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Beyond Freedom and Dignity by B. F. Skinner

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Special Book Review

BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY. BY B.F. SKINNER. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1972. Pp. 225. \$6.95. Paperback: Bantam/Vintage. 1971. \$1.95.

I.

*Beyond Freedom and Dignity** is not, of course, the first challenge which the legal system has faced from the social sciences. Lawyers and social scientists, and lawyers and physicians, have been clashing at the borders of their respective disciplines for many decades. To some extent, such a clash is inherent in the functions of the several spheres. The law defines and sorts in order to resolve; its categories are determinative, those of science are utilitarian and convenient. The law seeks to define insanity in order to determine liability. Psychiatry may define insanity, but primarily it does so for the sake of description.¹ Law is quite frankly concerned with, or at least frequently coincident with, morality; science, presumably, is neutral.

Heretofore, the unimpeachable premise in forming the conflict has been that those other than scientists *qua* scientists must make the choices of means and ends, with the light of science illuminating the alternatives. Skinner makes claims which put that premise at stake, for it is his thesis that "behavioral science," the tenets of which may be likened to the constitution of the future, "is a science of values."² Thus the conflict quite frankly becomes one of ultimate discretion. The title of the book alone ought to raise the hairs of the legal community. Is not the Bill of Rights primarily concerned with freedom and dignity?

What is Skinner proposing? "What we need," he proclaims at the outset, "is a technology of behavior."³ He tells us that the main impediment to the flowering of such a technology has been the entrenched prescientific view of man as an autonomous creature, acting independently of his environment, and never so glorious as when free and dignified. Prominent among those "conducting a sort of rear-guard action" on behalf of freedom and dignity are lawyers.⁴

* All references to the text are to the paperback edition.

¹ See, e.g., *United States v. Freeman*, 357 F.2d 606 (2d Cir. 1966), describing the flexible nature of psychiatric testimony.

² B.F. SKINNER, *BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY* 99 (1971) [hereinafter cited as SKINNER].

³ *Id.* at 3.

⁴ *Id.* at 16.

The fundamental error of the freedomist, we are told, has been his quest to free men from control. To the extent that the literature of freedom has identified persons having power of control and has proposed means of limiting or destroying such power, it has been reasonably successful. But for Skinner, control, from some source, is part of the nature of things. We can never escape control. We can only "analyze and change the kinds of control to which [men] . . . are exposed."⁵

The failure to recognize that external control is inescapable has bred as well the superstition of dignity: that is, the according of worth or, conversely, blame. For the author, the amount of dignity or blame to be ascribed to a person "is inversely proportional to the conspicuousness of the causes of [his] . . . behavior."⁶ To the extent that science uncovers causes it must erode dignity which pivots on a belief in autonomous man.

Skinner argues that, to a substantial extent, the freedomists/dignitarians have acted to preserve punishment⁷ as a proper means of control, for punishment, of course, spins on a belief in personal responsibility—willingness to give and refuse credit to the individual for his deeds. Unfortunately, says Skinner, aside from its false base, punishment is not a particularly efficient⁸ mode of control, for persons under threat of punishment learn not how to behave well, but how to avoid punishment. At the same time Skinner notes that champions of freedom and dignity, in their obsession with avoiding any taint of control, somewhat paradoxically have sought alternatives to punishment—permissiveness, guidance, socratic dialogue, rational argument—each of which only submerges the source of control. The repentant authoritarian only makes room for other, though less obvious, contingencies to take over. For Skinner, the supposed freedom obtained is a phantom. Control is simply masked or abdicated.

All this rests on basic premises of behavioral psychology: the organism acts on its environment which in turn produces a stimulus which may be reinforcing or averting; a complex of these events molds conduct; concepts of consciousness, feelings, motives, and cognition are artificial or are at best by-products rather than causes of behavior; change the environment and conduct is changed. Skinner boasts that

⁵ *Id.* at 40.

⁶ *Id.* at 55.

⁷ See for some corroboration of this claim, *California v. La Rue*, 409 U.S. 109, 131-33 (1972) (Marshall, J., dissenting).

