

Project No: 00525/3022

Colour Film No:

Duration: 24' 30"

OUF.156

Production by: Richard Callanan

First Transmission:
8th August, 1973

Linked to correspondence text for units 17 and 18,
"The Freewill Problem". . . Open University Press 1973.
Price

B .F. Skinner is Professor of Psychology at Harvard. His books "Science and Human Behaviour", "Beyond Freedom and Dignity" and others have made him one of the best known and most controversial of contemporary psychologists. His belief that "operant conditioning" is the true explanation of human behaviour has put him in direct conflict with philosophical arguments which uphold free will. Skinner claims that in no real sense do we choose to do something but that in fact we act according to the rewards or punishments that such an action might bring about. To use his words, our behaviour is controlled by contingency reinforcements. His argument extends into the political field because he believes that, as we can manipulate the rewards (or "reinforcements") for any action people can be controlled to behave in a way which is for the general good of our society.

Geoffrey Warnock, Principal of Hertford College Oxford, and author of Contemporary Moral Philosophy and The Object of Morality, attempts to pinpoint what he sees as the contradictions within Skinner's arguments. He asks how, in Skinner's view, a political power can manipulate reinforcements without freely choosing which actions are to be rewarded and which punished.

The discussion is chaired by Professor Godfrey Vesey.

Title: Behaviour control: freedom
and morality

Producer: Richard Callanan

Contributors: B.F.Skinner
Geoffrey Warnock
Godfrey Vesey

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Project No. 00525/3022
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Form VTR
Duration 23'50"
Class nos. 123, 150.19434

Summary: The contributors discuss philosophically the behaviourist school of psychology as represented by B.F.Skinner and then go on to discuss the morality of applying Skinner's psychological technique to society.

Rwv

Seq.	Time.	Footage.	Sequence List.	Sound Cue
1	1.26	23	Godfrey Vesey opens the programme, explains its intention, introduces the other participants and starts off by posing the question whether, although a person's behaviour can be explained in terms of contingencies of environmental reinforcement, would that person's explanation of his behaviour in terms of intentions, ideas and thoughts render the former explanation bogus?	...a bogus one?
2	4.38	70	B.F.Skinner replies using as an example a visit to the theatre. Warnock replies. He suggests that Skinner's well known view-point is perhaps not so extreme as one might be led to believe. Skinner explains how his visit to the theatre can be explained in terms of the contingencies of environmental reinforcement.	Yes - well, could we... ...this particular instance.
3	10.16	147	Warnock replies that there is nothing in what Skinner says to make one want to deny that intentions occur at least in man. Skinner defines what he feels to be the difference between his standpoint and that of Warnock. The latter wishes to ascribe to purposes, intentions etc. dimensions which Skinner wishes to avoid. Warnock re defines Skinner's proposition.	Yes, but I suppose... ...than I'd supposed
			Godfrey Vesey now introduces the question of	Could I now turn.....

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PROGRAMME SEQUENCE LIST

Continuation

Seq.	Time	Footage	Sequence List	Sound Cue
4	15.45	216	<p>the morality of behaviour control by conditioning. He poses the question: To what ends?</p> <p>Skinner is the first to reply; Warnock draws a parallel between Skinner and Hobbes, and introduces the social and political problems in conditioning.</p> <p>Skinner makes it clear that he possesses a technology but not a set of criteria by which it might be used in a social context in which political considerations are involved.</p>	...whatever is available.
5	19.50	264	<p>Warnock returns to Hobbes, citing the latter's over-riding value that above all must remain the personal survival of the individual.</p> <p>Vesey introduces the notion of changes in culture and the question of what changes are desirable in a culture. Warnock presses Skinner to be more precise as to the values which should survive in his opinion in a given culture.</p>	<p>Yes. There is one.....</p> <p>..continuously at war.</p>
	23.36	306	<p>Warnock defines the difference between his viewpoint and that of Skinner. They return to the previous point that Skinner possesses a technology but not a complete confidence that his expertise should be applied without debate. Skinner refutes the suggestion that he has in mind the idea of the 'master manipulator' set above the society which is being moulded. Vesey brings the programme to a close.</p>	<p>Nobody's going to.....</p> <p>...Warnock, thank you</p>
	23.50	309	Credits	