and institutions amounts to a failure to grasp and satisfy the demands of ecclesial rationality rather than embrace them.

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2 Woodward, "'A Phantom Plague:' America's Bible Belt Played Down the Pandemic and Even Cashed In. Now Dozens of Pastors are Dead."

3 Ibid.

4 Of course, quite a bit will hinge on how "transcendental" is understood. Here I mean by transcendental both "that which makes possible" and "one practice external to another." This clarification is necessary because James's transcendental project operates closer to what Deleuze called "a plan(e) of immanence" than "a plan(e) of transcendence" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand*, 265–6). See also Duvernoy, "'Pure.'"

2 William James in a world of pure experience

In "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" William James makes a claim that has often been noted for its substance but seldom interrogated for its methodological presuppositions.[5] He says, "consciousness […] is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles."[6] Many philosophers have been struck by the first part of this claim and have interpreted James as here rejecting substance dualism. While I agree James rejects substance dualism, I am struck by the second part of this claim, the suggestion that "consciousness […] has no right to a place among first principles." I find this claim particularly perplexing because I do not take James to be a philosopher of first principles. Consider, by way of contrast, the philosophies of Kitarō Nishida and Edmund Husserl. In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Kitarō Nishida begins with the notion of pure experience,[7] and his first chapter is replete with citations of James, including James's essay "A World of Pure Experience."[8] For Nishida, pure experience is what one must turn to "[t]o understand true reality […] [and] discard all artificial assumptions."[9] Like Descartes' *cogito*, pure experience is "a firm base" for proper philosophizing.[10] Similarly, Husserl construes his phenomenological or transcendental ἐποχή as a redux of the Cartesian method, not "to doubt universally […][but] to parenthesize every objectivity."[11] For Husserl, this bracketing of "the natural attitude" reveals "pure consciousness" or a "phenomenological residuum" that discloses "a new region of being never before delimited."[12] However, for Husserl, this new region is not just a new frontier, but a propaedeutic for all other inquiries.[13] In this sense, both Husserl and Nishida construct foundationalist philosophies; they both identify a starting point, or beginning place, for proper philosophizing that attempts to shake off prior commitments. James takes a different tack. In "The Sentiment of Rationality," James says that "the power to trust […] is an essential function"[14] and in "Reflex Action and Theism," James says that "the given world is there […][and that the] only possible duty […] is the duty of getting the richest results that the material given will allow."[15] In this way, James adopts a philosophy *in mediis rebus*[16] or a method of taking on commitments one already has and discerning the reliable from the unreliable rather than a method of starting from scratch or from a beginning.

So what then does James mean when he says that consciousness has no right among first principles? Has James abandoned his prior methodology? It seems not. After claiming that consciousness has no right among first principles, James notes a continuity in his thought, claiming that "[f]or twenty years past I have mistrusted 'consciousness' as an entity [and] for seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students."[17] In the follow-up essay, "A World of Pure Experience," James also aligns his

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5 James's essays on pure experience are collected in the series of papers that became *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. These essays raise questions about the status of radical empiricism as James's mature view, his metaphysical positions, and his methodological relation to other philosophical approaches, such as Husserlian phenomenology. In my view, the philosophy of pure experience subtends what can be called a non-egological transcendental phenomenology, or onto-epistemology, and that this provides transcendental support for Jamesian pragmatism. For some classical work on the relationship between Husserlian and Jamesian methodology, see Edie, "William." For more recent work, see Blum, "William." For recent work developing similar interpretations of James, see Drabinski, "Radical;" and Duvernoy, "Concepts."

6 James, *Essays*, 3.

7 Nishida, *An Inquiry*, 3.

8 Ibid., 5.

9 Ibid., 38.

10 Ibid., 39.

11 Husserl, *Ideas*, 60.

12 Ibid., 63–5.

13 Ibid., xxii.

14 James, *The Will*, 76.

15 Ibid., 103.

16 As Lynne Ruder Baker notes, there are two senses of "in the middle of things:" a middle of things into which one jumps and a middle of things from which one begins. Jamesian pragmatism is a middle of things from which one begins. The contrast between James and Nishida/Husserl here concerns starting in the middle and starting at a beginning (or as close as one can get to a beginning). See Rudder Baker, "Philosophy," 378.

17 James, *Essays*, 4.

pure experience commitment to consciousness as a nonentity with his doctrine of radical empiricism.[18] Of course, radical empiricism is a distinct doctrine from James's pragmatism, which is most definitively a philosophy *in mediis rebus*, but James says that "the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail."[19] So it seems that James is not backtracking on his methodological commitments. What then does James mean by first principles? As I see it, what James means by a first principle is something unanalyzable or primitive. In the ontology of substance dualism, an immaterial substance is a simple substance without extension or parts as opposed to a material substance with extension and parts. And James does in fact say that consciousness is "the faint rumor left behind by the disappearing 'soul' upon the air of philosophy,"[20] but what James says next is even more telling.

The development of James's case against consciousness is not so much a polemic against substance dualism as it is a critique of egological accounts of experience. Thus, James's target is not so much Cartesian substance dualism as it is the "neo-Kantian [view][...] that the experience is indefeasibly dualistic in structure."[21] In this view, "object-plus-subject is the minimum that can actually be" given in experience.[22] This "subject-objection distinction [...] is entirely different from that between mind and matter."[23] It is a claim about the structure of phenomenal experience. James's point in "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" is that experience does not have this structure. Thus James, says, "my contention is exactly the reverse of this. *Experience* [...] *has no such inner duplicity; and that separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition.*"[24] Here James's point is that the truly unanalyzable or primitive experience is the "instant field of the present [...] the 'pure' experience."[25] This field is "only virtually or potentially either object or subject."[26] In this sense, experience is not egological. There is no "I" that knows some object "O." Instead, "knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter."[27] In this case, "knowing actually and practically amounts to – leading towards, namely, and terminating-in percepts, through a series of transitional experiences which the world supplies."[28] Of course, this notion of "agreeable leading" is exactly what it is at the core of James's pragmatic theory of truth.[29] So radical empiricism is no substitute doctrine for Jamesian pragmatism.