⁸ One might ask, "efficient in what sense?" In terms of a fairly decent short run risk of avoiding "bad" behavior without too great demand and attention, it may be considered quite efficient.

we now have the rudimentary technique to manipulate the environment in order to nurture or produce the desired conduct. But he laments that utilization of this skill has been impeded by the literatures of freedom and dignity not only by their aversion to apparent control, but by their posing of the questions of value and of the proper seat of control as well. Who will be in charge and to what ends shall their charge be directed? Where shall we find the "good"?

Far from being disinterested in these last inquiries, Skinner avers that behavioral science holds the answers. Good, we learn, comes in three packages: that which promotes the continued survival of the individual, of others, and ultimately, of the culture.

The last of these, the survival of the culture, is deemed the highest good, the Value to be pursued.⁹ Unless the culture can convince its members to work for its survival it will decay.¹⁰ On the other hand, "a culture which FOR ANY REASON induces its members to work for its survival is more likely to survive."¹¹ However, we learn that, inconveniently, the good of the individual will not always accord with the good (*i.e.* survival) of the culture. In order to promote the good of the culture it is often necessary to visit upon the individual an immediate reinforcement or aversion which promotes the good of the whole. Thus, while *A's* theft from *B* may benefit *A* (and hence, I suppose, reinforce the thieving conduct), since it is presumed that the culture cannot exist with theft rife, society administers consequences to the individual which represent the long range cultural detriment. We telescope the process and bring it to bear upon the offender. A similar process may immediatize rewards. Therefore, "the task of the culture designer is to accelerate the development of practices which bring remote consequences of behavior into play."¹² Simply put: "[B]ehavior can be changed by changing the conditions of which it is a function. . . . Such a technology is ethically neutral. It can be used by villain or saint."¹³ Apparently, once it is recognized that the Value is the survival of the culture, a technology of behavior can be used to promote or assure that good.

Insofar as the pattern of cultural evolution is the analog of individual development, the tenets of behaviorism apply to it with equal force.

A culture is very much like the experimental space used in the analysis of behavior. Both are sets of contingencies of reinforce-

⁹ SKINNER at 174.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 130-31.

¹¹ *Id.* at 137.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 143.

ment. A child is born into a culture as an organism and is placed in an experimental space. Designing a culture is like designing an experiment; contingencies are arranged and effects noted. In an experiment we are interested in what happens, in designing a culture with whether it will work.¹⁴

This identity between cultural and experimental behavior design is the crucial bridge in the journey beyond freedom and dignity. For Skinner it follows that it is behavioral scientists who are best equipped to discern and implement the complex of contingencies which assure cultural survival.

II.

Heretofore, the most trenchant criticism of Skinner has been targeted at the integrity of his science and the inner logic of his system. Thus, for example, one reviewer has suggested that the signal contribution of *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* will be to draw "critical attention to the failure of behaviorism as a scientific discipline, and thus as a basis for society."¹⁵ The crucial failure is said to stem from a refusal to accord any place to cognitive factors, "despite all the experimental evidence available to us"¹⁶ that they exist and are significant. We are asked by some critics to recognize finally that Skinner is a religionist rather than a scientist, not a philosopher so much as an evangel.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Id.* at 145-46.

¹⁵ Fancher, *The Crumbling of Walden Two* (Book Review), *The Village Voice*, Dec. 16, 1971, at 35.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Chomsky, *The Case Against B. F. Skinner*, *The New York Review*, Dec. 30, 1971, at 18. Chomsky suggests that a proper approach to Skinner ought not to be unlike a proper approach to nineteenth century "raciology." We examine the scientific status of the claim, and then, especially as the status is slight, we "consider the climate of opinion within which the claim is taken seriously." *Id.* at 18. He quite successfully, almost playfully, attacks the first question. The assertion that behavior is totally a product of the environment is lanced as an unproven, even unproveable claim, not a scientific statement at all. Thus, for Chomsky, Skinner's would-be most powerful ally, science, is not properly in the field. Insofar as behaviorism has pretensions of being more than a code of methodological limits, *i.e.*, a demand for empirical verification (a method to some extent useful for all rational men), Chomsky finds it to rest upon a violation of its own first principle. In effect, Skinner confirms the non-existence of cognitive factors without, in fact in the face of, empirical evidence.

