
LEARNING GUIDE

B. F. SKINNER

A FRESH APPRAISAL

Narration By

MURRAY SIDMAN Ph.D.

(41 Minutes)



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INTRODUCTION

Other than Freud, no psychologist has been so discussed, critiqued and, at times, maligned as B.F. Skinner. Using both archival and new footage, this video takes a new look at who Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990) was, and what he really said in his twenty books.

Like other thinkers who broke new ground, Skinner had to invent his own vocabulary to describe the phenomena he was studying. In this video, his terms are introduced in context so the student understands how they were intended to be used and the research that produced them.

The video lays to rest some myths and credits Skinner with contributions not often attributed to him. Understanding the complex man behind his work enables students to better evaluate the importance and relevance of the work he inspired.

Murray Sidman, Ph.D., colleague and thoughtful practitioner of behavioral analysis, narrates.

SKINNER'S EARLY LIFE

- Stable family life in a small railroad town in Pennsylvania.
 - His inventive interests came early.
 - Unremarkable early education.
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THREE MAJOR INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS OF THE 1920'S

- Darwin's theory of evolution: Physical characteristics of organisms, including those of humans, shaped over millions of years.
Skinner's "Selection by Consequence": related to Darwin's "Natural Selection"
- Freud's psychoanalysis: Early experiences shaped later life. Behavior not a product of free will.

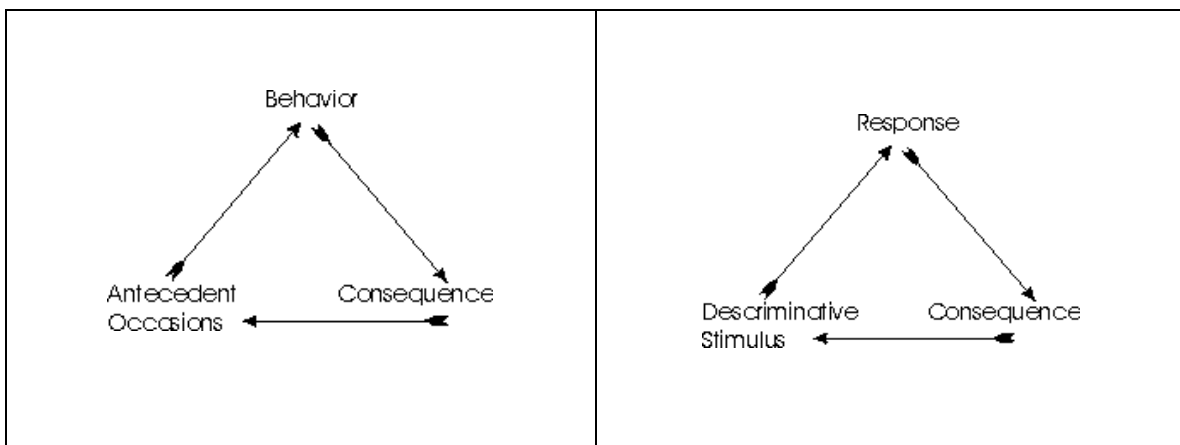
Skinner rejected Freud's unobservable mental constructs like id, ego and superego. Many of Skinner's most vocal critics came from this tradition.

- Behaviorism as it sprang from Pavlov's experiments: Pavlov's physiological experiments led to an understanding of "Classical" or "Stimulus/Response Conditioning".

SKINNER'S RESEARCH

- The apparatus he built improved the scope of behavioral research greatly.
- Operant conditioning: activities that produced consequences he called *reinforcers* would be repeated.
- Sequence of events different than in Classical Conditioning where a stimulus led to a response. Here a response led to a stimulus/consequence.
- Definition: Acts that operate on the environment, producing consequences that determine how likely the acts are to be repeated.
- Shaping: Gradual molding of behavior, by requiring ever-closer approximations to a desired behavior. Demonstrated with a pigeon pecking a bell.

THREE PART CONTINGENCY



- Discriminative stimuli: allow organisms to make distinctions between environmental events available at any moment in time.

- The addition of the third term, greatly widened applicability of operant conditioning.
- Discriminative stimuli can become conditioned *reinforcers* themselves.
- Reinforcement
 - Must follow an action.
 - Must cause the action to be repeated or happen more often.
- Reinforcement
 - Positive: The addition of something valued.
 - Negative: The removal of something that is aversive.
 - Punishment: Loss of positive *reinforcers* or the addition of negative *reinforcers*.
 - Skinner was not an advocate of punishment.
- Rate: The likelihood of a particular behavior occurring is the most important feature to measure.
- Reinforcement schedules
 - Different schedules affect the persistence of behavior.
 - Persistence of gambling behaviors explained.

APPLICATIONS FROM THE FIELD OF BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

- Air crib
- Teaching machines
- Verbal Behavior
 - Applies the principles of operant conditioning to social communication.
 - Examples shown in course of work with children with severe language delays.

- Three part contingency shown in session with autistic Jeffrey.
 - Animal training.
 - Socialization of at-risk youth.
 - Education of the mentally handicapped.
 - Walden Two, a novel
 - Los Horcones, an intentional community in Mexico, in existence since 1973.
 - Basement study shows Skinner's application of principles to his own behavior.
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B. F. SKINNER 'S L E G A C Y

- Methods and apparatus to study behavior.
 - Skinner scientifically arrived at discoveries about behavior.
 - Far reaching applications that stem from his research but beyond Skinner's actual work.
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