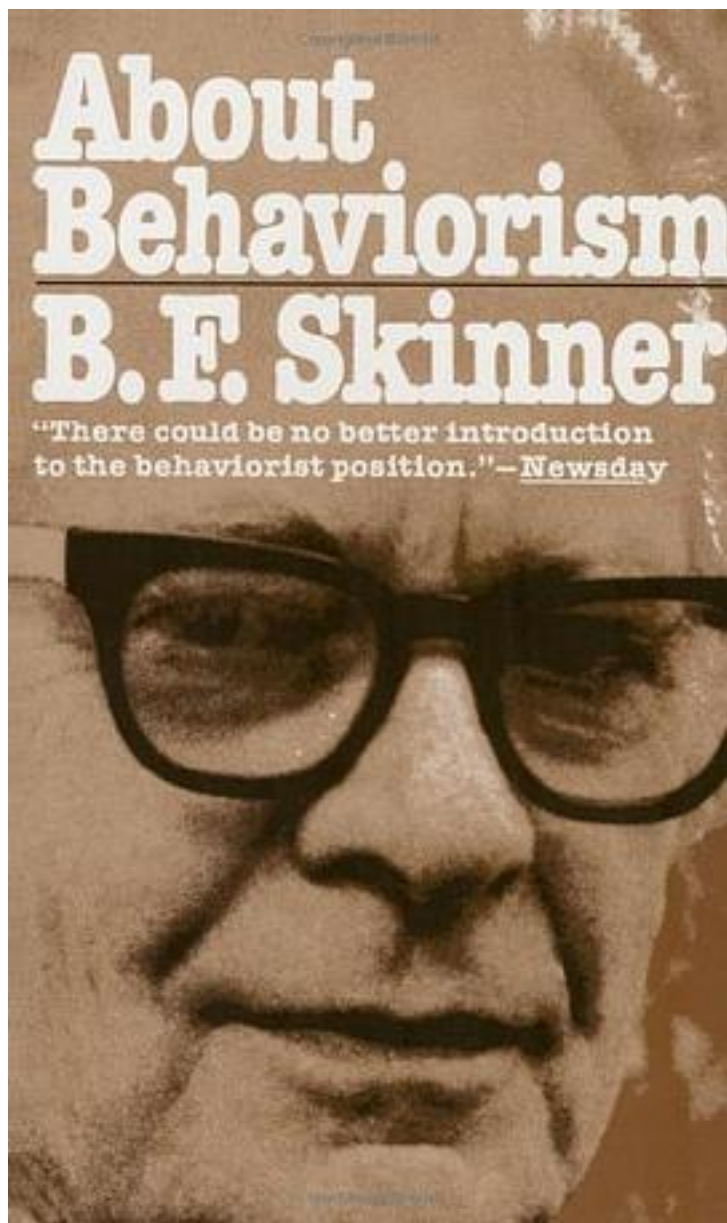


# About Behaviorism



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著者:B.F. Skinner

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By Shaker

A letter to the editor (published in August 1990 in the Los Angeles Times, in response to Skinner's obituary) asked the following disturbing question:

For the all effort and money spent in research in psychology, has there been any progress whatsoever?

The letter-writer asked this question not only of the Skinnerian approach in psychology but of all approaches. He seemed to be rather knowledgeable in psychology. (If I remember right, he granted that the effects of intermittent reinforcement may well be something non-obvious that the research has uncovered. His point was that there is not much more.)

I was disturbed by this allegation. However, I couldn't come up with a smoking gun rebuttal (though my thoughts were along the lines of verbal behavior and programmed instruction.)

Rereading About Behaviorism last week, I feel that Chapter 2 of this book may be pointed to as an unassailable answer to the above question -- Skinner makes some points here that are true advances being made for the first time in the history of human thought. These are Skinner's views on what self-knowledge and introspection is, the special problems posed by them, and how we have "solved" them at least partially. Skinner's views on these may well undergo considerable revision in the future -- however, without his first statement, such an improvement would not have been possible.

According to Skinner, the responses involved in introspection and self-knowledge are nothing more than verbal reports to stimulations inside the body. (In other words, these are not some mysterious non-physical stuff. The mind-body problem is solved neatly.) Skinner points out that primitive nervous systems are involved in these reports (primitive because these nervous systems have evolved not for this purpose but for other purposes). He also points out that those teaching a child to report these accurately are at a loss since they cannot directly feel these stimulations. Skinner's other points are the following:

1. The basic law of effect is what stamps in behavior
2. Unquestionably, changes in the nervous system are involved when behavior is stamped in. However, these do not produce stimulations that the learner can sense, report, and thus know (since no such nervous system has evolved).
3. Thus introspection is useless in order to know when behavior change occurs. (Skinner is not denying the private world. He readily grants even the practical usefulness of it. However, his point is that behavior altering nervous system changes cannot be directly sensed.)

Unquestionably, all these are very difficult to understand. However, one needs to only compare these with what passes in general for psychological theory to appreciate how brilliant Skinnerian theory is.

I hope that I have not misunderstood Skinner too badly.

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