However, in "A World of Pure Experience," James does say that radical empiricism "must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced."[30] This may sound like the declaration of a methodological beginning point, and in *The Meaning of Truth*, James does say that "[r]adical empiricism consists first of a postulate [...] that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be definable in terms drawn from experience."[31] What I want to suggest is that for James a postulate is not a voluntarist undertaking or promethean conjuring, but a suggestion one is moved to by the general drift of experience. This would explain why James says that "the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail,"[32] and the fact that he makes this claim right before he states the postulate of the latter doctrine. Of course, this raises the question of what additional work radical empiricism does over and above

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18 Ibid., 22.
19 James, *The Meaning*, 6/172.
20 James, *Essays*, 4.
21 Ibid., 5.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 6–7.
25 Ibid., 13.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 4.
28 Ibid., 14.
29 James, *Pragmatism*, 97.
30 James, *Essays*, 22.
31 James, *The Meaning*, 6/172.
32 Ibid.

the work of pragmatism. Here I want to suggest radical empiricism is a transcendental account in support of pragmatism in two ways: it explains how a practice facilitates knowing and how one practice can lead into another.

Both pragmatism and radical empiricism have been interpreted as relativistic or problematically subjectivist doctrines, but James thought of both as embracing what contemporary philosophers would now call social epistemology. For example, in *Pragmatism*, after James says that truth means agreement of our ideas with reality,[33] he says that "we exchange ideas" and that "we must talk consistently just as we must think consistently."[34] Thus, James says that "[t]rue ideas lead us into useful verbal and conceptual quarters as well as directly up to useful sensible termini."[35] And in "The Essence of Humanism," James explicitly says that his view is "essentially a *social* philosophy, a philosophy of 'co'."[36] Similarly, in "The Function of Cognition," James says that "[y]ou can deduce a possible sensation from your theory and taking me into your laboratory, prove that your theory is true of my world by giving me the sensation then and there."[37] Of course, James has no scientistic biases; what holds in the case of scientific laboratories holds in the case of other endeavors. As James says, "[t]he whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one."[38] Thus, the Jamesian view is that we work out these differences in laboratories as well as in churches and parliaments. In this sense, Jamesian pragmatism makes central use of the notion of a practice, or an organized activity. However, Jamesian pragmatism with its central notion of worthwhile leading does not enshrine an anti-individualistic knowing together, as some social epistemologies do. Instead, Jamesian pragmatism emphasizes the experiences of both the individual and the collective and the ways in which both individuals and groups form, disperse, and traverse various practices. In this sense, Jamesian pragmatism recognizes a complex, fluid multiplicity of knowers of various scales as it specifies what successful leading amounts to for both individuals and emerging and dissolving groups.[39]

This understanding of Jamesian pragmatism combined with the notion of conceptually informed pure experience finally leads us to the transcendental relationship between radical empiricism and pragmatism. In *The Meaning of Truth*, James says that the "generalized conclusion [of radical empiricism] is that [...] the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience."[40] This conclusion accounts for the very possibility of the leading that is at the core of pragmatic truth, but pragmatism also supports the traversing of practices. Here James appeals to the notion of "the more substantive and the more transitive parts" of experience.[41] Of course, James adds that these parts "run into each other continuously,"[42] but he is also clear that "[r]adical empiricism [...] is fair to both the unity and the disconnexion" in experience.[43] Thus, radical empiricism explains both how practices lead into one another and break apart. However, the most important transcendental work radical empiricism plays with respect to pragmatism is its account of how knowing together is possible within a particular practice. For

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33 James, *Pragmatism*, 96.
34 Ibid., 102.
35 Ibid., 103.
36 James, *Essays*, 99.
37 James, *The Meaning*, 31/197.
38 James, *Pragmatism*, 30.
39 For James, this is measured by a plurality of desiderata captured by the term satisfactoriness. As James says in "Humanism and Truth Once More," "[s]atisfactoriness has to be measured by a multitude of standards" (James, *Essays*, 128). I will elaborate on this point later. See also Stepanenko, "The Fruits."
40 James, *The Meaning*, 7/173.
41 James, *Essays*, 42.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 24.

James, this is accomplished by the radical empirical doctrine that two minds can know one thing,[44] or what James calls the "conterminousness of different minds."[45] This conterminousness is facilitated by the pure experiential suggestion that consciousness does not fit the subject–object schema. In that schema, two experiences of an object are necessarily distinct experiences.[46] In the case where one subject and another subject both perceive a rope,[47] both persons experience something captured in the form "I see a rope" where each I is necessarily distinct insofar as it refers to each separate person. In a conceptually informed pure experience, however, both subjects experience something of the form "pullable rope." This experience is, to be sure, located in different streams of consciousness insofar as each person perceives the rope from different angles, but the substantive component of the experience is the same insofar as each substantive component of the experience possesses the same internal features and external transitive relations.[48] In this way, then, radical empiricism explains both how the kind of knowing together pragmatism posits is possible and how knowers of various scales both emerge and disperse through various conscious and co-conscious processes.

3 W. E. B. Du Bois and ecclesial rationality in "Of the Faith of the Fathers"

The Souls of Black Folk was published in 1903, 1 year after the publication of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and almost 2 years after James gave the first Gifford Lectures that became *Varieties*. However, many of the essays that constitute *Souls* were written and published in various journals and outlets and then revised upon inclusion in *Souls*. This was the case with the tenth chapter of *Souls*, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," which first appeared in the journal *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religious Ethics and Theology* in 1900 under the title "The Religion of the American Negro." The relationship between the philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois and William James is complicated, and a chronology of the dynamical influence the two had on each other and their respective philosophical developments is beyond the scope of