At this point an annoying, though obvious, question intrudes. If Skinner's thesis is false, then there is no point in his having written the book or our reading it. But if his thesis is true, then there is also no point in his having written the book or our reading it. For the only point could be to modify behavior, and behavior, according to the thesis, is entirely controlled by arrangement of reinforcers. Therefore, reading the book can modify only if it is a reinforcer, that is, if reading the book will increase the probability of the behavior that led to reading the book (assuming

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Much of the critical attack on behaviorism seems impressive, at least to the scientifically untutored such as the present reviewer. Nevertheless, there remains a nagging sense that something of Skinner's thesis remains unanswered. The formal arguments tend to attack the ability to control rather than the advisability of the thesis; the capacity rather than the proposal. The scientific pretensions of Skinner's single-sighted world view may be perforated, but few deny the significance of controls, the real effectiveness of reward, punishment and deprivation. Whether control may stem from a perfected technology of operant conditioning, strobonic injection, mass hypnosis, or from the terror of a muzzle, it exists and modern science seems to have added to its arsenal.¹⁸ Throughout the criticism runs a more or less explicit cry in the alternative: "We don't want it." Most, it seems, would agree with Huxley's Savage:

"My dear young friend," said Mustapha Mond, "civilization has absolutely no need of nobility or heroism. These are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society like ours nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise. . . ."

"But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin."

"In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "You're claiming the right to be unhappy."

. . . .
 "Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to

(Footnote continued from preceding page)

an appropriate state of deprivation). At this point we seem to be reduced to gibberish. *Id.* at 20.

Chomsky proceeds to reduce the essential thesis of operant conditioning to absurdity: according to strict view, reading the book can only reinforce behavior if reading the book was a consequence of the behavior. The behavior to be reinforced, says Chomsky, is to put our lives in the hands of behavioral scientists. But "obviously putting our fate in the hands of behavioral technologists is not behavior that led to our reading Skinner's book." *Id.* The only escape from the syllogistic trap is to recognize something called persuasion which rests on a rational process, a process having no place in Skinner's cosmography. At best, we can surmise that persuasion works by an appealing arrangement of statements (logic) which—what? —reinforce us to read the book again and again? No, to accept its ideas and act upon them. But that calls for some internal process. Chomsky concludes, "In every possible respect, then, Skinner's account [of behavior] is simply incoherent." *Id.*

Among the better known and most fascinating book length rejoinders to behaviorism is A. KOESTLER, *THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE* (1967). Koestler contends the whole thesis of behaviorism is circular and that the science is "a monumental triviality."

See also Herrmann, Book Review, 70 MICH. L. REV. 415 (1971).

¹⁸ See A. HUXLEY, *BRAVE NEW WORLD REVISITED* 5 (1945), where there appears an interesting acknowledgement of the contribution of behavioral psychology to the creation of a "brave new world."

eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pain of every kind."

There was a long silence.

"I claim them all," said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. "You're welcome," he said.¹⁹

And, typical of most recent reactions to the Skinnerian thesis is the statement that, "For those of us who would hold the enhancement of man's freedom of choice as a fundamental value, any manipulation of the behavior of others constitutes a violation of their essential humanity. . . ." ²⁰ These are noble sentiments, but they are in fact conclusions. What lies beneath this willingness to reject perfection?

It is all very well to contend that Skinner's theories are tunnelled, that his claims of technical capacity are swollen, that his Utopia, *Walden Two*, is still science fiction.²¹ Surely some degree of behavioral control is within our reach; moreover, there is little reason to doubt that continued advances in behavioral and biological science will increase the capacity to manipulate individuals. Is our only answer an existential commitment to freedom as a good, THE good, despite. . . ?

There is an undeniable aspect in Skinner's dictum that, "If you insist that individual rights are the SUMMUM BONUM, then the whole structure of society falls down."²² Individual freedom or dignity may well be legitimately subject to be adjudged against a higher standard, and the survival of the culture, or perhaps the species, is not an untenable candidate for that standard.

Finally, Skinner's assertion that free choice is a phantom, while hardly novel, seems generally ignored rather than answered. Perhaps the free will v. determinism debate has been correctly tabbed a non-issue. Nonetheless, one may occasionally pause in his daily go-rounds to sense that the concept of free will is more handy and habitual than true in any absolute sense—one pauses before getting on with the task of living and "choosing."²³

¹⁹ A. HUXLEY, *BRAVE NEW WORLD* 284-88 (1932).

