

Against free will

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

B. F. Skinner argues that the free will of a human being is a dangerous notion to believe in, seeing that it hinders the behavioral control processes that may be applied to manage his or her doings. In his book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, the psychologist notes that "[the literature of freedom and dignity] has been successful in reducing the aversive stimuli used in intentional control, but it has made the mistake of defining freedom in terms of states of mind or feelings... (42)."

While Skinner did not disagree with the fact that man has a mind and feelings, he believed that the mind and feelings do not have a place in scientific observation and analysis. I disagree with this view, now that neuropsychologists, in particular, have discovered the methodology to monitor individuals' responses to different thoughts and feelings by way of the scientific method.

But, Skinner was actually arguing against thoughts and feelings that are totally unrelated to their consequences in the environment. In other words, everything that the individual thinks or feels must have an environmental cause. Nobody is free of the environment. Human beings must constantly do things that relate them to their communities. Skinner's main argument against free will has been described thus by the author: " In the traditional view, a person is free.

He is autonomous in the sense that his behavior is uncaused. He can therefore be held responsible for what he does and justly punished if he offends. That view, together with its associated practices, must be re-examined when a scientific analysis reveals unsuspected controlling relations between behavior and environment (17)."

Indeed, empirical science assumes that everything has a cause. Free will, on the other hand, entails that a human being has the right to choose what he or she would like to do at any point in time – without being pushed by the environment to choose a certain cause of action, and without a cause.

I would have to agree with this argument against free will made by Skinner.

I do not believe in an individual's will to make decisions without considering the consequences that he or she would encounter in the environment. Indeed, all of our decisions are made on the bases of the consequences we expect to encounter in our respective environments.

In short, there is nothing that I may will to do without the knowledge that my interaction with the environment in a certain way would grant me rewards or lead me to punishment. Skinner argued against punishment, too, seeing that an individual must scientifically analyze his or her behavior to avoid punishment.

Children also learn to avoid behaviors that may lead them to punishment. Moreover, even an infant – as he seeks to touch a toy – does not have free will because his or her action is determined by the attractions that the environment (the toy, in this case) holds for him or her. The infant would like to learn about the environment. Thus, his or her will to touch a toy is caused by his or her desire to know the environment that invites him or her to know it.

Indeed, free will has no place in science, just as the human being's decisions or will cannot be separated from his or her notions about the environment. It is the environment that teaches the infant not to go near the fire. If free will

were to exist, it would only do so in the life of the child who has not thus far learned that the fire is dangerous.

Then again, the environment helps the child to learn quickly and easily that all of his or her actions have consequences. From that point on, everything that the individual decides is caused by his or her learning of consequences.

Works Cited

Skinner, B. F. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Bantam Vintage Paperback, 1972.