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Burrhus Frederic Skinner

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behavior is controlled by its consequences rather than its antecedents. Operant behavior, as Skinner termed it, acts on the environment. In contrast, respondent behavior is elicited by the environment.

Skinner played an important role in the development of behavioral research techniques and equipment; he developed the Skinner box, the cumulative recorder, and the first teaching machines. He disliked formal theory and emphasized single-subject rather than group research. While he was a graduate student at Harvard, Skinner developed a lifelong friendship with Fred Keller. Through his teaching at Columbia University, Keller was most influential in propagating Skinner's theory; it was Keller's students who popularized behavioral psychology in the 1950s and 1960s.

Among the many honors awarded to Skinner were the Warren Medal of the Society of Experimental Psychology in 1942; the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association in 1958; the Edward L. Thorndike Award in Education in 1966; the United States Air Force Hoyt-Vandenburg Trophy in 1967; the National Medal of Science in 1968; the Gold Medal of the American Psychological Foundation in 1971; the International Award of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Foundation for Mental Retardation in 1971; the Humanist of the Year Award of The American Humanist Society in 1972; the Creative Leadership Award for Distinguished Contributions to Educational Research and Development by the American Educational Research Association in 1976; the First Annual Award of the National Association for Retarded Citizens in 1978; and the American Psychological Association's Award for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Psychology in 1990. Skinner also received more than 20 honorary degrees.

The breadth of Skinner's intellectual interest is indicated by his many professional associations, including fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Royal Society of Arts; and member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the New York Academy of Sciences.

A prolific writer, Skinner published 19 books dealing with a broad range of topics from technical aspects of operant behavior to mental illness, education, politics, and social policy. His most influential works in psychology include *The Behavior of Organisms* (1938), which outlined his basic theory and philosophy; *Science and Human Behavior* (1953), in which he applied his theory to everyday human activities; *Verbal Behavior* (1957), his account of private events and consciousness; and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971), applying his theory and philosophy to social systems, ethics, and religion. Skinner helped found the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior* (1958–) and the Division of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior in the American Psychological Association.

Skinner, Burrhus Frederic (1904–1990). Considered to be the father of modern behavioral psychology. Son of a moderately prosperous lawyer, Skinner was born in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, and grew up there in a middle-class Protestant family. He attended Hamilton College, completing his B.A. in 1926. Skinner planned on a literary career but quickly gave this up. He enrolled in psychology at Harvard in 1927, completing his M.A. in 1930 and his Ph.D. in 1931.

Skinner became a National Research Council Fellow (1931–1933) and then a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows (1933–1936) at Harvard; during this period he worked in the laboratory of W. J. Crozier, an experimental biologist. He taught at the University of Minnesota from 1930 to 1945, taking time out during 1942 and 1943 to conduct war research sponsored by General Mills, and for a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1944 and 1945. Skinner became chairperson of the department of psychology at Indiana University in 1945. He then went to Harvard as William James Lecturer in 1947, joined the Department of Psychology in 1948, and remained there for the balance of his career.

Skinner's most lasting contribution to psychology was his "demonstration that behavior could be studied as a self-sufficient subject matter, rather than as a reflection of inner mental events" (Holland, 1992, p. 665). The goal of Skinner's work was simple: the control, prediction, and interpretation of behavior. He showed that most animal and human

Although he was tremendously influential and widely acclaimed, Skinner is also a controversial figure who frequently championed unpopular positions. Thus Skinner's critics are numerous. Among the criticisms are charges that Skinner reduces people to robots or automatons; dehumanizes people, destroying freedom and personal responsibility; denies the existence of the mind; undermines the basis for morals through rejection of all but empirical bases for ethical decisions; fosters totalitarianism by his emphasis on control of human behavior; and confuses his personal philosophy with his science, resulting in scientism rather than science (Bufford, 1981; Cosgrove, 1982; Wheeler, 1973). Skinner responded to these criticisms most extensively in *Answers for My Critics* (in Wheeler, 1973).

A signer of the *Humanist Manifesto II*, Skinner espouses materialistic humanism. In *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971), Skinner articulates this philosophy. According to Skinner, people have no special moral sense; rather, environment has taught them to behave in certain ways. At times his humanistic views seem to shape Skinner's scientific conclusions (Cosgrove, 1982). For example, he concludes that punishment has harmful effects and does not work, that has been a view effectively challenged (Bufford, 1981).

Although he was a determinist, Skinner believed that humans can control their own destiny. "Man himself may be controlled by his environment, but it is an environment which is almost wholly of his own making" (Skinner, 1971, p. 196). Thus Skinner ends up discounting determinism and advocating a view similar to that of causality and responsible choice held by most Christians.

Because of Skinner's significant role in the development of modern behaviorism, many people have come to view Skinner's religious perspectives as central to behavior theory. However, Bufford (1981) contends that Skinner's worldview is not essential to behavior theory.

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