



Harvard Univ.

BURRHUS FREDERIC SKINNER

B. F. Skinner, whose major field of interest is the experimental analysis of behavior, has been Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology at Harvard University since Jan. 1, 1958.

His techniques for the study of "operant" behavior, in which probability or rate of response is emphasized, are widely used—both in pure research and in industry (especially the latter case, in the study of the effect of drugs on behavior). He has worked mainly with rats and pigeons, but has recently extended his techniques to the human organism in the study of psychotic behavior, in the analysis of verbal behavior, in the design of instructional devices and in the analysis of cultures.

Born in Susquehanna, Pa., in 1904, he received the B.A. degree from Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y., in 1926, and the M.A. (1930) and the Ph.D. (1931) degrees from Harvard. He was a National Research Council Fellow from 1931 to 1933 and a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard from 1933 to 1936.

He received the D.Sc. (hon.) degree from Hamilton College in 1951, the D.Sc. from North Carolina State College in 1960, the Litt.D. from Ripon College in 1961, the Sc.D. degree from the University of Chicago in 1967, and the D.Sc. (hon.) degrees from University of Missouri (1968), Alfred University (1969), University of Exeter (England) (1969), McGill University (1970), and Indiana University (1970).

In 1936, he joined the psychology department at the University of Minnesota, remaining there until 1945. During the years 1942-43, he conducted war research sponsored by General Mills, Inc., and also was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1944-45. In 1945 he became chairman of the department of psychology at Indiana University. In the fall of 1947 he was appointed by Harvard University as William James Lecturer, and he joined the department of psychology at Harvard in 1948.

In addition to various technical articles, he is the author of *Behavior of Organisms* (1938), a utopian novel, *Walden Two* (1948), a general analysis of the implications of science for human affairs, *Science and Human Behavior* (1953), *Verbal Behavior* (1957), *Schedules of Reinforcement* (with C. B. Ferster, 1957), and a collection of papers, *Cumulative Record* (1959; enlarged edition, 1961). His most recent works are *The Analysis of Behavior* (with J. G. Holland), *The Technology of Teaching* (1968), *Contingencies of Reinforcement* (1969) and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (to be published in September).

Dr. Skinner is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and other professional societies. He received the Warren Medal of the Society of Experimental Psychology in 1942, the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association in 1958 and the National Medal of Science in 1968.

Dr. Skinner lives in Cambridge, Mass.

The ultimate conclusions of a mod behaviorist

by Robert J. Trotter

Burrhus Frederic Skinner is the most influential psychologist alive today, and he is second only to Freud as the most important psychologist of all time. This, at least, is the feeling of 56 percent of the members of the American Psychological Association, who were polled on the question. And it should be reason enough to make Dr. Skinner's new book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, one of the most important happenings in 20th century psychology.

It may well be. Not only because it represents the summation of the Harvard psychologist's behavioristic approach to psychology, but because it goes beyond psychology into philosophy. And because Dr. Skinner's philosophy will probably be insulting to a great many people.

The 70,000-word manifesto will be published in September by Alfred A. Knopf Publishers Inc., but a 40,000-word condensed version is available in the August *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*. T. George Harris, editor of *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*, says *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* "makes sandy reading on the beach."

Why so? Because Dr. Skinner extends his behavioral theories to what he considers to be their logical conclusion. And in doing so he destroys the concept of man as a free being.

He begins by stating that the behavioral sciences are 100 years behind the physical and biological sciences and are likely to remain there unless attitudes and ideas are changed. Most persons concerned with the behavioral sciences and human affairs, he says, "continue to talk about human behavior in a prescientific way." And that is why "a science and a technology of behavior have been so long delayed. We must no longer attribute behavior to intentions, purposes, aims and goals. We can follow the path taken by physics and biology by turning directly to the relation between behavior and the environment and neglecting states of mind." In other words, all of man's actions are determined solely by his environment. Concepts such as autonomous man, freedom and dignity are

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no longer relevant. And good riddance to them, he says. "Only by dispossessing autonomous man can we turn to the real causes of human behavior—from the inferred to the observed, from the miraculous to the natural, from the inaccessible to the manipulable."

