



04 February 2021

Selection Committee  
William James Book Award  
Society for General Psychology

It is an honor to recommend the volume *Reconstructing Agency in Developmental and Educational Psychology* (Taylor & Francis/Routledge, 2020) by Professor Paul Downes for the 2021 William James Book Award. I make this recommendation as one familiar with your Society and with the William James Award. This volume is a worthy contender on par with others over the years. I will explain (in brief) the analytical basis for this judgment.

First, the William James Book Award winner must take up the task of coming to grips with a substantial and important issue that shows not only currency in the present milieu, but meaningful connection to issues and questions with intellectual longevity. Professor Downes has indeed taken up a key issue in human agency. Throughout the volume the author weaves the key aspects of agency in and out of the narrative in insightful ways and offers new analytical insights, makes innovative connections to related bodies of scholarly work, and develops new intellectual models, successfully offering, in the end, a sort of “protolanguage,” to use the author’s own term for dealing with human agency across a broad intellectual landscape.

Second, the William James Book Award winner must represent a breadth of thought and a level of innovation in keeping with James’ own body of work. Professor Downes successfully brings together a remarkably broad range of perspectives relevant to human agency as it is encountered in an array of sub-disciplines in psychology and education. This work makes contact with a truly impressive range of perspectives from cognitive and structural approaches of various sorts to contemporary phenomenological schools of thought. Few texts manage such a range of insights.

The signal contribution of the work is the introduction, into the scholarly conversation on agency and its related topics, of the dimension of spatiality in a sophisticated form. This aspect of the book, I predict, will be taken up again and again for quite some time, and be recognized as a substantial lasting contribution.

For these reasons, I recommend this volume as a worthy recipient of the 2021 William James Book Award.

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DEPARTMENT OF  
COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY AND  
SPECIAL EDUCATION