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44 Moller contends that objections from Miller and Bode forced James "to see how deeply flawed his radical empiricism was, at least as he initially conceived it" and that this explains why James abandoned his *The Many and the One* project (19). To salvage radical empiricism, Moller suggests James abandoned "the philosophy of pure experience in favor of panpsychism" and that he abandoned the critique of compounded consciousness he developed in *Principles* by the time he began to compose *A Pluralistic Universe* (Moller, "'The Many,'" 18). I agree that Miller's and Bode's objections troubled the framing of the problem James started to develop in *The Many and the One*, but I disagree that James abandoned the philosophy of pure experience in favor of panpsychism. For one thing, James mentions "the relations of radical empiricism to panpsychism" in "A World of Pure Experience" (*Essays*, 43). Second, James entertains "[s]peculations like Fechner's" in "How Two Minds Can Know One Thing" (which was published on September 1, 1904, years before the *Universe* lectures), and those speculations already involved compounding consciousness. Here James does warn of taking those speculations as entitative rather than functional, but this may just be a cautioning against dualism once more. Finally, James had called himself a radical empiricist for some time and had long allied radical empiricism with pluralism, a doctrine he also occasionally aligns the philosophy of pure experience with. So I'm not sure there was ever a clearly pinned down use for any of these doctrines that James later deviates from, although his various formulations of the doctrines clearly changed across time. However, a more detailed account of how James understood and responded to the Bode–Miller objections is beyond the scope of this paper. For an account of the various uses James put these terms to throughout his career, see Slater, "William."
45 Ibid., 37.
46 James does not exactly explain why two different "I's" could not share the same object. He is aware of the neo-Hegelian claim that individuals can share an experience in virtue of their absorption in an absolute Ego, but he believes that in the former case there would still be numerically distinct experiences, and in the latter case, there would be a numerically single experience. His doctrine of conterminousness is an attempt to account for how numerically distinct experiences can be shared.
47 I take this example from James, *Essays*, 38.
48 Of course, some of these transitive relations are felt in different ways, but because each experience is a multiplicity James suggests that sharing is possible within these differences.

this article.[49] However, it should be known that Du Bois was a student of James's at Harvard,[50] and that he himself once claimed to have become "a devoted follower of James at the time he was developing his pragmatic philosophy."[51] In what follows, I do not want to suggest that Du Bois first formulates the philosophy of pure experience in "Of the Faith of the Fathers," but I do want to suggest that this chapter can be interpreted as evincing a pragmatic recognition of a complex, fluid multiplicity of knowers of various scales and a concrete example of the complex relationship that often exists between religious consciousness and co-consciousness that is typical of individual participation in ecclesial bodies.[52] I argue that this case study serves as a fruitful exemplification of ecclesial rationality and irrationality when Jamesian pragmatism is applied to it insofar as the chapter supports a pragmatic conception of successful participation in various practices.

"Of the Faith of the Fathers" begins with a journey, as Du Bois travels a country road "far from my foster home, on a dark Sunday night [...] past wheat and corn, until we could hear dimly across the fields a rhythmic cadence of song."[53] The song is a "soft, thrilling, powerful [melody of][...] a Southern Negro revival."[54] The scene is somewhat startling to Du Bois who says he is used to the "quiet and subdued" sermons of Berkshire.[55] At the scene, Du Bois reports an "air of intense existence that possessed that mass of black folk."[56] He claims that, "[a] sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and seemed to seize us, – a pythian madness, a demoniac possession, that lent terrible reality to song and world."[57] He describes the "preacher [who] swayed and quivered [...][as] people moaned and fluttered [...][until] the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside [him] suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry."[58] Of the revival, Du Bois says that there are "[t]hree things [characteristic of the] religion of the slave, – the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy."[59] The Preacher, Du Bois says, "is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil."[60] He is a "leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' and intriguer, an idealist [...] and ever, too, the centre of a group of men."[61] "The Music [...] is that plaintive rhythmic melody [...] [s]prung from the African forests, where [...] it was adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope."[62] Finally, "the Frenzy or 'Shouting,' [is an expression of] the Spirit of the Lord pass[ing] by, and seizing the devotee, [making] him mad with supernatural joy."[63] This final feature of the revival, the Frenzy, Du Bois says, was "the one more

49 See Stepanenko, "A New Name," for some work in this direction.

50 See Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*.

51 Du Bois, *The Autobiography*, 133.

52 Du Bois's contributions to pragmatism have been recognized elsewhere (e.g., Itzigsohn and Brown, "Sociology;" and Kahn, *Divine*), but there is also a considerable literature dedicated to Hegelian interpretations of Du Bois as well (e.g., Krell, "The Bodies;" Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow*; Shaw, *W. E. B.*; and Siemerling, "W. E. B."). I do not mean to suggest that Du Bois should not be interpreted as clearly influenced by both the Jamesian and Hegelian traditions. However, by interpreting radical empiricism as a transcendental phenomenology in support of pragmatism and applying this to one chapter in *Souls*, I hope to bring these two streams of Du Bois interpretation closer together. The possibility of such a reconciliation should not be surprising to those familiar with Kenneth Westphal's interpretation of Hegel as "the original pragmatist" (Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology*, 49). For scholarly interpretations of Du Bois as a phenomenologist in a unique direction, see Henry, "Africana;" Meer, "W. E. B.;" Monteiro, "The Epistemic;" and Pope, "Ägypten."

53 Du Bois, *Souls*, 119.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 120.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

devoutly believed in than all the rest."⁶⁴ In fact, Du Bois says the Frenzy held "so firm a hold [...] on the Negro, that many generations firmly believed that without this visible manifestation of the God there could be no true communion with the Invisible."⁶⁵

With this brief description of the Southern revival, Du Bois already invokes the fluid multiplicity of a complex of knowers of various scales characteristic of a practice understood pragmatically. First, Du Bois describes himself on a journey, not in isolation of course, but in the environment of the country road. However, as he comes upon the revival, he notes "the air of intense excitement [...][and] suppressed terror [...][that] seemed to seize us."⁶⁶ Here Du Bois notes his incorporation into an emergent co-consciousness that relates the disparate actors.⁶⁷ However, the group is not described as a homogenous mass. Instead, Du Bois notes the "black and massive form of the preacher" who stands over and against the rest of the crowd "as the words crowded to his lips and flew at [them] in singular eloquence."⁶⁸ In this way, Du Bois recognizes the fluidity of the emergent group, as the preacher is first included in "that mass of black folk"⁶⁹ and then singled out against the rest of the crowd. This pattern repeats as "[t]he people moaned and fluttered" at the preacher's words until "the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside [Du Bois] suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul."⁷⁰ This description of the woman as "a lost soul" draws attention to the sense in which the woman has broken out of the co-consciousness of the group. Du Bois's use of the term "Frenzy" to describe the behavior of the group in the revival also reinforces the sense in which the many become a multiplicity in virtue of a shared experience, just as James describes with his philosophy of pure experience. This is described as a "'Shouting,' when the Spirit of the Lord" seizes the emergent group and they share a co-consciousness of "supernatural joy."⁷¹

