

## *Walden Two: The Morality of Anarchy*

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The utopian label is often pinned on calls for comprehensive change as a means of dismissing them from serious consideration... [S]ocial orders come and go, and those who indulge in utopian thinking may be more prepared for . . . the inevitability of widespread societal transformation. . . . Keeping utopia in mind can prevent our settling for minor reforms when more significant change might be possible. (Fox, 1985, p. 55)

When . . . I called myself a benign anarchist . . . someone said that that was not like the dictatorship of *Walden Two*. But *Walden Two* was anarchistic.... The functions delegated to [figures] in the world at large were performed by the people themselves through face-to-face commendation and censure. (Skinner, 1983, p. 426, emphasis his)

The issue for anarchists is not whether there should be structure or order, but what kind there should be and what its sources ought to be. The individual or group which has sufficient liberty to be self-regulating will have the highest degree of order; the imposition of order from above and outside induces resentment and rebellion where it does not encourage childlike dependence and impotence, and so becomes a force for disorder. (Barclay, 1982, p. 17)

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A vision of a human future cannot do without the indispensable support of scientific expertise, but it encompasses more than the realm of science. The utopia without science is empty, but science with out utopia is blind. (Plattel, 1972, p. 97)

[There is a] common recognition among philosophers that facts cannot produce a value. Thinking otherwise has been called “the naturalistic fallacy.” . . . A fact only becomes a value when someone *approves* of that fact. . . . Fully grasping the argument concerning the naturalistic fallacy leads one to the basic question of research on mortality: Which naturalistic fallacy should and must we commit? (Haan, 1982, pp. 1096—1097, emphasis hers)

If I am not for myself, who should be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? (The Talmud)

What are we to make of B. F. Skinner’s utopian work, *Walden Two*, published in 1948? It can be read as the ravings of a self-styled benign anarchist; a blueprint for a sane, just, and peaceful world; a critique of post-industrial civilization; a prophetic grasp of the need for small scale (Schumacher, 1973); nostalgia for by gone times when people lived in tribes or close-knit agrarian communities and shared simple, self-evident values; a synthesis of Judeo-Christian, Confucian, and behaviorist ethics (see Wailer, 1982); a sales pitch for behavioral technology; a mad scientist’s plot against human freedom; or a symptom of Skinner’s compulsion, shared with G. B. Shaw, to “dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”

Skinner was not the first psychologist to succumb to asking “Why not?” Morawski (1982) has uncovered four earlier utopias dreamt by well-known twentieth-century psychologists. William Mc Dougall (1921) wrote one urging world domination by a genetic elite; Hugo Munsterberg (1916) wrote one urging international pacifism; John B. Watson (1929) wrote one; and G. Stanley Hall published a utopian novella called “The Fall of Atlantis” (Hall, 1920). One might expect Watson’s

utopia to prefigure Skinner's inasmuch as both are behaviorists, but in Morawski's account, Hall emerges as a nearer relation.

G. S. Hall's utopian morality tale, "The Fall of Atlantis," concerned the tension between selfish individualism and supraindividual and future-oriented values. Here is Morawski's (1982) account of Hall's "Fall of Atlantis":

Atlantean citizens subordinated individual to social desires and celebrated a perception of being 'uniquely one with all Nature. . . .' The fall of Atlantis was not cataclysmic, but rather a gradual degeneration initiated by forces of individualism and by physical changes in the environment.

In Atlantis research was the ultimate expression of the belief in human improvement. And of all scientific endeavors, psychology represented the most valuable. . . . [It] strove chiefly to give self-knowledge and self-control...

Jurisprudence was designed through research on human nature and operated with two rules: the pleasure and pain principles and the assessment of the social value of individual actions.

The fall had resulted partly from the psychological flaws of individualism and selfishness, and the revered field of psychology did not escape these faults. . . . The commercial preoccupations of scientists signaled the eventual demise of the scientific spirit. (Morawski, 1982, p. 1094)

If selfish individualism and commercialism do not corrupt utopia from within, the same vices, in the form of imperialistic capitalism, will destroy it from without. That is the message of *Walden Tres*, a rueful Latin-American novella by a prominent Colombian behavior analyst, Ruben Ardila (1979). In Ardila's fantasy, a tiny Central American state engages the services of the best behavior analysts to help turn the tropical land into a "socialist-humanist" paradise. Progress is so rapid and peaceful that the ruling junta dismantles the army and assigns its career officers to useful work. In time, however, the United States does the inevitable. Alarmed at the threat "socialist-humanism" may pose to U.S. investments, the U.S. sends in the Marines under pretext of "defending human freedom." The socialist nations, including Cuba, watch from the sidelines, making no move to aid their newest sibling, for the beleaguered little land had committed the sin of going its own behavior-analytic way, "without Marx or Jesus, without Mao or Lenin" (Ardila, 1979, p. 180).

Ardila's parable serves to remind us that The Kingdom of Skinner will not arrive any time soon, if for no other reason than that it goes against *Realpolitik*.

We need not fear International Skinnerianism's becoming a threat to human survival; the real threats lie in the current world "order." (See Schell, 1982, for an eloquent summary of our predicament.)

## THE DIALECTIC OF MORALITY

*Walden Two* should be read along with Skinner's other major works on the human condition, *Science and Human Behavior* (1953) and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971). Together these three form an extended treatise on morality.

