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978-1-107-02695-7 - William James, Sciences of Mind, and Anti-Imperial Discourse

Bernadette M. Baker

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WILLIAM JAMES, SCIENCES OF MIND, AND ANTI-IMPERIAL DISCOURSE

In the past few decades, the humanities and social sciences have developed new methods and reoriented their conceptual frameworks in a “world without frontiers.” In this book, Bernadette M. Baker offers an innovative approach to rethinking sciences of mind as they formed at the turn of the twentieth century, via the concerns that have emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. The less-visited texts of Harvard philosopher and psychologist William James provide a window into contemporary debates over principles of toleration, anti-imperial discourse, and the nature of ethics. Baker revisits Jamesian approaches to the formation of scientific objects including the mind of a child, exceptional mental states, and the ghost to explore the possibilities and limits of social scientific thought dedicated to mind development and discipline formation around the construct of the West.

Bernadette M. Baker is a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin. Her research areas include philosophy, history, comparative cosmology, and sociology as they intersect with curriculum studies and transnational and postfoundationalist approaches. She is the recipient of a Fulbright fellowship and of an Outstanding Book Award from the American Educational Research Association for *In Perpetual Motion: Theories of Power, Educational History, and the Child* (2001). Baker currently holds a visiting professorship at the University of Copenhagen.

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BERNADETTE M. BAKER

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For Larry, Ginny, and Lois

~You know why~

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Acknowledgments

It's possible to live lifetimes within a life. The pathways that have led to the finalization of this project have been varied and rich. In academic terms, it is precisely because of the multidisciplinary latitude permitted and encouraged within a field called curriculum studies that this analysis could come to fruition. In personal terms, much has to be rethought when loved ones pass and life goes on. This remains, then, my favorite part of writing – the overt acknowledgment that a manuscript could never be singular. I owe many debts of gratitude to fantastic scholars who have entertained my unusual topics and stylistics, and in particular four who tolerated my initial ramblings with incredible grace: Amit Prasad, John Richardson, Clare O'Farrell, and Tim Johnson. Thank you for your close reading, insights, and brilliance! I am also deeply indebted to many other fantastic scholars, whose feedback, humor, seriousness, and playfulness have sustained me through their comments on various versions of these chapters and presentations, written across years, rethought across an eternity: Carl Grant, Bill Green, David Kirk, James Marshall, Maja Plum, Thomas Popkewitz and the Wednesday group, Fazal Rizvi, Lynda Stone, Gordon Tait, and Hannah Tavares. I am grateful, too, for the assistance I received at the William James archive at Harvard University in Boston, and for the warm welcome I received at the archives of the American Society for Psychical Research in New York via the then-head archivist, Colleen Phelan. In addition, this manuscript would not be what it is and on time without the tireless, supportive, and mature work of Christine Kruger at the University of Wisconsin. Last, as strange as it may sound, the joy, sustenance, and home that my dear Coton de Tuléar, Fluffy and Sweetpea, provided amid many unexpected changes have been immeasurable, familial, irreplaceable – you probably can't read this (?) but you already know what you mean to me.

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Prologue

What do anti-imperial discourse, ghosts and mediums, theories of associationist psychology, political philosophy, and teacher education have to do with each other? The historical and multidisciplinary analysis that follows explores where this range of topics meet up – in the less-visited works of William James – and reconsiders what their intersection opens onto. Through reapproaching James, this book traces the dynamics of a *religion-science-nation-West horizon of enactment* in the making, never completely totalizable yet not without effects. James uses the terms *religion*, *science*, *nation*, and *Western* in his writing and does so in complex, shifting, and idiosyncratic ways that cannot be neatly read off as fulfillment or example of extant theories. As such, this book takes aspects of the Jamesian oeuvre as a unique window onto such a formation and as a springboard into contemporary debates around it.

The analysis traces several scientific *objects-disciplines* and the allied *strategies-tactics* that emerged in debates over their veridicality. James gave attention to several potential or new scientific objects including child mind, exceptional mental states, and the ghost, and in the process of his ruminations on these a fourth one silently actualizes – the social scientist. The debates over such objects, whether they could be legitimated as genuinely scientific objects, and their seeming invisibility to the outside observer were implicated in the making up of new disciplines in the late nineteenth century, such as education, psychology, abnormal psychology, and psychical research/parapsychology – disciplines the borders of which Jamesian texts sometimes challenge and at other times seem to solidify.

The debates within and beyond James generated strategies-tactics that became indexical of certain kinds of authority. They eventually helped to confer legitimacy onto particular ways of seeing, opening onto larger formations and border-makings than simply a small group of professionals talking to each other. When putting James' less-visited texts into dialogue with each other in

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ways that do not automatically expect alignment within or between them, what comes into view is how many of the questions that were significant at the turn of the twentieth century seem to have reappeared in the twenty-first. Jamesian texts allow the reader to examine how issues in the nascent sciences of mind did not arise as issues in a vacuum. They were deeply involved in new regionalisms and new kinds of slippage in which the authority to legitimate, to appear as expert, and to enact certain rituals was conferred in particular ways, some of which Jamesian texts artfully challenge, and which can contribute to a rethinking of possibilities and limits in contemporary debates.

As the nineteenth century fades, new geopolitical territories, onto-epistemological hierarchies, verification processes in the sciences, and the possibilities for critique within and against such sciences and territories form, setting the stage for dissensus over what can and cannot be seen as authentic and sovereign zones of belonging today. The staging and the dissensus bubbled over, complicating claims to nonimplicated ethical positions, including claims to anti-imperial discourse, and leaving “us” with the question that marks the problem of “our” era, the question not of difference or of *différance*, but of economies of affection, of “What would it take, and what is taken, ‘to live and let live?’”