²⁰ *TIME MAGAZINE*, Sept. 20, 1971, at 47.

²¹ In notes to the text Skinner admits "[t]he author's *Walden Two* describes a community designed essentially on the principles which appear in the present book." SKINNER at 212. See also K. KINKAOE, *WALDEN TWO EXPERIMENT: THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF TWO OAKS COMMUNITY* (1973), an intriguing account of a Virginia community which has taken *Walden Two* as its model.

²² *TIME MAGAZINE*, Sept. 20, 1971, at 52.

²³ Statements such as the following are uplifting but hardly compelling by logical force:

I must reassert that we have come to the point in biological history where

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The remainder of this review, then, will to some extent take Skinner on his own terms; that is, we will accept the premise that an efficacious technology of behavioral control is within our grasp, that free will is a phantom, that to refuse to manipulate totally our environment is at best but to surrender to haphazard control, and that a commitment to freedom ought to have greater support than high resolution and shibboleth.

III.

A consideration of a "brave new world" turns upon two sets of inquiries. The first set concerns questions, not of technical capacity which we are assuming, but of teleological capacity—questions, really, of discerning values. The second set of questions, not really separable from the first, concerns who: to whom shall authority be granted? What assurances, if any, in a natural or constitutional sense, exist or shall be exacted?

To his credit, Skinner recognizes early the kindred nature of the two major lines of inquiry: "Who is to construct the controlling environment and to what ends?"²⁴ His undertaking to answer the second portion of his question is, if ultimately unsuccessful, surely more gallant than his efforts regarding the first. He admits that "until these issues [of who and to what ends] are resolved, a technology of

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we now are responsible for our own evolution. We have become self-evolvers. Evolution means selecting and therefore choosing and deciding, and this means valuing. A. MASLOW, *THE FARTHER REACHES OF HUMAN NATURE* (1972) [cited in Oates, *The Potential of Normality*, Book Review, *SATURDAY REVIEW, THE SOCIETY*, Aug. 26, 1972, at 53].

Being the product of conditioning and being free to change do not war with each other. Both are true. They co-exist, grow together in an upward spiral, and the growth of one furthers the growth of the other. The more cogently we prove ourselves to have been shaped by causes, the more opportunities we create for changing. The more we change, the more it becomes possible to see how determined we were in that which we have just ceased to be.

What makes a battleground of these two points of view is to conceive of either as an absolute that excludes the other. For when the truth of either view is extended to the point of excluding the truth of the other, it becomes not only false but incoherent. We must affirm freedom and responsibility without denying that we have the freedom to transcend that causality to become something that could not even have been pre-visualized from the circumstances that shaped us. What destroyed the behaviorist's argument is not the evidence marshaled to demonstrate that we are controlled by environment—that is utterly convincing—but the use of that evidence to deny freedom. Wheelis, 246 *HARPER'S MAGAZINE*, Feb. 1973, at 8.

Skinner too believes we can control the environment. Of course, it seems unlikely that anyone accepts determinism wholly—even Skinner. Else, why write the book . . . perhaps he couldn't help it, but. . . .

²⁴ SKINNER at 19.

behavior will continue to be rejected, and with it possibly the only way to solve our problems."²⁵ The tacit promise to provide acceptable answers is never fulfilled.

For a moment, the reader anticipates that some answer is forthcoming in Chapter 6 entitled *Values*: "But for whom is a powerful technology to be used? Who is to use it? And to what end?"²⁶ Disconcerting hints of the proposed answer are strewn along the way. Now and again the answer of identity is presaged by the gradual ascription of a title, "the culture designer,"²⁷ whose task it is "to accelerate the development of practices which bring remote consequences of behavior into play."²⁸ And who can better perform that task than the behavioral psychologist? They are the ruling corps of the future.²⁹

Yet even if we can be assured of their benevolence, Skinner admits that "benevolence is no guarantee against the misuse of power."³⁰ Something more than personal ethics must be the control. There exists, we are assured, a trustworthy safeguard available against abuse:

The designer of a culture comes under fire because explicit design implies control. . . . The issue is often formulated by asking who is to control? And the question is usually raised as if the answer were necessarily threatening. To prevent the misuse of controlling power, however, we must look not at the controller himself but at the contingencies under which he engages in control.³¹

The controller himself is not free:

The relation between the controller and the controlled is reciprocal. The scientist in the laboratory, studying the behavior of a pigeon, designs contingencies and observes their effects. His apparatus exerts a conspicuous control on the pigeons, *but we must not overlook the control exerted by the pigeon.*³²

There it is. We pigeons must recognize that, albeit indirectly, we will have something of a vote—a vote not unlike that of a 100 pound boulder which exercises its franchise by demanding a fairly strong individual to lift it. You see,

²⁵ *Id.* at 23.

²⁶ *Id.* at 96-97.

²⁷ Cf. Mustapha Mond's title, *The Controller*, in *BRAVE NEW WORLD*, note 19 *supra*.

²⁸ SKINNER at 137.

²⁹ At points, even Skinner takes a modest view of their capacities. See, e.g., *Id.* at 39 and 138.

³⁰ *Id.* at 38.

³¹ *Id.* at 160.

³² *Id.* at 161 (emphasis added). Note again the identity in Skinner's mind between experimental and cultural design. See note 14 *supra*.

The designer of a culture is not an interloper or meddler. He does not step in to disturb a natural process, he is a part of a natural process.³³

• • • •

As Francis Bacon put it, nature to be commanded must be obeyed.³⁴

The stuff of the controls, then, inheres in the nature of things.³⁵ Because the controller, anymore than we, cannot best nature; he must conform to nature—that is the safeguard. “Don’t blame (or, I suppose, praise) us, blame nature,” or “It’s all O.K. Go to sleep now. Everything will be alright. Nothing can go wrong.” But there are many things which nature commands, or, more accurately, allows. A can hug, tickle, beat or kill B—or so it has seemed. Skinner must mean something else. What he really means, he says, is something quite like a democracy or some form of self-government which:

. . . often seems to solve the problem by identifying the controller with the controlled. The principle of making the controller a member of the group he controls should apply to the designer of a culture.³⁶

We seem to be back to where we started. One has the sense that Skinner has skipped the question of abuse altogether. He’s simply softened the blow—as parent to child, or, scientist to pigeon.³⁷

In fact, of course, self-government and delegation of total control to a cultural designer are incompatible concepts. Even if we all are able to become behavioral psychologists, a question of trust remains. Who gets the nod? Skinner? I don’t know him well enough. I know some fine friends and colleagues, but I can’t really put total trust in them. You be the pigeon and I’ll be the culture designer. And that’s a crux of democracy. Being uncertain, we settle on a degree of individual control; or, if we are to be regarded as but products of external contingencies, a degree of haphazard control.

There is a basic mistrust which is more central to our system of self-government than has usually been recognized. This mistrust stems not only from a fear of purposive malevolence, or from a fear of the

³³ *Id.* at 172.

³⁴ *Id.* at 161. It is heartening that Skinner calls upon a lawyer for authority.

³⁵ *Id.* at 161-62.

³⁶ *Id.* at 164.

³⁷ *Cf.* BRAVE NEW WORLD REVISITED 34-35, *supra* note 18:

To the question QUIS CUSTODIET CUSTODES?—Who will mount guard over our guardian, who will engineer the engineer?—the answer is a bland denial that they need any supervision. There seems to be a touching belief among certain Ph.D.’s in sociology that Ph.D.’s in sociology will never be corrupted by power. Like Sir Galahad’s, their strength is as the strength of ten because their heart is pure—and their heart is pure because they are scientists and have taken six thousand hours of social studies.

embodiment of the old saw about power and corruption. Rather it is a mistrust, better, a skepticism, concerning human capacity and perfectibility. At times even Skinner's modesty shines through. "No one knows the BEST way of raising children, paying workers, maintaining law and order, teaching, or making people creative. . . ." ³⁸ At best, behavioral scientists are "slightly beyond Newton's position in the analysis of light for we are beginning to make applications." ³⁹ How far along is that? It is awesome to many that we can send a ship to the moon, but it is a well-tried joke that the weather still seems beyond our certain grasp. ⁴⁰ Our skepticism is multi-aimed: prediction, control, and ends. It is one thing to predict weather, another to control it, and another to determine what weather we want. I personally adore snow and abhor temperatures over 70°. How about you?