It is evident that humans need one another; we are too puny to survive alone, at least in recognizably human form. As Hobbes (1651/1939) told us three centuries ago, outside the support and protection of the group, life is "nasty, brutish and short."<sup>1</sup> Or as Harry Morgan said in the

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<sup>1</sup> This passage is worth quoting in full: "Whatsoever . . . is consequent to a time of war . . . the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry. . . . no navigation . . . no knowledge of the face of the earth; no

closing pages of Hemingway's (1937) novel, *To Have and Have Not*, "No matter how, a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance."

In agreement with Hall and other moralists, Skinner has argued that our dependence on one another not only obliges us to live in social groups—it also obligates us to put the group's survival first. Not because the group has value in itself but because it is the sine qua non of the satisfaction of our individual needs and the realization of our individual aspirations.

But if self-interest requires the group, the group also gives rise to the moral and psychological tensions Freud (1930/1962) described in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Because the self-interests of individuals are bound to conflict with each other and with the interests of the group as a whole, individuals must compromise some of their self-interest. How to do this equitably is the problem of human morality.

In her thoughtful essay on the moral grounds of social science, Haan (1982) draws a parallel between human morality and science. Consensual truth, she says, is the goal of science; consensual equity, the goal of mortality. Both are reached by similar dialectic methods. Haan characterizes the dialectic of science as "even handed consideration, acceptance and evaluation of all evidence pursued with the supposition and hope that the 'best fit' to the data ... will be worked out" (p. 1102). Similarly, the dialectic of morality is good-faith negotiation among equal participants, all of whom must speak their needs and press their claims forthrightly, while recognizing the right of others to do the same, and being prepared "to engage in exchanges that can result in their having less than they initially thought was justified" (p. 1102). Parallel to the dialectic truth-seeking of science, "Morality is the shared interactive understanding about the ways that moral interchanges should be conducted and concluded" (p. 1102).

Haan (1982) further notes that "The moral dialogue works to untangle legitimate self-interest and selfishness" (p. 1103). This is the heart of the matter. The ecologist Garrett Hardin has put the problem well in his discussions of the "tragedy of the commons" (1968) and "the carrying capacity as an ethical concept" (1978). Imagine a group of farmers who share a common village pasture. So long as the number of cattle grazing the commons does not exceed the carrying capacity of the land—its ability to replenish itself—this simple communitarian anarchy works to ensure that the community's grazing land is efficiently utilized. And it works equitably so long as each farmer puts about the same number of cattle to graze as the others. But there is an economic advantage to the farmer who exploits the compact by increasing his herd. An addition by one induces the others to add to their herds, to reestablish equity. Eventually the carrying capacity of the commons is exceeded. Selfish individualism ruins the commons, and in the end, all lose.

Hardin (1978) argues:

Even if an individual fully perceives the ultimate consequences of his actions he is most unlikely to act in any other way, for he cannot count on the restraint his conscience might dictate being matched by a similar restraint on the part of all the others.

Tragedy is the price of freedom in the commons. Only by changing to some other system . . . can ruin be averted. In other words, in a crowded world survival requires that some freedom be given up. (pp. 245—246, emphasis his)

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account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1651/1939, p. 161).

Moral equity demands that individuals feel assured that any restraint on their freedom is balanced by like restraint on others, and that all welcome restraint as being in their personal long-term self-interest.

Skinner's overriding concern in *Walden Two* and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* was with just these issues, the tragedy of the commons, the carrying capacity of the environment, and promoting the moral dialectic needed to achieve equitable restraints on unbridled self-interest. Because the realization of individual interests requires the integrity of the supporting group, society needs to devise ways to assure that members' individual actions make contact with their long-term consequences for the welfare of the group.

Haan (1982) says that "Our most pressing social problem is not the populace's moral weakness but that social institutions increasingly limit citizens' moral participation" (p. 1103). I read this in two ways. First, the technological complexity of our society limits our ability to estimate long-term social and personal consequences of actions and to assess which public or private actions are in fact in one's interest. Second, the impersonal bureaucratic institutions of post-industrial society get in the way of citizens' assuming their roles as equal participants in moral negotiations, even when they come ready, like Ralph Nader or the Sierra Club, with an abundance of well founded forecasts concerning the future consequences of present actions.

I conclude this section with a final bit of wisdom from Haan (1982): [A]ltruism... does not produce moral balance because the receiver becomes obligated while the giver becomes morally superior. Instead of receiving gifts, people much prefer having what is legitimately theirs. Failure to understand that morality is balanced reciprocity is an endemic blindness of the welfare state, which gives gifts instead of rights to participate in legitimate and rewarded work. ... (p.1103)

## **THE MORALITY OF ENGINEERING MORALITY**

*Walden Two* sketches a system of communitarian social engineering whose goal is not a welfare state but balanced reciprocity. Like G. S. Hall before him, Skinner envisioned a world where psychology is the preeminent science, and its chief task is to teach self-knowledge and self-control.

Self-control is surely an essential of the moral dialectic, a necessary element in the ability to assert one's own interests forthrightly yet abide at times with less than one initially thought justified. But Skinner, and behavior analysts generally, assume that humans are wholly a part of nature, and hence wholly subject to natural law. Our behavior, as much as our organism, is the determined result of natural, evolutionary forces outside ourselves. How can we possibly gain self-control over such a process? And how can we function as free and equal participants in the moral dialectic if our behavior is wholly determined by forces outside ourselves?

