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0521398339 - The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences

Edited by Quentin Skinner

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The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences

edited by

Quentin Skinner

Professor of Political Science
University of Cambridge



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Preface

My principal debt as editor of this book is owed to Michael Mason of the Talks department at BBC Radio 3. It was with Mr Mason that I originally discussed the idea of commissioning a group of essays about recent theoretical developments in the human sciences. As a result, eight of the following chapters first took shape as contributions to a series of talks on that general theme which Mr Mason produced for Radio 3 in the spring of 1984. The talks were broadcast under the title *The Return of Grand Theory* and were subsequently printed in *The Listener*. I am deeply grateful to Mr Mason for persuading the BBC to run the series, for prompting me to approach the contributors, and for providing all of us who took part in the broadcasts with the benefit of his expert advice on the range of topics to be covered and the best means of presenting our arguments.

I am also very grateful to Jeremy Mynott of the Cambridge University Press, as a result of whose guidance and encouragement the broadcasts have now been turned into a book. At his suggestion, the original scripts were all revised and greatly expanded; the bibliography and guides to further reading were added; and two further chapters were commissioned, the one by David Hoy on Derrida and the one by James Boon on Lévi-Strauss. Jonathan Sinclair-Wilson served as editor of the volume as it went through the Press, and did so with his habitual calm and efficiency. Penny Souster acted as our sub-editor, and carefully sorted out a number of last minute difficulties.

I should also like to express my appreciation to all those who have contributed to this book. They have helped me at every stage, providing me with many valuable suggestions about coverage as well as meeting their own deadlines with cheerfulness and complete absence of fuss. Finally, in writing and revising my Introduction I have incurred a number of debts: to various readers who wrote to

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The Listener about the original broadcasts, whose criticisms I hope I have managed to accommodate; and above all to Anthony Giddens and Susan James, both of whom commented on successive drafts of the Introduction with meticulous care, as well as offering me a great deal of indispensable support and advice throughout the production of the book.

I have taken the opportunity of an early reprint to correct some small errors. For pointing them out I am indebted to the original contributors and, above all, to Keith Thomas for his exceptional vigilance.

Quentin Skinner