Of course, from here Du Bois launches into a genealogical account of "Negro religion as a development [...] from the heathenism of the Gold Coast to the institutional Negro church of Chicago."⁷² While this shift to genealogy is interesting itself,⁷³ and can be read as a movement from one practice to another within the chapter, Du Bois also continues his account of the place of the church in everyday life, claiming that the "Negro church [...] is the social centre of Negro life [...][and] the central club-house of a community of a thousand or more."⁷⁴ At these churches, several activities are performed: "[c]onsiderable sums of money are collected [...] employment is found for the idle, strangers are introduced, news is disseminated, and charity [is] distributed."⁷⁵ Thus, Du Bois says, "[t]he activity of a church like this is immense and far-reaching."⁷⁶ The church connects its members to various services and opportunities outside its walls, but it

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 121.

66 Ibid., 120.

67 Here scholars have long interpreted Du Bois as a stranger at this revival. For example, Cornel West claims that the "black ritualistic explosion frightened [Du Bois]" (West, "Black," 60). Similarly, Shamoon Zamir suggests that here Du Bois "reproduce[s] the same exoticism [...][of] the white middle-class" (Zamir, "The Sorrow," 348). My view is that Du Bois begins with this fear and orientation, but that the experience transforms his understanding, as evidenced by his characterization of the Frenzy as a reaction to the Spirit of the Lord. As Kahn says, "to claim that Du Bois sees religion only as a source of moral misdirection or as a primitive mysticism is to ignore the narrative development of the chapter" (Kahn, "Religion," 22). While I don't have space to fully articulate this case here, I take it that Du Bois's reference to "the deep religious feeling of the real Negro heart" at the end of the chapter harkens back to the religious experiences of the revival that the chapter begins with (Du Bois, *Souls*, 129). I hope that what follows lends some support to this case.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 121.

73 For an interpretation of these shifts, see Schrager, "Both Sides." See also Stepanenko, "A New Name."

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 122.

76 Ibid.

is also "the expression of the inner ethical life of a people."[77] As Du Bois notes, "the Church often stands as a real conserver of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right."[78]

In this description of the church as both a governing group of persons and a built location at the intersection of various activities, Du Bois implicitly recognizes the pragmatic commitment to the way individuals and groups traverse various practices. As an institution, the church body engages in various internal religious practices, as Du Bois notes when he says, "Depravity, Sin, Redemption, Heaven, Hell, and Damnation are preached twice a Sunday with much fervor."[79] But the church also facilitates participation in external practices, as in the case of finding employment for its members, and it partakes in nonreligious practices, as in the case of disseminating news. These practices sometimes engage various groups of people: "insurance societies, women's societies, secret societies, and mass meetings of various kinds."[80] Sometimes they engage various individuals and smaller groups of persons, as Du Bois notes when he adds that "[e]ntertainments, suppers, and lectures are held beside the five or six regular weekly religious services [...][and that back] of this more formal religion, the Church often stands as a real conservers of morals [and] strengthener of family life."[81]

Of course, the traversing of these various practices must meet various conditions as exemplified by James's demand for "linking things satisfactorily."[82] For James, this "[s]atisfactoriness has to be measured by a multitude of standards."[83] These are "satisfactions (in the plural)."[84] They include intellectual, moral, aesthetical, and practical dimensions, and James says that they must be satisfied *simultaneously*.[85] The genealogical account of "the large development of the Negro church since Emancipation"[86] that Du Bois pivots to after his description of the church's various functions may seem to shift the subject from the ecclesial body's satisfactory linking of various practices to a sociohistorical analysis, but this account quickly leads to "two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings"[87] Du Bois warns against. This reference to "streams of thought" is a clear allusion to James and Du Bois's critique of "the two great and hardly reconcilable streams" is an indication that he has not entirely dropped the theme of satisfactory leading. Thus, Du Bois says that "[b]etween [these] two extreme types of ethical attitude [...] wavers the mass of the millions of Negroes [...] and their religious life and activity"[88] which exemplify an ecclesial rationality to be contrasted with the irrationality expressed by the extreme types. In this way, Du Bois's genealogical analysis can be read as both a sociohistorical account of the development of the black church and an account of how ecclesial practices can link successfully and unsuccessfully to the organized activities of their greater context.

To see this, it will help to carefully consider the direction Du Bois describes the development of the black church taking. He starts by noting that "the social history of the Negro did not start in America...[but that he] was brought from a definite social environment [...][where his] religion was nature-worship."[89] "The first rude change in this life was the slave ship and the West Indian sugar-fields [as the] plantation organization replaced the clan and tribe."[90] Here "the Priest or Medicine-man [...] of the former group life [...][became] the Negro preacher, and under him the first Afro-American institution."[91] At first, this

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77 Ibid., 124.
78 Ibid., 122.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 121–2.
81 Ibid., 122.
82 James, *Pragmatism*, 34.
83 James, *Essays*, 128.
84 James, *The Meaning*, 104/270.
85 James, *A Pluralistic*, 55.
86 Du Bois, *Souls*, 123.
87 Ibid., 127.
88 Ibid., 129.
89 Ibid., 123.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.

institution "was not [...] by any means Christian nor definitely organized [...][but] an adaptation and mingling of heathen rites."[92] Only by "[a]ssociation with the masters [and] missionary efforts [...][did] these rites [take on] an early veneer of Christianity, [until] after the lapse of many generations the Negro church became Christian."[93] In this beginning, "the church was confined to the plantation, and [thus] consisted of a series of disconnected units."[94] After Emancipation, "the Negro church largely severed [...] affiliations [...] they [...] had with [...] white churches, either by choice or by compulsion."[95] At this time, "[t]he Baptist churches became independent, [and] the Methodists were compelled [...] to unite for purposes of episcopal government."[96]