Garrett (1985) has some interesting things to say on these questions. He makes a good case that

arguments over determinism vs. indeterminism are beside the point. Our freedom so far as we have or lack it is a function on the one hand of our power over our environment and over ourselves and on the other of the extent to which we are enlightened about what is really important. (p. 33)

We can, on the one hand, *take responsibility* for our lives in the sense that we can take stock of our actions, thoughts, and psychological states and the consequences they have on ourselves and others and we can (to a certain extent) discriminate between what is really important and what is not and change ourselves accordingly. . . . [Limits to human freedom arise not from the determined nature of behavior but from] our limited power over the environment and

over ourselves and from the fact that too often we do not really know or lose sight of what is really important. (p. 35, emphasis his)

The key to self-control is self-knowledge. We control our own behavior by personally manipulating the causes of that behavior. Just as knowledge informs control, so self-knowledge informs self-control. People who want to exert responsible control over their own behavior, and so participate as equals in the moral dialectic, must first understand the laws of behavior as they apply to us all. Then they must learn to discern (and not lose sight of) what long-term consequences are really important to their own and the group's interest.

But there is another dilemma that requires mention here — whether individuals whose behavior is at least partly the result of others' deliberate manipulations can be said to be morally equal to those who do the manipulating. (Is the pupil morally equal to the teacher?) Haan (1982) says that "People cannot negotiate morally in good faith if they feel helpless; they need hope that their legitimate self-interests will be heard and considered" (p. 1102).

Here is one root of the widespread fear of the planned control of human behavior. Because of his emphasis on planned and institutionalized behavioral control as a means of achieving moral equity, Skinner has been bitterly attacked as the arch example of the mad, power-hungry scientist, a dangerous totalitarian — communistic or fascistic, depending on the ideological stance of the critic. It is certainly legitimate to ask whether the means of behavioral technology are by their very nature incompatible with the end of moral equity. Does behavior technology render its beneficiaries morally weaker than the behavior technicians? Without hope that their legitimate self-interests will be heard and considered? Morally helpless to negotiate in good faith?

The saving answer comes down to balanced reciprocity (or perhaps tribal anarchy—see Crowe, 1969; Fox, 1985). Built into the structure of any equitable group must be the fundamental requirement that the rulers be subject to the same contingencies as the ruled—indeed, that there be no such distinction as ruler vs. ruled. (A governor or executive is not a ruler, although some governors and executives don't know that.)

Still, "equal under the law" is not germane to the relation of parents to their children, teachers to their pupils, behavior technicians to their clients. Unequal knowledge and skills do imply unequal power. In these situations, other kinds of balanced reciprocity come into play. Behavioral power consists mainly in the power to reinforce or punish. Punishment and other modes of aversive control breed rebellion and counterforce, whereas the change in behavior named by reinforcement occurs only if the consequence of action is a reinforcer, in which case the client might be said to be participating in a (most of the time) mutually-advantageous compact or balanced exchange with the behavior technician.

Besides, if psychology's goal is to teach self-knowledge and self-control, then any power imbalance between teacher and pupil is meant to be temporary and brief. Psychology's ideal goal is only reached when the pupil becomes independent of the teacher (or becomes the teacher).

Individuals cannot gain self-control without help. We do not choose our genetic heritage nor do we choose the formative experiences that shape the sort of adults we become. If our intellectual and creative capacities are to be fully realized, if we are to acquire interpersonal skills and moral values consonant with the interests of the group and a repertoire of knowledge and skills for self-control and self-expression, it can only be as the result of learning experiences that the social milieu provides for us. It is the group that ultimately determines the character of its members. The wise

society fosters research on behavior so that it can exploit the resultant technology for the purpose of rearing intelligent, creative, thoughtful, loving, moral, and self-controlling citizens.

But that is social engineering, so feared by so many. The fear is understandable. Who wants to envision a world of conditioned zombies? How can zombies negotiate morally in good faith? If society holds all the cards, what is to prevent it from rearing masses of demoralized, dehumanized, degraded humans whose only function is to serve a governing elite (as George Orwell, 1949, and Aldous Huxley, 1932/1946, and others have prophesied)? It may be that pain and terror breed rebellion, but with modern-day behavior technology, is it not possible to eschew terror and rear contented zombies who will not want or even imagine rebellion?

Some of the possible answers to such fears are well-founded, others simply wishful, for, to be candid, all the evidence isn't in. First, neither the human organism nor the environment is long at rest, and creative innovation is the inevitable outcome of human interaction with a kinetic environment. No matter how hard and earnestly tyrants tried to make zombies, even contented ones, surely human inventiveness, combined with restlessness bred of monotony, would foil them.

Further, humans, like animals, do in deed rebel against force and terror. When human intelligence is engaged by the struggle against terror, sooner or (too often) later, terror must lose out.<sup>2</sup> In our century, we have seen many (though by no means all) terrorist regimes overthrown, some from within, some from without, some to be replaced by more enlightened societies, others, alas, by fresh tyranny.

One technique always open to “morally violated people . . . [is to] covertly fight back in bad moral faith, even if they become passive and pseudo-stupid” (Haan, 1982, p. 1102). Schell (1986) and Weschler (1983), in important recent *New Yorker* essays, suggest that altogether new and ingenious methods of nonviolent political and cultural resistance are being developed in Poland—*Solidarity* is one part of it. These innovations in peaceful resistance may in time lead Poland out of deep oppression even if not out of the Soviet sphere; and what is more, the Polish experience may teach important lessons to the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup>

If terror cannot indefinitely support a regime, what about those contented zombies who have been conditioned without benefit of terror by positive reinforcement methods? We can imagine them as not so very unlike the rock-and-television-zonked walking dead we find among us today. May not capitalism (or communism)—cum rock porn cum computer games cum hot tubs and television smiles—become ever more efficient a machine of enslavement as it wakes up to the possibilities of rationally-engineered positive reinforcement? What if our present bread-and-circuses world turns into a cake-and-space-carousels world?