Discarding the idea of freedom and looking at man's actions in a scientific way, Dr. Skinner calls man's apparent struggle for freedom nothing more than a behavioral process by which he attempts to avoid or escape unpleasant features of the environment. And man can never be free of this environment. The best he can hope for is to learn to be happy by controlling the environment. Instead of freeing man from all control, he suggests that new controls be found. Like a rat in a cage, man will be happy if the proper techniques of control are applied.

The idea of freedom, therefore, is a hindrance to the development of these new controls and to man's fulfillment. When man attributes actions to free will rather than to environmental factors he is denying physical truth and acting in an unscientific manner.

Freedom is not the only humanistic concept that he denies. He says that dignity, like freedom, is a hindrance to man's total development. When we recognize a person's dignity or worth by giving him credit for what he has done, we are denying the fact that his actions are merely reactions to environmental stimuli. Man must not attribute actions to mysterious or occult qualities (freedom and dignity), he must attempt to discover which environmental factors produce which actions. The goal of science is the destruction, not the perpetuation, of mystery.

Dr. Skinner makes these arguments logically and rationally and bases them on scientific data drawn from his many years as a behaviorist. And obviously, many aspects of the environment could and should be changed to produce a better world. "The fact that young people drop out of school, refuse to get jobs and associate only with others of

their own age is not due to feelings of alienation but to defective social environments in homes, schools, factories and elsewhere."

Why then will Dr. Skinner's book be insulting and make sandy reading? Because Dr. Skinner denies the two qualities (freedom and dignity) that separate man from the animals and because his universal statements are based on limited experiments. Man is obviously a more complex being than a rat.

He does not stop here though. He goes beyond freedom and dignity. He proposes that man build a completely new society based entirely on a behavioristic foundation. In other words, he wants to put the world into a controlled environment—a Skinner box.

Once man is ready to accept the fact that he has no freedom and no dignity, the culture designers can move in. The first step, Dr. Skinner says, is to alleviate the aversive features of the human environment. Punishment, for example, is an aversive feature of intentional control. Alternatives should be found. "The problem," he says, "is not to induce people to be good but to induce them to behave well." Instead of building a better man through punishment, "a better world should be built." It should be possible to design a world in which behavior likely to be punished seldom or never occurs. And, he continues, strong nonaversive controls should be built into the environment. "What we need is more control, not less, and this is itself an engineering problem of the first importance."

Dr. Skinner does not say who the engineers will be and he does not say what controls they will use. He simply urges that intensive research in these fields be undertaken because "there are wonderful possibilities—all the more wonderful because traditional approaches have been so ineffective."

Not everyone will think these possibilities so wonderful. The release of this book with its denial of autonomous man (with his freedom and dignity) and its call for a more controlled world will undoubtedly cause quite a stir.

Dr. Peter F. Drucker, a management

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expert at New York University, is a proponent of basic behavior modification, but he thinks Dr. Skinner's plan for a behavioral utopia is pure romanticism. "This book," he says, "isn't science, it is cosmic philosophy and it is totally silly." Dr. Drucker believes that "behaviorism has made significant operational contributions and that it will have a greater impact on the world than all other fields of psychology combined." He has great respect for Dr. Skinner because of his contributions in the fields of psychology and education and feels that "Dr. Skinner is one of the most useful men around today." But he calls Dr. Skinner "out of his field" with this book and says he "is trying to have himself elected absolute emperor of the world."

A psychologist-philosopher who does not have as much respect for behaviorism is Dr. Sigmund Koch of Boston University. He views the Skinner-box evaluation of the world with even greater alarm. "I think the issue is too important to respond to in a few general terms. A detailed analysis is what is needed—not glibness. We have had enough of that on the part of Dr. Skinner. It is strange though," Dr. Koch continues, "Skinner has destroyed the one consideration which has thus far kept me from undertaking a detailed consideration of his views—*dignity*. He has liberated me for action." Dr. Koch does not know exactly how or when he will get the chance to break down and study Dr. Skinner's latest thoughts but he says that if given the opportunity he would like to review the book and the Skinner phenomena.

These and other criticisms will undoubtedly plague Dr. Skinner as soon as the book is released. But he is expecting them. He points out that many major scientists through the ages have been rejected by their peers. The cosmological discoveries of Copernicus, the biological discoveries of Darwin and the psychological discoveries of Freud were all discarded during their time. Now the world will have to contend with the behavioral discoveries of Skinner. □