

Untruthful, dogmatic statements of this kind are all through Skinner's work. In support of his assumptions about the effectiveness of conditioning, he says, "A parent nags a child until the child performs a task; by performing the task the child escapes nagging." I wonder where Skinner has been for the last 20 years, in a permissive society, where children who feel ignored by their parents refuse to perform tasks because their desire to attract the parent's attention is more powerful than their desire to escape nagging or even punishment. Here again Skinner's assumptions do not admit the possibility of a child's inner psychology having the autonomy to make such a choice, so his own perception fails to notice a condition which is blatant. And, of course, Skinner is quite unable to notice his own failure of perception, because to him perception is a purely mechanical thing, without any active role. That is why this "scientist" fails to see masochistic and self-destructive behavior, or disobedient children, in a world which is full of them. The reason is that Skinner is not a scientist at all, but a conditioned professor who has discovered that he gets rewards for doing things, including writing and speaking nonsense, and continues to do them.

Skinner's ideas are not new as he insists, but very old. His theory that men seek pleasant experiences and avoid unpleasant ones is explicit in Jeremy Bentham (died 1833) and has been discarded from the toolbox of psychology for a century. It is still used by Skinner as his basic tool because he has no concern with psychology but only with behavior. The only innovation Skinner has made with this tool is that he has rejected the use of punishment in conditioning and would rely only on rewards. But this fails because his rewards are too weak, and he ignores the fact that people can get surfeit with materialist rewards, especially weak ones. In the laboratory, a rat which is kept hungry may continue indefinitely to do what Skinner wants in return for an inadequate food pellet after each success, but a human being can become surfeit with any reward or success and can leave the laboratory, the game, or the world. Throughout history, from ancient Sparta to recent Nazi Germany and contemporary Russia, efforts to create a society based on operant conditioning have shown the impossibility of preventing men from adopting the kind of behavior which Skinner ignores, such as opting out, walking away, or self-destruction; the very things which are sweeping over our society and are doing so just because our society is already moving in those dehumanized, materialistic, technological, and impersonal directions which Skinner advocates as a cure for these conditions.

Some measure of his misconception of the nature of man and of our present crisis is to be seen in his suggestion that a solution to our problems could be found by replacing our inter-personal relations with relationships with things (pages 89-90). He says, "A world in which all behavior is dependent on things is an attractive prospect." At a time when the world is being swept by a growing hatred of artifacts, with irrational vandalism of things increasing everywhere, while people desperately try to replace their relations with unresponsive things by almost any kind of relationships with nature and persons, it is difficult to believe that any responsible person could advocate replacing inter-personal relationships by more "dependence" on things, but there it is.