In the short term, any perversion of human society is possible. If other human-made disasters do not get us first (overpopulation; nuclear obliteration; triage; depletion of water tables, forests,

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes we forget how close engagement is to exhaustion,' a Polish friend told me one afternoon. . . . 'It's a mistake to imagine that a beaten down and apparently defeated class can't suddenly emerge defiant and fierce, with a fierceness brought on by precisely the things that were making it exhausted'" (Weschler, 1983, pp. 102, 105). Take note that here fierceness means fierceness of determination, not of action.)

<sup>3</sup> Today it is precisely in the societies under severest and most philistine governance—in South Africa, in Eastern Europe, in Latin America—that much of the finest imaginative literature is being created. . . . The 'censorship' of the free and mass-market economies is wonderfully light. . . . But it corrodes, it trivializes. . . . 'Do not forget,' said Borges, . . . 'that censorship is the mother of metaphor.' Banishing or hounding serious poets to their deaths. . . is a hideous tribute to their importance. It is a tribute nevertheless (Steiner, 1986, p. 36).

arable land, the ozone layer; pollution of air, water and earth), it seems virtually certain that the balance-sheet mentalities who run the post-industrial nations will in time catch on to the immense power and economy of systematic, rationalized positive reinforcement. They will use it ever more efficiently to turn whole populaces into happy zombies, just as Aldous Huxley (1932/1946) predicted in *Brave New World*. (Living in southern California, I sometimes think that day has already come.)

But in the long run, that, too, must fail. Technocratic society needs intelligent, imaginative, critical, creative workers. People cannot be zonked and creative at the same time. Individuals trained to the intelligent skepticism needed to service technocracy will grow restive under a stultifying social order. They will find others like themselves and organize resistance — even the resistance of pseudo- stupidity. Eventually, human imagination and intelligence will subvert any social system that does not respect the human need to create, invent, experiment, devise new challenges for human imagination and intelligence to play upon.

Skinner argues in *Walden Two* and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* that any society that discounts human nature, human needs and interests, ultimately self-destructs. So it is, not only for terrorist regimes, but as well for regimes deploying the more sophisticated technology of positive reinforcement against the truly human interests of their populaces. A culture that cannot count on the whole hearted and intelligent support of its members must eventually give way to one better equipped to resolve the requirements of social living with the facts of human nature—unless human society simply vanishes.

Perhaps half the world is now enslaved by terror and the other half by economic reinforcers dispensed by rapacious exploiters of our labor, our imaginations, and our precious habitat. Commissars, caliphs, and cowboys restlessly finger their nuclear triggers and long for a thermonuclear joust, while the rest of us pursue our private Pompeiiian pleasures and quietly pray that no artificial means or heroic measures will be used to prolong our mushroom agony. There may soon be no one left to worry about social engineering's threat to human freedom. Our present predicament leaves us with few, if any, alternatives to engineering a moral society, provided we want to avert the greatest immorality of all, eternal thermonuclear night.

## **WALDEN TWO'S VALUES**

The moral and social values Skinner advanced in *Walden Two* in 1948 are just what one would expect from a sensitive and prophetic analyst of the human scene. They are much the same values that later social thinkers have advocated (e.g., Schumacher, 1973), and the reasoning behind them is now familiar. The ground of *Walden Two's* values is simply the survival of human civilization.

### *Small Scale*

Skinner advocated smaller communities in place of our current megalopolises. Anyone who has visited the great cities of the world in recent years can attest to the most visible horror of the megalopolis: nerve-rending traffic and air laden with the noxious waste products of the combustion engine and heavy industry.

Small scale is human scale. Crowding is unpleasant and stressful. Large cities are impersonal. It is easier to care about the welfare of people one knows than about anonymous hordes. Accountability is better on the small scale. Those who manage a society's institutions should be accessible and answerable to the citizenry. Small scale makes it possible to revive ancient, anarchic forms of participatory democracy. *Walden Two's* managers and governors were not elected, but rather emerged from the existing managers and governors through systematic apprenticeship. But the managers and governors and their apprentices had to be ever-responsive to the needs and wishes of the community, because their job security depended on the welfare of the community. Members were frequently queried about their needs and wishes, and their satisfaction (or lack thereof) with community policies and practices. Small scale makes it possible for social institutions to respond quickly and thus enables social experimentation. Policies and practices can be tried out and promptly modified or discarded if they prove unworkable or lead to dissatisfaction. In an evolutionary society, nothing is written in stone.

Small scale works against the development of castes, and for moral equity. The managers and governors (and psychologists) of *Walden Two* received no special privileges to match their special responsibilities. They shared the lot of the community. Every member of *Walden Two* had to contribute a certain amount of labor to the community, and everyone, including managers and governors, had to discharge some of the labor obligation in menial physical work. Skinner (1948/1976) explains why:

The really intelligent [person] doesn't want to feel that [Their] work is being done by anyone else. [They're] sensitive enough to be disturbed by slight resentments which, multiplied a millionfold, mean [their] downfall. . . . [Besides] brains and brawn are never exclusive. . . . [It's] fatal to treat brawn as if there were no brains, and perhaps more speedily fatal to treat brains as if there were no brawn. One or two hours of physical work each day is a health measure . . . but there's a better reason why brains must not neglect brawn. . . the manager must keep an eye on the managed, must understand [needs, must experience [their] lot. . . . It's our constitutional guarantee that the problems of the big- muscle user won't be forgotten. (p. 52)

Small scale fosters balanced reciprocity and good-faith moral negotiation among equals. It obliges managers and governors to rely on positive incentives to motivate the work of the community and to shun force, both because the technocrats' personal accessibility makes them ready targets of members' outraged response to force, and because the technocrats share the daily life of the community and no more wish to be subject to force than anyone else does.<sup>4</sup>

There are economies of scale that are available only to large populations, but these economies must be weighed against the high cost of supplying the necessities of life to impacted populations and disposing of their waste products; the expense and sluggishness of the attendant bureaucracies; and the loss of contact with the natural realities of life. Skinner envisioned a decentralized network of *Walden Twos* which would jointly avail themselves of economies of scale where indicated, while preserving the advantages of small scale in other areas. "Appropriate Technology" is the current name for this.