Before Emancipation, however, "the doctrines of passive submission embodied in the newly learned Christianity [...][inculcated a] deep religious fatalism" when combined with the socioeconomic position as slave.[97] Here, "the spirit of revolt gradually died away [...][until] courtesy became humility, [and] moral strength degenerated into submission."[98] Thus, Du Bois says that, "[u]nder the lax moral life of the plantation [...] a religion of resignation and submission degenerated [...] into a philosophy of indulgence and crime."[99] However, at this time "the gradual growth of a class of free Negroes [caused] a change."[100] For these persons, "[f]reedom became [...] a real thing and not a dream." As a result, their "religion became darker and more intense [...][and the] 'Coming of the Lord' swept this side of Death, and came to be a thing to be hoped for in this day."[101] In this way, "Negro religion [...] transformed itself and identified itself with the dream of Abolition, until that which was a radical fad in the white North and an anarchistic plot in the white South had become a religion to the black world."[102]

With this description of the development of the church, Du Bois draws a clear contrast not only between two religious' temperaments but also between two forms of ecclesial belonging.[103] On the one hand, there is the religious temperament of pessimistic fatalism. On the other hand, there is a more optimistic religious temperament. The first temperament contributes to a form of ecclesial belonging that makes no contact with the outside world and cultivates "sullen hopelessness [rather than] hopeful strife."[104] The second temperament contributes to a form of ecclesial belonging that engages "fugitive slaves and irrepressible discussion [with a] desire for freedom."[105] The first temperament and form of ecclesial belonging is a form of irrationality insofar as it neglects the ethical and practical dimensions of rationality. The second temperament and form of ecclesial belonging is an improvement insofar as it partly embraces the ethical dimensions. However, Du Bois stops short of claiming that this second outlook is entirely rational. He says that "when Emancipation finally came [...] the freedman [...] stood dumb and motionless before the whirlwind [asking] what had he to do with it? Was it not the Lord's doing?"[106] With this impression, "he stood awaiting new wonders till the inevitable Age of Reaction swept over the nation and brought the crisis of to-day."[107] In this sense, the second improved temperament still amounts to a failure of rationality insofar as it overlooks sociopolitical facts of the context. This also compromises the intellectual dimension of rationality and

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 124.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 125.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 125–6.
101 Ibid., 126.
102 Ibid.
103 Joseph Ballan has suggested that here there is also the beginning of a political theology of labor (Ballan, "The Prophethood," 65).
104 Ibid., 125.
105 Ibid., 126.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.

reverberates into a corruption of sociopolitical engagement further undermining the practical dimension of rationality. Here the potential meliorism of the abolition movement is undermined by empirical inadequacy.

The result of this melioristic vitiation is the danger of the two extreme types of thinking Du Bois describes as the potential traps for contemporary ecclesial bodies and their members. Though Emancipation has brought abolition to the masses of people, "the reactionary forces of prejudice, greed and revenge" force the freed people into unenviable socioeconomic and political positions. Against these forces, two further temperaments emerge: one "bitter and vindictive," the other "shrewder and keener and more tortuous."[108] According to Du Bois, "the danger of the [first] lies in anarchy, that of the other in hypocrisy."[109] The first type "stands almost ready to curse God and die, [while] the other is too often found a traitor to right and a coward before force."[110] The vindictive anarchist "is wedded to ideals remote, whimsical, perhaps impossible of realization." The hypocrite, on the other hand, "forgets that life is more than meat and the body more than raiment."[111] As ecclesial bodies, "the two groups [...] represent [...] divergent ethical tendencies, the first [...] toward radicalism, the other toward hypocritical compromise."[112]

Here again Du Bois paints two portraits of ecclesial irrationality. The radicalism of the anarchists is marked by a failure of practicality and a vengeance that besmirches ethical engagement. The tortuousness of the hypocrites is marked by a failure of the ethical demeanor and intellectual incoherence. For the hypocrite, this is the result of a narrow conception of practicality construed as a mere material getting by, as Du Bois notes when he says that this type of mind "sees in the very strength of the anti-Negro movement its patent weaknesses, and [...] endeavor[s] to turn this weakness to the black man's strength."[113] In this way, then, both groups fail to exhibit appropriate ecclesial rationality insofar as both groups fail to link their ecclesial practices satisfactorily with the practices of their broader sociopolitical context.[114] For the anarchists, this amounts to a failure to link their sermons, hymnals, and liturgies to the practices of discourse and democracy that characterize broader sociopolitical life. For the hypocrites, this amounts to a failure to link their sermons, hymnals, and liturgies to the practices of civic engagement that characterize the sociopolitical fight for equality. In both cases, this ecclesial irrationality is also marked by an empirical inadequacy, or a failure to understand the history, politics, theology, economics and psychology of contemporary life and its corresponding crisis.

Between and against these groups, however, Du Bois paints a portrait of ecclesial rationality that he suggests is more characteristic of "the mass of the millions of Negroes."[115] These ecclesial bodies are marked by a "religious life and activity [that] partake[s] of [the contemporary] social conflict within their ranks."[116] These institutions "[cater] to the desire for information and amusement of their members."[117] Of course, they are not entirely perfect. They "warily [avoid] unpleasant questions both within and without the black world."[118] But they redeem themselves insofar as they "[preach] in effect if not in word: *Dum vivimus, vivamus*."[119] In this way, they give some expression to "the deep religious feeling of the real Negro heart [...] seeking in the great night a new religious ideal."[120] Thus, they reach "toward the Goal, out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where all that makes life worth living – Liberty, Justice, and Right – is marked 'For

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108 Ibid., 127.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 128.
113 Ibid., 127.
114 As Zuckerman notes, for Du Bois, the church "is never a separate sphere, but always and in every instance intersects with other social phenomena" ("The Sociology," 247).
115 Du Bois, *Souls*, 129.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid. "While We Live, Let Us Live."
120 Ibid.

White People Only.'"¹²¹ With this description, Du Bois suggests that these ecclesial bodies are most rational when they express appropriate ethical striving and broader practical engagement. Their expression of "the deep religious feeling of the real Negro heart" also suggests an aesthetical adequacy and an attentiveness to spiritual reality as well an understanding of the reality of contemporary life and crisis that the extreme types miss. In this way, then, Du Bois constructs a conception of ecclesial rationality that coheres with James's pragmatism and the transcendental radical empiricist phenomenology that supports it.