Thus, even if we can be assured of benevolent controllers, we should like to know something of their basis and mode of control, something of their means of discerning the proper orientation.

Others, aforementioned, have called into question the basic concepts of behaviorism and hence its capacities to fulfill Skinner's promise of prediction and control. But there are other problems lurking. Let us assume that to a greater or lesser extent the problem of control is solved (and there are enough examples in the 20th century, outside of fiction, to suggest that an ability to manipulate individuals and masses is not entirely unknown). Ignoring for the moment his rather strange dismissal of all attributes of mind, thought, and feelings, ⁴¹ we find that Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, which presumably is the cardinal formula for the culture designer, has room for all sorts of environmental aspects which affect (reinforce) what most of us call the intellect or the emotion, or at least would appear to be processed and transmitted through these entities. Skinner ad-

³⁸ SKINNER at 138.

³⁹ *Id.* at 204.

⁴⁰ Freud's comment seems pertinent:

So long as we trace the development from its final stage backwards, the connection appears continuous. . . . But if we proceed the reverse way, if we start from the premises inferred from the analysis and try to follow them up to the final result, then we no longer get the impression of an inevitable sequence of events which could not otherwise be determined.

We notice at once that there might have been another result.

Quoted in J. HALL, *GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CRIMINAL LAW* 458 (2d ed. 1960).

⁴¹ Is this an example of the "McNamara Fallacy?", see Smith, *The Last Days of Cowboy Capitalism*, 320 *THE ATLANTIC* No. 3, 43, 54, Sept. 1972, quoting Daniel Yankelovich:

The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is okay as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't very important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide.

mits that concepts are part of the environment. For example: "The traditional conception of man is flattering; it confers reinforcing privileges. . . . It was designed to build up the individual as an instrument of counter control. . . ." ⁴² Thus, while freedom is but a phantom, only a masking of the dispersal of the controls, it, in itself, as a concept, is a part of the environment. Insofar as, in Skinner's cosmos, control is effectively masked, man appears autonomous, has "responsibility," and hence is the carrier of dignity or blame. While freedom and dignity are not realities in one sense, as concepts they are of the utmost significance. In fact, a widespread dedication to them is the very orientation which Skinner is set on dispelling. The role of intellectual or normative institutions turns out to play a central part in Skinner's *Weltanschauung*. We learn, for example, that the incidence of heroic self-sacrifice derives from the reinforcement of the esteem of one's fellows. ⁴³ And, of course, as the esteem follows the sacrifice, the hero acts in anticipation of esteem, and often dies before the reinforcing stimulus can be applied. This becomes a cultural "value"—an idea which as part of the environment affects behavior. Quite literally, it would appear that for Skinner ideas are contingencies as much as heat, light, and wind. ⁴⁴ Significantly, the game of control is largely to be carried out by the *cultural* designer—that is, by instituting the proper social contingencies, or reinforcers, or—values.

In that light, Skinner at times becomes inexplicable or, at best, careless. He says,

We shall not solve the problem of alcoholism and juvenile delinquency by increasing a sense of responsibility. It is the environment which is 'responsible' for the objectionable behavior, and it is the environment, not some attribute of the individual, which must be changed. ⁴⁵

If people are lazy or careless,

we shall not get far by inspiring a 'sense of craftsmanship or pride in one's work,' or a 'sense of the dignity of labor,' Something is wrong with the contingencies which induce men to work industriously and carefully. ⁴⁶

But responsibility, industriousness, pride in craft, at least as concepts,

⁴² SKINNER at 204.

⁴³ *Id.* at 105-06.