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<sup>4</sup> Edney . . . reviewed experimental data showing that cooperative behavior is indeed more common in small groups. . . . [H]e listed the following 'functional benefits' of reducing group size: Improved communication helps sustain necessary feedback; greater visibility of member distress during scarcity enhances the probability of remedial action; individual responsibilities are harder to avoid; alienation is reduced; and the role of money is reduced. . . . 'The improved focus on the group itself, the greater ease of monitoring exploitative power, and the opportunities for trust to develop among individuals with face-to-face contact are also enhanced' "(Fox, 1985, p. 52, quoting Edney, 1981, p. 28).

A student once objected to me that the small scale of *Walden Two* would not be conducive to Skinner's expressed dream of fostering great art. The student argued that, for example, only a large, concentrated population can support a really first-class symphony orchestra. There has to be a large pool of people so that the rare individuals with musical talent will be in sufficient supply, and so that the population can take care of its subsistence needs without burdening its artists with mundane tasks. Actually, there should be an overabundance of trained musicians, the student argued, so that competition for scarce orchestra slots will goad them to reach for ever higher standards of excellence. And the population concentration has to be large enough to provide audiences — symphonic music, after all, isn't everyone's cup of tea.

This view ignores history. The great cities of Europe were no more than towns by our standards when art reached perhaps its highest excellence. Shakespeare, Vivaldi, Bach, and Mozart wrote for small audiences by current standards. Few of Michelangelo's Italian contemporaries could have seen his paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Great art seems to need neither large concentrations of people nor the artificial stimulus of contrived competition to goad artists to excellence. What it surely does need is appreciative, discerning audiences and patrons who are willing to provide subsistence to professional artists. Genius is a rare commodity, but as for artistic talent, that may well be a basic part of the human heritage, the human need to experiment, to play, to seek and create variety and novelty. All known human cultures have produced fine art, and honored their artists. A community need not be wholly dependent on the rare interaction between genetics and the environment that brings forth a genius. It can rely principally on the strategy of fostering everyone's talents, and providing support, encouragement, and training for those intent on an artistic vocation.<sup>5</sup> It must also see to the development of discerning audiences, but those, like artists, are made, not born. It is training that makes connoisseurs. Cultural tradition alone has made Italians discerning and appreciative critics of opera; Russians, of ballet; Viennese, Salzburger, and Bostonians, of symphonic music—not any national genetic predisposition for one or another of these art forms.

### *Respect for the Carrying Capacity of the Environment*

It is remarkable that in 1948, when much of the world was just turning from war production to the frenzied production of consumer goods, Skinner had the prescience to propose a communitarian life based on respect for nature and conservation of its resources. He foresaw communal ownership of essential machinery and technological gadgetry, and a high standard of living built upon eminently nonmaterialistic values. Life in *Walden Two* was not bereft of technology; on the contrary, Skinner advocated its maximum use to free people from onerous labor.<sup>6</sup> *Walden Two* would surely have had its full complement of computers and robots. Nor was life in

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<sup>5</sup> “[No] poet, however inspired, is wholly the be getter of his poem. The informing context of personal creation is always social and collective. ...Above all, it is in art and literature that the Messianic challenge, the potential of human ripening and deliverance, is enacted and transmitted across time. The poet is responsible toward the claims and provocations of the ideal just because a certain personal impotence has freed him from the mire, from the compromise of actual power” (Steiner, 1986, p. 36).

<sup>6</sup> “work ethic that has no further justification than work itself and is divorced from other values is susceptible to being driven by narrow self-interest, and it risks that conceptions of achievement will be distorted into forms that are indifferent if not antithetical to the public good” (Spence, 1985, p. 1292).

*Walden Two* devoid of interesting variety. With small scale assuring everyone's full participation in the community, and technology to shield workers from tedium, *Walden Two* could count on everyone's pitching in with a good will to get the community's work done. And with an enthusiastic work force, no one had to work very much. Skinner estimated that about four hours a day would suffice. Members had an abundance of leisure for creative personal pursuits.

Frequently and eloquently, Skinner writes in *Walden Two* of the dawning of a Golden Age of Art. This was no mere bread-and-circuses ploy to keep the masses doped and compliant. On the contrary, Skinner recognized that playful and creative self-expression is an urgent human need, the highest reach of our human capacities. Arts, crafts, sports, the playful pursuit of pure science and invention would abound. There would be something for everyone. In Skinner's *Walden Two*, amateur musicians found others to join them in an evening of so-so chamber music for their own pleasure; more accomplished performers and composers found small but appreciative audiences for their performances. The community was awash in members' paintings and sculptures, some in traditional and others in experimental styles. Some members cultivated flower gardens in their leisure time, others held a dance, others tinkered in the lab or shop or read in the library or rehearsed a play or took a group of youngsters on a nature hike.