4 Ecclesial (ir)rationality and the COVID-19 pandemic

The preceding account of Du Bois's "Of the Faith of the Fathers" suggests several forms of ecclesial irrationality that can be observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In my view, Du Bois identifies three primary forms of ecclesial irrationality that he contrasts with one form of ecclesial rationality described at the end of the chapter. This is not to say that this typology exhausts the possible forms of ecclesial (ir)rationality, but that it makes helpful sense of the problematic forms of ecclesial belonging Du Bois identifies in "Of the Faith of the Fathers" as well as the problematic forms of ecclesial response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The suggestion that Du Bois identifies three primary forms of ecclesial irrationality in "Of the Faith of the Fathers" may seem surprising, given Du Bois's reference to "two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought."¹²² However, these two streams of thought are developments of the two religious temperaments that characterized some forms of black religious life during the struggle toward Emancipation, while the "hardly reconcilable streams of thought" are operant during the Reconstruction period Du Bois is arguably most concerned with in the chapter. Why not suggest then that Du Bois identifies four forms of ecclesial irrationality? The reason is that the two earlier religious temperaments Du Bois criticizes are both forms of what Du Bois describes as "deep religious fatalism."¹²³ The difference between the two temperaments is a difference in outlook. The first is more pessimistic and involves "sullen hopelessness"¹²⁴ while the second is more optimistic and involves "waiting for new wonders."¹²⁵ The second optimistic temperament is tinged with resistance to the conditions of slavery and inequality, but its fatalism is sealed with what Du Bois describes as "a note of revenge" and a hope for the "Coming of the Lord" and Judgment Day.¹²⁶

The "two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought" are not forms of fatalism. The first Du Bois describes as anarchist. The second Du Bois describes as hypocritical. The anarchists can appear like fatalists. Du Bois suggests that the anarchist "stands almost ready to curse God and die."¹²⁷ However, Du Bois describes the anarchist as problematically "tending toward radicalism."¹²⁸ The anarchist is "wedded to ideals remote,"¹²⁹ and thus generally uncooperative, but the problem is not that the anarchist possesses the fatalist's feeling of impotence. Du Bois does say that the anarchists are "[c]onscious of [...] impotence," but their radicalism suggests a more energetic temperament than that of the fatalists.¹³⁰ The hypocrites, on the other hand, are far from fatalists. They are "too often found a traitor to right and a coward before force."¹³¹ The hypocrite may concede too easily in the face of opposition, but their problem is that they tend toward

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., 127.
123 Ibid., 125.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 126.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 127.
128 Ibid., 128.
129 Ibid., 127.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.

compromise.¹³² They recognize the effectiveness of their actions, but they accept far too little in the way of rights and improvements in quality of life. Thus, Du Bois says that the hypocrite "forgets that life is more than meat and the body is more than raiment."¹³³

Although these problematic temperaments accurately describe various forms of individual irrationality, Du Bois also recognizes the way these forms of irrationality reappear in ecclesial bodies. For instance, Du Bois notes how the sociopolitical circumstances foster these temperaments and present a dilemma that is "tingeing and changing [...] religious life."¹³⁴ In the case of the anarchists, this results in a religion that "often becomes bitter and vindictive [...] a wail rather than a hope, a sneer rather than a faith."¹³⁵ In the case of the hypocrite, this results in a religion that operates under the shadow of "the anti-Negro movement."¹³⁶ Thus, Du Bois concludes that while the majority of people waver between these two tendencies, "[t]heir churches are differentiating, – now into groups of cold, fashionable devotees, in no way distinguishable from similar white groups save in color of skin; now into large and social business institutions."¹³⁷ These forms of organization are not so much anarchist or hypocritical, but they evince tendencies toward one or the other: sometimes toward the eschatological disengagement of the anarchists and sometimes toward the hasty compromise of the hypocrites.

If that's right, then Du Bois does in fact identify three primary forms of ecclesial irrationality. Du Bois describes these individuals as fatalists, anarchists, and hypocrites, but how should one characterize their corresponding ecclesial types? To distinguish the ecclesial from individual types of irrationality, I propose the following descriptions: Resignationism, Utopianism, and Amoralism. Applying Jamesian pragmatism to each type, we can describe each as a failure to satisfactorily link ecclesial and nonecclesial practices. Of course, if these are going to count as distinct forms of ecclesial irrationality, then each type will have to fail in distinctive ways. In the case of Resignationism, I want to suggest that there is a general failure to link liturgical and nonliturgical ecclesial practices to outside practices. Ecclesial bodies of this type do not collectively conceive of the church as having any other purpose than to support the participation of individuals and various groups of people, such as families, in worship practices that contribute to spiritual endurance of circumstances. In the case of Utopianism, there is not a general failure to link liturgical and nonliturgical practices to outside practices. Instead, liturgical and other practices are collectively conceived as primarily existing for the purpose of releasing the pressure of life outside the ecclesial body and supporting worship practices that contribute to spiritual preparation for eschatological life. Finally, in the case of Amoralism, there is an expressed intention of linking liturgical and nonliturgical practices to outside practices. However, liturgical practices are collectively conceived as primarily existing for the purpose of easing the movement of groups and individuals to and from the ecclesial body and supporting worship practices that facilitate participation in a real or perceived broader sociopolitical status quo.

The distinctiveness of each type of ecclesial irrationality can be strengthened and brought into clearer view by applying Jamesian pragmatism to each type. Recall that Jamesian pragmatism requires the consistent and simultaneous satisfaction of a plurality of desiderata as groups and individuals move from one practice to another and that this plurality includes intellectual, ethical, aesthetical, and practical dimensions. On almost every one of these counts, Resignationism fails. Resignationist churches not only often fail to adequately understand the facts of their circumstances, but they deliberately eschew efforts to inspire and to improve conditions and participate in the broader sociopolitical context. They thereby fail to satisfy aesthetical, ethical, and practical dimensions of rationality. Utopianism fares better, but while Utopian churches may better understand the facts of their circumstances and inspire their members, they over-emphasize ethical ideals and thus promote deficient sociopolitical cooperation, thereby failing to satisfy the practical dimension of rationality. On this particular count, Amoralism fares better than Utopianism, but

132 Ibid., 128.
133 Ibid., 127.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 129.

while Amoral churches are practically oriented, their emphasis on immediate and easy results often sacrifices ethical engagement and thereby promotes little more than a perceived status quo.