⁴⁴ *See, e.g., Id.* at 121 or 33—"gluttony" is an environmental contingency; or—norms are but statements of contingencies.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 70.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 150. Skinner also suggests that a similar miscomprehension has impeded the struggle of American Blacks. Perhaps this is true in part, but have not the concepts of black power and racial pride contributed immeasurably to the struggle?

are themselves contingencies. Hence, it must be that they cause unwanted behavior (but that isn't true for Skinner), or that they are alone insufficient. Even so, that is not to dismiss them as non-concepts or as obsolete. Is the argument then simply that these are not attributes, only concepts; that the concept of pride in craft is real, but that to speak of A as having pride is foolish? What if we find that pride in craft is not only a useful concept, effective when an orientation towards it is coupled with a reward—for example, praise, or money—but we also find it is useful to ascribe pride as an attribute of the individual? Whether pride can be dissected in the laboratory is irrelevant if a concept of it as a potential personal trait is a useful cultural tool. The same thing may be said for freedom, dignity, responsibility, honor and what have you. One can make a commitment, albeit existential, to these not because they fulfill some standard of absoluteness, but because they are useful, and useful on Skinner's own terms, as promoting the survival of the culture. If a culture dedicated to freedom, at least formally, has thrived, the "truth" of the concept to one side,⁴⁷ have we something like proof of its value? What, then, can possibly be meant by the statement that:

A scientific analysis shifts the credit as well as the blame to the environment, and traditional practices can then no longer be justified.⁴⁸

We may grant the first part of the statement, yet ask how the second follows? "Traditional practices" are by Skinner's own thesis no longer justified only if they do not promote the survival of the culture.

The simple fact is that a culture which FOR ANY REASON induces its members to work for its survival, or for the survival of some of its practices, is more likely to survive. Survival is the only value according to which a culture is eventually to be judged, and any practice that furthers survival has survival value by definition.⁴⁹

Therefore, the "traditional practices" can indeed be justified if they have promoted the survival of the culture. How shall we discover or assess their cultural value?⁵⁰ Let us concentrate on freedom.

⁴⁷ At this point, the basis for regarding behaviorism as little more than a valuable laboratory discipline becomes clearer.

⁴⁸ SKINNER at 19.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 130.

⁵⁰ And, of course, there are other questions: What is a culture? What is survival? Is anything promoting the "Aryan" culture a value so long as it promotes survival? Was Hitler's fault strategic more than anything? At the cost of what other culture? Or is culture a broader concept: western culture? mankind? the species? Is survival of a culture measured by length of blood lines? Material wealth? Stability of tradition?

Again, for the sake of argument, we may accept Skinner's description of freedom: Freedom's autonomy is a phantom; what we really have when we refrain from conscious or intentional control of others is a situation where the individual is still wholly controlled by his environment. "[T]o assume that the balance of control is left to the individual. . . ." is false. "[I]n fact it is left to other conditions. The other conditions are often hard to see, but to continue to neglect them and to attribute their effects to autonomous man is to court disaster."⁵¹ The error, in Skinner's view, is twofold: the first is to neglect controlling conditions, in a sense to submit ourselves to a lottery; and the second is to believe that chances in this lottery are determined by independent virtues. We still have not been informed of the basis for the postulate that the concept of autonomous man is not useful for cultural survival, that is—is not a value. How shall we or the culture designer find out?

We might contend that we are here and in many aspects have thrived. In a historical context we are apparently fit, despite, according to Skinner's charge, our dedication to freedom. It's hard to argue with success when success is the sole criterion.⁵²

Of course, Skinner and many others counsel that whatever our past vitality, we are now courting disaster. It may well be that as in the past, certain matters left to the market will have to be subjected to legislation; that is, in Skinnerian terms, certain aspects of the lottery will have to be attended to and consciously arranged. Nevertheless, insofar as natural selection operates on a cultural level, we have been selected. Things seem to have worked out. To predict that we have passed our heyday is, aside from requiring an effort of precognition, a quality Skinner says is non-existent, not science so much as a *priori* political contention. Simply, how do we know whether a commitment to freedom as an ideal has not been the sustaining fire of the culture?

Of course, as Skinner suggests, the mere existence of a trait or practice doesn't guarantee its utility—it may be an anomaly, a mutation, the aversive effects of which are too distant to have been felt or foreseen.⁵³ It is the culture designer's task to telescope the aversive effect so that it is presently felt. Short of resorting to cognitive processes, how can he discern whether our dedication to freedom and dignity is suicidal or saving?⁵⁴ Nothing convinces us that freedom is not a

⁵¹ SKINNER at 94.