There is an amusing scene in *Walden Two* in which some skeptical visitors from the Big City are standing around a bulletin board packed with small-print notices of the week's social and cultural events. One of the visitors expresses surprise at the smallness of the print and the absence of colorful posters urging members' attendance at the various functions. The host explains that there is no need, and little point, in overselling events. In a community with abundant leisure and opportunity to cultivate tastes and interests, a small-print notice of an event suffices to quicken the heartbeat of interested members. Hype would be all wrong, because if the event itself did not provide sufficient incentive for attendance, why waste anyone's time with it? It was not as though anyone had to worry about the profitability of an entertainment industry, and no one's livelihood depended on the size of the audience they drew.

Skinner was quite right. Look at the smallness of the print in the notices of events in any college newspaper, or in the program of an academic meeting. In my city, one of the most popular newspapers is a free weekly made up of a fat section of fine-print notices of the week's cultural events; another fat section of free fine-print classified advertising; a section with news and articles of general interest and theatrical and musical reviews; and a hype section with lurid commercial advertisements of rock bands, nightclubs, and mud-wrestling by semi-nude young women. Presumably the lurid ads pay for the rest of the newspaper, but if the purveyors of hype were dispensed with, could not the paper survive by charging readers for the information that is now offered free? I do not see why not, provided the publishers were content to make costs and just a little more.

My city has an art institute whose membership is open to all who choose to call themselves artists. It has about 800 members, who submit about 250 art works for public exhibition each month, from which jurors select about 90 for the monthly show. Inasmuch as only a handful of art works is sold each month, it must be that members pay their yearly dues, create their works of arts, and submit them to the critical scrutiny of the jurors for just the pleasure of making art, exhibiting it on occasion to the public, and having the fellowship and appreciation of other artists.

I know several amateur chamber-music groups that have met weekly for years. Occasionally one gives a free public performance. It must be that the musicians meet weekly for the sheer pleasure

of making music together, and that they perform publicly without pay simply for the encouragement that public performance provides to improve their playing.

I know an 82-year-old widowed barber who has had the same barber shop for 35 years, and still charges the same \$1.95 for a haircut that he charged when he opened the shop. The shop is the center of his social life. He figures that if he charged the going rate for his mediocre haircuts, he would have few customers and little to do all day. At night he goes to a community dance hall and dances until closing time.

The painters, the musicians, the barber would thrive in *Walden Two*. As wise people have always known, a satisfying life is not to be found in an excess of toys and gadgets. With care, a musical instrument will last a lifetime, a painter's only material needs are paints and canvas, a barber's shears can be resharpened. Novelty, variety, challenge, and companionship are essential, but the compulsive acquisition of material things (with its resultant waste of earth's limited resources) does not secure these human requisites. They are more likely to flow from working on a new and difficult piece of chamber music, setting oneself a new painting problem to solve, or from the variety of people who drop into the barber shop or the dance hall for a haircut or a polka and a sociable chat.

### *Self-Control*

For a society to survive, it must provide subsistence to its members, while respecting the carrying capacity of the environment and the subsistence needs of future generations. It must provide for the satisfaction of the human needs for community and affection, as well as autonomy and self-realization, in a way that equitably balances the conflicting interests of individuals and the group. A root problem for moral equity lies in the motivation of behavior. An individual's actions, however pleasurable in the short term, may have consequences in the long run that are harmful to the individual themselves, or to other individuals, or to the group. But potential consequences far off in the future are not the things that motivate behavior. It is the promise of immediate reinforcement that impels us to act, the threat of immediate punishment that deters us. When the immediate consequences of an act are the very opposite of its long-term consequences (as is often the case), it is the long-term consequences that tend to lose out, to every one's detriment.

If we are to resolve this dilemma, it must be by the judicious exploitation of just the same behavioral processes that gave rise to it in the first place. We cannot hope to solve society's problems by ignoring the natural laws of behavior. (Ye politicians, take heed.) The secret, says Skinner, is to supplement the intrinsic consequences that flow naturally from our actions with extrinsic ones that society contrives. When immediate consequences are at odds with long-term consequences, we must contrive to offset the short-term consequences by others that are consonant with the projected long-term outcome for the individual and the group.

Societies have traditionally done just this in the moral training of the young, mostly by use of punishment and fear—“instilling a conscience,” it is called. To offset any immediate advantage to a child for lying or stealing, say, the child's moral teachers contrive punishments to offset the benefits of the misconduct. These serve to bring children into more palpable contact with the consequences of their misdeeds for others; lying or stealing harms others, so liars and thieves should be made to feel a comparable harm. In time, the inclination to engage in punishable acts declines; the individual has “learned self-restraint” or has “developed a conscience.” Of course, the ultimate source of the

restraint rests with society, which carried out the moral training and which enforces self-restraint by exacting penalties for infractions of the moral code.

Skinner's chief innovation would be to replace a system of moral training and enforcement based on extrinsic punishment of antisocial acts with a system based on extrinsic reinforcement of prosocial acts. The reinforcement for prosocial behavior would have to be generous enough and judiciously enough applied to make up for any natural deficiencies in the short-term reinforcement of prosocial acts. Indeed, such acts may have no short-term reinforcement for the individual at all, but only costs; and acting prosocially means forgoing the short-term reinforcers that are to be gleaned by acting selfishly. In time, Skinner believes, a wisely planned and executed system of moral training based on reinforcement should be just as successful in instilling a personal conscience and self-control in the individual as the traditional system based on punishment.<sup>7</sup> And, of course, it would have the advantages that all reinforcement systems have over systems based on fear and force: It would not incite instant resentment, resistance, and rebellion; it would not leave individuals feeling that they had been compelled to act, or to inhibit acting, against their will; it would stimulate creativity and imagination instead of the sullen dullness that punishment breeds; and it would forestall or at least minimize the anxiety neuroses that Freud (1930/ 1962), in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, argued were the unavoidable and tragic price of civilized restraints on unbridled selfishness.