Of course, each of these forms of ecclesial irrationality is an ideal type. No church or ecclesial body will always embody these forms, and many may express tendencies toward more than one. Therefore, assessments of ecclesial irrationality in the COVID-19 pandemic should not be expected to produce examples of ecclesial bodies that perfectly conform to any one particular type. A demonstration that various ecclesial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic exhibit tendencies toward one or more these forms of ecclesial irrationality is sufficient to establish the fruitfulness of the typology.

In response to the government- and medical-issued stay-at-home orders, mask mandates, and/or instructions not to hold mass gatherings, some churches responded by shirking all or most of these orders. Jamesian pragmatism suggests that these responses are irrational. These ecclesial responses not only fail to establish an adequate dialogue with the scientific and medical community, they also fail to inspire, to take adequate account of the well-being of others, and to take actions that facilitate the construction of a postpandemic world. In this way, these responses fail to satisfy each of the dimensions of rationality by failing to satisfactorily link ecclesial practices to the practices of broader contemporary life, but this alone is not sufficient to identify what form of irrationality each of these ecclesial bodies is expressing. To identify these forms, it is necessary to examine what ecclesial leaders have said about their responses.

In some cases, noncompliant ecclesial bodies have appealed to "rationales" that express fatalist outlooks. For example, in Bakersfield, CA, pastor Angelo Frazier of RiverLakes Community Church has been holding church gatherings outside but expressed interest in returning indoors. "I think people are deciding to do what is God-given to them," Frazier said. "They are going to do what they need to do, and the consequences will be what they are."[138] Similarly, in Decatur, IL, pastor Derek Bradshaw held services that defy state orders prohibiting gatherings of more than ten persons. In defense of his church's decision, Bradshaw suggests that mortal lives have a "zero percent" survival rate, and that spiritual death can only be prevented by accepting the eternal cure made possible by Christ.[139] In Montreal, Canada, pastor Stefano Gesualdi has been considering holding services for a number of congregants that defy state orders while staging protests against the orders. Gesualdi is unconcerned with the consequences of the behaviors. Speaking on behalf of the protesters, Gesualdi said, "Let us choose for ourselves. And if it costs me my life? Great. Because if I die, and I know that I died obeying the Lord, it was worth it."[140] In each of these cases, these pastors express little concern for what will occur, acknowledge little to no role that their ecclesial behaviors will have in the production of what will occur, and seem to regard the purpose of worship as primarily concerned with spiritual endurance of the present circumstances and little more than that. In this way, these pastors and the ecclesial bodies they represent exhibit signs of Resignationism.

In other cases, noncompliant ecclesial bodies have appealed to "rationales" that express overwhelming desire to return to prepandemic normal and little signs of concern for public health and the well-being of others. For example, in Akron, OH, Reverend Randy Baker held outdoor services in the early days of the pandemic and expressed no intention of closing the church. "Look around this group, man," Rev. Baker said. "This is the cream of the crop right here. Good to be in God's house today [...] This is God's house. Randy Baker cannot, will not, no matter what the cause, lock those doors on Sunday morning."[141] Similarly, in Fair Oaks, CA, Grace Bible Church circulated a letter in fall 2020 calling church assembly an "essential duty" and arguing that "the spiritual health of the Body of Christ is greater priority than the concerns over the health of the physical body."[142] In Louisiana, a Oneness Pentecostal pastor who defied the state ban on large gatherings said, "We hold our religious rights dear, and we are going to assemble no matter what someone says."[143] And in Rocklin, CA, Destiny Church held a service defying state prohibition on large

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138 Morgen, "Bakersfield Churches Forge Their Own Path as COVID Cases Increase."
139 Reid, "Church Defies COVID Rules, Holds Sunday Service."
140 Mosleh, "Protesting for Their Prayers: Religious Groups Defy Public Health Orders to Continue Worshipping."
141 Livingston, "Coronavirus: Northeast Ohio Churches Adopt or Defy Social Distancing."
142 Jansen, "Leap of Faith? Some Churches Choose to Continue Indoor Services."
143 Silliman, "A Few Churches are Defying Bans on Large Gatherings. That Could Be Bad for Religious Liberty."

gatherings to host popular speaker Charlie Kirk who tweeted, "It is time to disobey ALL orders that violate our natural rights. No more curfews, lockdowns, or authoritarian measures. Disobey, resist, defy – open America!"[144] In each of these cases, these ecclesial leaders and bodies express little to no concern for how the exercise of their "rights" impacts others and the general public's health and appear to regard the purpose of worship as primarily concerned with getting parishioners to church and maintaining what they perceive as the sociopolitical status quo. In this way, these ecclesial bodies exhibit signs of Amoralism.

Of course, in some of these cases, one could argue that these ecclesial bodies exhibit both signs of Resignationism and Amoralism. The important point to note is that the forms of ecclesial irrationality Du Bois identified over a century ago help identify what is problematic and irrational about the ecclesial responses to the contemporary COVID pandemic. In fact, the COVID pandemic has brought out the fact that various ecclesial bodies fail to recognize the epistemic value of ecclesial belonging. Rather than acknowledge the social participatory character of religious practices and the importance of ecclesial belonging as an opportunity to partake in collective decision-making and discernment, many COVID guideline-defiant ecclesial bodies seem to regard ecclesial bodies as a place where members come to express their individual preferences. For example, in Coeur D'Alene, ID, Candlelight Christian Fellowship's Senior Pastor, Paul Van Noy, described the church's mask-wearing policy as "if you feel comfortable wearing a mask you can. If you're not comfortable wearing a mask you don't have to. Nobody is going to be criticized for whatever decision they make."[145] Similarly, Brooks Pentecostal Church in Maine held a 100- to 150-person gathering in October where masks were available, but not required. The Maine Center for Disease Concern later linked the gathering to 62 cases of COVID contraction.[146] In both cases, these churches appear not to regard membership as a commitment to any kind of collective decision-making process but merely as a place where individuals meet and make their own decisions. While the evidence cited above does not establish this much in the cases presented above, it is not hard to imagine that many of these COVID guideline-defiant churches share this view of ecclesial belonging.