⁵² See note 49 *supra*.

⁵³ SKINNER at 104, 123-24.

⁵⁴ Moreover, even if the effect can be discerned, by what means are the adverse effects presently to be brought to bear? By reinforcing non-free acts? By . . . rational argument?

useful concept, even if we grant Skinner his explanation of the true operation of freedom. That is, it may be that there is value in "pretending" that our concept accords with reality. It may be we are incapable on a level of activity of doing much else.

As we have seen, Skinner's claim that behavioral psychology is a science of values rests upon the thesis that values are a function of cultural survival in the evolutionary process. However, one may be receptive to the view that evolutionary development is relevant to a discussion of values without being compelled to march in the lockstep that Skinner would call.

In fact, others who have posited the evolutionary foundations of value, (and done so, in this reviewer's eyes, in a more satisfactory manner than Skinner) have concluded that "biological wisdom" demands an open society. C. H. Waddington contends that insofar as man is distinguished by a socio-genetic vehicle of evolution (that is, cultural evolution, in Skinner's terms), we must recognize that evolution is an open-ended process.⁵⁵ In fact, its very indeterminacy is the characteristic which makes it unacceptable to most persons concerned with questions of value.⁵⁶ Waddington suggests that biological and psychiatric evidence exist for the proposition that a single-channelled view of value is evolutionally suicidal.⁵⁷ An evolutionary process may lead to stasigenesis, that is "the attainment of a biologically satisfactory condition which persists unchanged. . . .", cladogenesis, the evolution of a diversified range of species, none more advanced than another, or anagenesis which includes "the appearance of something which can be recognized as an improvement over the previously existing type."⁵⁸ But anagenesis may take too narrow a path leading to an evolutionary box wherein stasigenesis is reached and extinction may follow because of adaptive inability. Hence, in order to assure an open-ended anagenesis, an open and diversified culture, within the limits of authority needed for the socio-genetic mechanism to operate, is essential. Skinner thus appears to ignore the critical aspect of cultural evolution—that it evolves and hence the "values" themselves evolve, are indeterminate and cannot be discovered and stencilled for all time. To attempt to do so proves a poor risk in the evolutionary lottery.

But one has not to turn to biology or ethology to arrive at a similar conclusion. There is, at the root of democratic wisdom, a skepticism which doubts the ability to discover even the existence of an ultimate

⁵⁵ C. WADDINGTON, *THE ETHICAL ANIMAL* (1961).

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 97-98.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 188.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 126.

truth or good, a refusal even to make the leap of faith required by the postulate that cultural survival is the only value. Who knows? Not knowing, it seems preferable to undergo the risk of the lottery. Therefore, even if Skinner is correct that freedom is nothing but surrender to haphazard control, that risk is to be preferred to the risk of handing control to a designated authority forever. Ultimately we can't trust—and democracy represents a compromise in the light of this human condition. In a sense, the reason has its paradigm in our commitment to the "preferred" freedom of speech. Essentially, a democracy is not a temporary system or a way station on the road to Utopia wherein free speech is honored so that we can hear all ideas, pick the truth, and get on with it. Rather, it is an end in itself wherein free speech may provide mundane, not ultimate insight.⁵⁹ Hence freedom and dignity, apart from appearing so far to have been workable, have the commission of reason as well. They seem the best risk now and in the foreseeable future.

Whatever the merits of behaviorism as a laboratory discipline or as a fundamental science of animal behavior, Skinner's tract, even on its own terms, fails to make even a colorable case for the rejection of freedom and dignity. Perhaps it is an environmental contingency stimulating a rethinking of the foundations for democratic slogans. As such, it is welcome.

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⁵⁹ Such a view may seem to compel the sort of argument most recently put forth in Bork, *Neutral Principles and Some First Amendment Problems*, 47 *IND. L.J.* 1 (1971), that groups bent on destroying liberty ought not be accorded the right of free speech. But, of course, there are other first amendment values to be considered, such as the value of free speech as a creative or emotional outlet promoting stability. See, e.g., Emerson, *Toward A General Theory of the First Amendment*, 72 *YALE L.J.* 877 (1963). And finally there is the paradox of the skeptical view—we are really not too sure that democracy is the end-in-itself after all.

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