In *Walden Two*, Skinner offered several examples of his methods of moral training. Young children were given lollipops, but not allowed to eat them until later; they were invited to put the lollipops away in the meantime. Once the lollipops were out of sight, the children forgot about them and did not suffer their deprivation. Thus, the children learned to put temptation behind them. When the children were older, they had to carry their lollipops on a string around their necks. The lollipops were coated with powdered sugar, so teachers could easily detect a surreptitious lick. At the appointed time, if no licks were evident, the children could eat their lollipops; otherwise not. At this stage, the children had to learn to "internalize" the earlier behavior of putting temptation behind them. They learned to busy themselves with other things and so forget about the lollipops hanging from their necks, thus sparing themselves the pangs of a pleasure denied. The lesson Skinner teaches us here is important. Self-control is a matter of learning to manipulate the conditions that control one's behavior. We can resist temptations by putting them literally behind us, but we can also, and with wider application, learn to ignore them by busying ourselves with other things. This is the behaviorist's version of an internalized conscience.

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<sup>7</sup> Japanese child-rearing methods may teach us a thing or two. For example, "American mothers tended to prefer discipline via the assertion of maternal authority and power, whereas Japanese mothers used such empathy-oriented approaches as describing how a child's misbehavior would hurt others' feelings" (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984, p. 959).

"When we children started to quarrel, my mother used to say. . . 'to lose is to win.' By giving way, a person demonstrates his or her tolerance, self-control and flexibility. Giving way shows that the person is mature enough to control his or her own assertive drives in order to protect the peace and harmony of the group. This gives the person credibility so that he or she will be supported by elders and peers in more important decision-making situations in the future. Mother would also provide an immediate reinforcement by showing a very subtle but clearly noticeable sign of appreciation to the child who yielded. The one who failed to yield would thus have a strange feeling of defeat even though apparently the victor" (Azuma, 1984, p. 970).

Another famous (or infamous) example of *Walden Two*'s moral training concerned soup. A troop of hungry children came in from a hike to find hot bowls of soup on the table, but rather than sitting right down to them, they had to stand for five minutes, after which every other child was allowed to start eating, while the rest stood for another five minutes. Those who had to wait passed the time telling jokes or singing. Again, they were learning to put up with a minor frustration by occupying themselves with other activities; and they were learning to do so without envy or rancor.

Readers sometimes express outrage at the cruelty of denying food to little children. Skinner's reply is that life is full of unavoidable frustrations, and the sooner we learn to deal with them with equanimity, the better. The children were well-nourished and well-loved, and it was an act of love to insert, in an otherwise pleasant day, a small lesson in how to cope with adversity. Further, the lessons in frustration tolerance were carefully graded, so that by the time the children reached the soup lesson they were already well versed in how to shrug off frustration.

Skinner placed great emphasis in *Walden Two* on emotional training, a subclass of moral training. He argued that anger, resentment, envy, and the other negative emotions are not only harmful to the group as a whole, but they are also painful and useless for the individual suffering the emotion. Why not teach people to cope with life's problems without anger and without resentment, in ways that are constructive for themselves and their social groups, while sparing them the anguish of these negative emotions? He suggested that the greatness of Jesus' teaching to "love thine enemies" lay not only in the disarming effect that love has on one's enemies, but also on the beneficial effect on the person wronged, who is spared the pain of hating.

A final example of *Walden Two*'s training in moral equity: At a certain age, the children were taken on trips to the Big City. They were shown the dismal slums as well as the lush enclaves of the rich, and challenged to find the economic connection between the two. This was Skinner's answer to the question, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paree?" He thought the children's first-hand observation of the moral inequity of selfish individualism and commercialism would keep them from growing discontent with *Walden Two*'s communitarian way of life and pining after the dark pleasures of the world.

### *CAN WE GET THERE FROM HERE?*

I have been assigning *Walden Two* to my classes since 1960, and I have watched my students' and my own views of the book change over the years. Student reactions swing pro and con with shifts in the political and economic climate. There are years when the predominant view is that *Walden Two* is a totalitarian nightmare—a response that saddens me—and other years when the view is that *Walden Two* is the only way to save humanity — a response that alarms me.

I am sad that Skinner's critics do not discern the difference between totalitarian systems based on privilege, inequity, force, and terror, and a proposal to engineer an equitable, communitarian, anarchic society through the methods of positive reinforcement. I am alarmed that *Walden Two*'s adherents are too ready to pledge their allegiance to any new social movement that promises the world's salvation, and gloss over the political and economic obstacles and a certain hopeful naiveté in Skinner's proposals. *Walden Two* is just a dream,<sup>8</sup> but as the years have gone by, I

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<sup>8</sup> The mature community of a thousand members that Skinner depicted has no counterpart in reality. However, novice communities on a much smaller scale are thinly scattered over North America. The Federation of Egalitarian Communities (Box FB2, Tecumseh, MO 65760, 417/679-4682) lists: Dandelion (RR 1(F), Enterprise, Ontario KOK 1

have found it a more and more appealing dream. If *Walden Two* in all its fullness, all its richness of culture, all its humane caring for one another existed, I would join up, gladly committing all my worldly goods to the endeavor. I would not worry about the threat to human freedom that *Walden Two* is said to pose, for as a behavioral scientist I know that absolute freedom does not exist. What does exist is a choice between social systems that motivate behavior through fear and those that motivate through positive consequences. What does exist is a choice between seeking the satisfaction of one's human needs in community, and seeking it in selfish individualism. We have few examples of the humane communitarian option, but evidence all around us of the chaos to which both selfish competition and totalitarian terror have brought us. The final decades of the twentieth century find humanity besieged on all sides.