How then can one characterize ecclesial rationality and rational ecclesial belonging? Any ecclesial body that successfully links liturgical and other ecclesial practices to the broader practices of the community as defined by Jamesian pragmatism will count as rational and any form of ecclesial belonging that recognizes the social participatory character of religious practices and can satisfy the demands of Jamesian pragmatism will equally count as rational. To count as rational, the ecclesial body will likely need to adopt a collective conception of the church as embracing a plurality of purposes. Some of these purposes might include various forms of spiritual edification, the supporting of various worship practices, and engagement in external activities that facilitate the collaborative construction of a world where collective and individual flourishing is made more and more possible.[147] In such churches, ecclesial bodies will not be regarded as places where individuals choose to come to bring their personal decisions before God, but as places where a multiplicity of actors gather to participate in collective decision-making processes. However, it's important to remember that rational ecclesial bodies will not only engage their full membership in such processes but proactively dialogue with elected officials, health officials, and other pertinent authorities on matters relevant to each decision.

In most cases of pandemic guideline defiance, there is little reason to suspect that ecclesial leaders reached out to relevant officials to establish these dialogues. In some cases, ecclesial leaders have even been documented refusing assistance from outside organizations. For example, in Charlotte, NC, the United House of Prayer for All People held a mass gathering from October 4 to October 11 that became a super spreader event infecting at least 82 people. The church refused a nonprofit organization's offer to provide

144 Haefeli, "Church Holds Packed Indoor Services Despite Covid Restrictions."
145 Epperly, "After Balking at Masks, Pastor and Church Staff in North Idaho Contrast COVID-19."
146 Abbate, "Maine CDC Closes COVID-19 Outbreak Investigation into Brooks Church."
147 In this way, rational ecclesial bodies can avoid Utopianism, the one form of ecclesial irrationality that many COVID guideline-defiant churches do not clearly exhibit.

free testing for the event.[148] In this sense, the majority of COVID guideline-defiant ecclesial bodies are also guilty of a social epistemological isolationism. So, to three forms of ecclesial irrationality identified by Du Bois, we might also add a fourth form: Dogmatism. In the case of any form of Dogmatism, there is a failure on behalf of ecclesial bodies to link their internal decision-making practices with the decision-making practices of the broader epistemic community. In these churches, liturgical and other ecclesial practices are conceived as primarily existing for the purpose of introducing parishioners to a supreme body of knowledge and supporting worship practices that prepare individuals to subordinate all other forms of knowledge to this supreme body and to jettison any commitment that cannot be easily assimilated and/or subordinated. In this sense, each of the other three forms of ecclesial irrationality can be identified as a form of Dogmatism. However, an ecclesial body could be theoretically guilty of a more intellectual isolationism without exhibiting one or more of the other three forms. In any case, the philosophical work of William James and W. E. B. Du Bois helps identify what is irrational about the behavior of these ecclesial bodies and their members.

5 Conclusion

I argued that radical empiricism is a non-egological transcendental phenomenology in support of Jamesian pragmatism and that one primary function of the doctrine of pure experience is to explain how two minds can share knowledge and understanding in the context of a practice or organized activity. I suggested that this account coheres with W. E. B. Du Bois's "Of the Faith of the Fathers" and that an explication of this assemblage of positions helps articulate a view of ecclesial rationality that pervades the chapter. In this view, ecclesial rationality involves the successful leading of individuals and groups through various internal ecclesial practices to successful engagement in external practices and back to the ecclesial body. Successful leading is defined by the consistent and simultaneous satisfaction of a plurality of desiderata, and irrationality is thus interpreted as failure of this leading in or between practices. This view suggests that ecclesial rationality is characterized by an appropriate responsiveness to institutions outside of the ecclesial body and by its capacity to facilitate its members' participation in the broader ecclesial context. Applied to the case of the COVID-19 global pandemic, this view suggests that what is irrational about various religious reactions, such as the shunning of stay-at-home orders and/or mask mandates, is the severance of internal ecclesial practices from external practices. This further suggests that what is irrational about these religious reactions to the pandemic is not a failure to adhere to some alien standard of rationality but a failure to grasp and embrace the standards of ecclesial rationality.

This view of religious irrationality in the COVID-19 pandemic raises the possibility that the pandemic has been exacerbated by alien conceptions of rationality that atomize knowers, divorce intellectual, ethical, and practical commitments, and cultivate a systematic distrust of experience, tradition, and authority. Because this constellation of tendencies is often expressed in the value-neutral skepticism of secular understandings of rationality, it is possible that secular rationality has contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and that the value-laden trust-based rationality of religious belonging is needed to both heal the global population and prevent future outbreaks. This contention may seem counterintuitive, given the way contemporary political discourse frames religion and the apparent trust many religious persons place in the ecclesial leaders of the guideline-defiant churches cited above, but the preceding analysis reveals how partial this trust is and how easily one experience and/or one authority can be enshrined over another. It is in this sense that a distinctively religious conception of rationality that emphasizes trust in experience, tradition, and authority may have been eroded and may have contributed to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in its erosion.

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148 The Daily Beast, "Cases Skyrocket as Superspreader Church Refuses to Host COVID Testing."

Further genealogical and genetic phenomenological work is needed to investigate these possibilities, but the preceding lends some support to this case. Further work is also needed to reinforce the conception of ecclesial rationality articulated in the preceding, to apply this understanding to other concrete cases, and to corroborate the suggestion that the James–Du Bois view of rationality is as much capable of addressing the contemporary crises we face in this century as it was capable of addressing the crises faced at the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps it is time to embrace the vision of the future articulated in the recent philosophical past. Perhaps it is high time to revisit an old philosophical declaration, this time addressed to that growing body of persons who identify as spiritual, but not religious, and declare: Believers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!

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