

## Critical Acclaim

Skinner, Q. (ed.)

The Return of Grand Theory in the  
Human Sciences

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985

VIII+ 215 pp.

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It has become socially obligatory among my students to protest that they are not positivists. Yet few are able to articulate any recognizable post-positivist position, much less identify that standpoint from which they are so critical of positivism. John Broughton [this journal, vol. 24, No. 6] first brought to my attention that such protests, without being grounded in some way, are likely ideological and may even derive from the same ideology they are intended to criticize. Thus, confident in the abilities of my students, I have been recommending that they become acquainted with Quentin Skinner's grand tour of the grand hermeneutic, structuralist, post-empiricist, de-constructionist, and otherwise post-positivist theories.

Skinner identifies two major concerns underlying much that may be characterized as post-positivist. The first of these is an extension of Dilthey's arguments that the natural sciences, as traditionally conceived, do not provide an appropriate or exclusive methodological model for the social sciences. This concern is reflected and transcended in the writings of Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Feyerabend, Derrida, Habermas, and others. Chapters on Gadamer, Derrida, and Habermas are included in this volume. The second major concern is with the moral implications of constructing a theory of society based on the positivist program. Kuhn's skepticism regarding the rationality of science is an important foundation for this concern, a skepticism I understood better after reading Barry Barnes' chapter on Kuhn than after reading Kuhn's major text many years ago. Habermas, Laing, Foucault, Rorty, Rawls, and others have more directly challenged the possibility of a social philosophy constructed upon facts known for certain and un-shaped by particular historical conditions. Skinner has included chapters on Foucault and Rawls.

The volume concludes with four exemplars of grand theories: Habermas's grounding of rationality in the ideal speech situation (Anthony Giddens provides one of the best introductions to this difficult writer); Althusser's emphasis upon the deterministic features of Marx's work; Levi-Strauss's revelation of the determining influence of social and linguistic structures; and Braudel's descriptions of the significance for history not only of economies and institutions but also of climate and geography.

Skinner avoids the problems of a single-authored survey of grand theories, which would be open to the charges of omission and bias, and an edited volume of the theorists' own writings, which would fail to provide the context, distance, and comparisons needed for understanding. The present volume provides informed and readable accounts of each grand theory in appropriate contexts, as well as raising reasonable concerns and criticisms along the way. This is the sort of grand tour one looks forward to embarking upon.

Smith, L.

## Piaget Mistranslated

Bull. Br. psychol. Soc. 4: 1-3 (1981)

Bruno Bettelheim (1982) has written eloquently on how the understanding and acceptance of Freud has been impaired through the reading of Freud only in translations that at best give misleading impressions and that at worst are seriously inaccurate. The same can be said for Piaget, although there may be somewhat greater recognition of this potential problem and so some corrective efforts have been made. One such effort is Smith's brief comments on translations into English of Piaget's *La Prise de Conscience/The Grasp of Understanding* (1974) and *Réus-sir et Comprendre/Success and Understanding* (1974). Smith focuses on the concepts of consciousness, understanding, and knowledge as these are presented by Piaget and as they have been translated. In the latter case, important distinctions between these concepts have on occasion been blurred, affecting the compre-

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hensibility of certain passages. Smith has been diligent in comparing the French and English texts page by page, and so this article might be used as a guide in annotating the texts. More than this, Smith's presentation of Piaget's usage of these three terms is helpful towards understanding Piaget's theory in general.

## Rosenthal, B.G. *Images of Man*

Basic Books, New York 1971 XII + 244 pp. ISBN 465-03200-1

This book is based in the thesis that implicit images of human nature and associated psychological theories and research will reflect the ideology and spirit of each historical period, as well as the interests of dominant groups and classes within it. What makes the book remarkable is Rosenthal's illustration of this familiar thesis through consideration of how a hypothetical psychologist, living in Classical Greece, the Middle Ages, or during the Italian Renaissance, might have conceived of and investigated intelligence, perception, group behavior, and the ego.

Rosenthal characterizes the Greek image in terms of striving for balance between logic and emotion and between intelligence and physical skills, so that overdevelopment of any one area at the expense of

another was to be avoided. Rosenthal speculates that a psychologist of the time, asked to assess intelligence, might ask people to find emotional aspects of logical material or analyze emotional experiences in a logical fashion. In contrast, the Middle Ages were a time of concern with the symbolic and ritual aspects of daily life. A key intellectual ability was discerning symbolic or hidden meanings, through interpretation of miracles, omens, revelations, etc. A medieval psychologist might be interested in the extent to which people could recognize implicit moral issues, cosmic meaning, or spiritual significance in simple stories. A Renaissance psychologist, concerned with uninhibited individualism and in the covert circumvention of moral conventions, would value craftiness, aggressiveness, cunning, and so forth. An intelligence test might thus call for persons to devise ways to deceive or discredit an enemy or to artfully counter arguments during a debate.

These few examples do not begin to convey the richness of this imaginative, delightful book.

The value of the book, of course, lies in its ability to stimulate reflection on the extent to which contemporary concepts in psychology are embedded within our particular cultural and historical circumstances as well as the issue of what might be done in response to this embeddedness.

Rosenthal calls for a 'cultural psychoanalysis', involving increased recognition of contemporary cultural values and ideologies and a review of the history of ideas.  
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