Alfred Meyer (1983), in a review of *The Human Cycle* by the anthropologist Cohn Turnbull, summed up Turnbull's views this way:

We are, by [Turnbull's] reckoning, in deep emotional, social and spiritual trouble. . . . We foster individualism, which leads to competitiveness and conflict rather than to cooperation and harmony. Part of the result is that we require laws to enforce social compliance, which comes voluntarily and automatically in the small, tight-knit societies. In short, argues Turnbull, we have lost touch—political, economic, social, and religious touch—with the ultimate value, the joy of human community and its effect, societal continuity. (p. 95)<sup>9</sup>

The anonymous author of a *New Yorker* "Talk of the Town" column a few years back discussed the mutual economic dependence among nations that the current system of international banking and finance has brought about. Bankers in the industrial nations keep refinancing the huge debts of the near-bankrupt developing nations for they dare not let them default; one default could bring down the whole world financial and monetary structure.

The world economy is thus held hostage by its individual members—individual banks as well as individual countries—whose separate interests may diverge sharply from the interests of the whole. In the absence of any duly constituted international authority, the international community is forced to resort to ad-hoc, semi-secret conclaves of financial people and others, convened on the spur of the moment to deal with emergencies as they arise... (p. 29)

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Z0, 613/ 358-2304); East Wind (Same address as the Federation); and Twin Oaks (Route 4, Box 1 69F, Louisa, VA 23093, 703/894-5126). *Walden Two* International Association (% Linda Armendariz, Apartado Postal 372, Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico 83000) is the corresponding arm of Los Horcones, a Mexican addition to the list of *Walden Two*-inspired communities in North America. Fernando Armendariz (1985) and McGregor (1985) provided up-to-date progress reports on Los Horcones and Twin Oaks, respectively, at a recent APA symposium.

Crowe (1969) sees the communitarian movement as a return to "tribal experience": "[We] might well assume that the departure from the tribal experience is a short-run deviant experiment that failed. As we stand 'on the eve of destruction,' it may well be that the return to the face-to-face life in the small community unmediated by the electronic media is a very functional response in terms of the perpetuation of the species" (Crowe, 1969, p. 1106).

<sup>9</sup> More behavioral wisdom from the Japanese: The following passage describes how the Japanese achieve consensus in business decisions through a system called *ringi*. "involves five invariant steps . . . (a) a proposal, written up by the middle management group, (b) cautious 'horizontal' consideration of the proposal by those at about the middle management level, (c) cautious 'vertical' consideration of the proposal by those above and below the middle level, (d) formal affixment of seals to the ringisho document containing the proposal, and (e) final, deliberate ambiguity regarding authority and responsibility for the proposal. The five steps permit all participants to feel that the group to which they belong has shaped the final product, but that no individual has. . . . Each individual forgoes personal, primary control over the final decision, but each gains control in the form of certainty as to how the decision will be reached and certainty that it will be accepted" (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984, p. 963, emphasis added).

The “Talk of the Town” author went on to note a parallel between the world’s economic predicament and the nuclear predicament:

In both our economic predicament and our nuclear predicament, the sole path even to individual survival lies in our acknowledgement of the common global interest and in action in common, yet in both predicaments we enshrine individual interest and let the common interest fend for itself, staking the fate of all on the voluntary self-restraint of each party involved. What appears to be at the root of this peculiar situation is not so much a failure of resolve as a failure of observation. In times past, some “idealistic” people dreamed of establishing “one world” to replace the system of separate nation-states, and other “realistic” people dismissed such a notion as impractical. But while the idealists and the realists were arguing, the world—reality itself—quietly changed. For reasons that had nothing to do with anyone’s ideals—or, for that matter, with anyone’s less creditable impulses — economic, technical, and political links tying the people of the earth together like so many mountain climbers on a slope were forged, and the one world came into being. This one world, in which we all now live, whether we like it or not, is no dream but an irrevocable fact, which awaits our recognition and response. (p. 29)<sup>10</sup>

It is time to topple selfish individualism from its shrine, and have a care for the common interest. Although not a single fully-developed *Walden Two* exists, much less a world network of mature *Walden Twos*, there are lessons to be learned from Skinner’s dream of community based on equity, self-expression, respect for the carrying capacity of the environment, and contriving to reward moral behavior. Perhaps it is not too late to learn them.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Axelrod asked contestants in a computer tournament to create a program to play Prisoner’s Dilemma, the nonzero-sum game beloved of social psychologists. If, on a particular move, both of two competing programs generated the command to cooperate, each received three points. If both programs generated a command to defect, each received one point. But if one program cooperated while the other defected, the defecting program got five points and the cooperating program none.

“The winner was the shortest program in the contest—a four-line program submitted by Anatol Rapoport ... called TIT FOR TAT. TIT FOR TAT’s strategy is simple: Its first move is to cooperate, then it does whatever its partner did on the previous move... What makes TIT FOR TAT a winner? For one thing it is . . . nice; it is not envious of another program’s scores and never defects first. . . . TIT FOR TAT maintains its respectable score by cooperating with the other nice programs and quickly [retaliating against] the mean ones ....“What is important in nurturing cooperation,” says Axelrod, “is not friendship, trust, and formal agreements but rather the durability of a relationship. *As long as the parties involved know that they will be engaging in similar deals in the indefinite future, cooperation can evolve all by itself ... The great enforcer of morality...is the continuing relationship*” (Aliman, 1984, pp. 25—30, emphasis added).

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