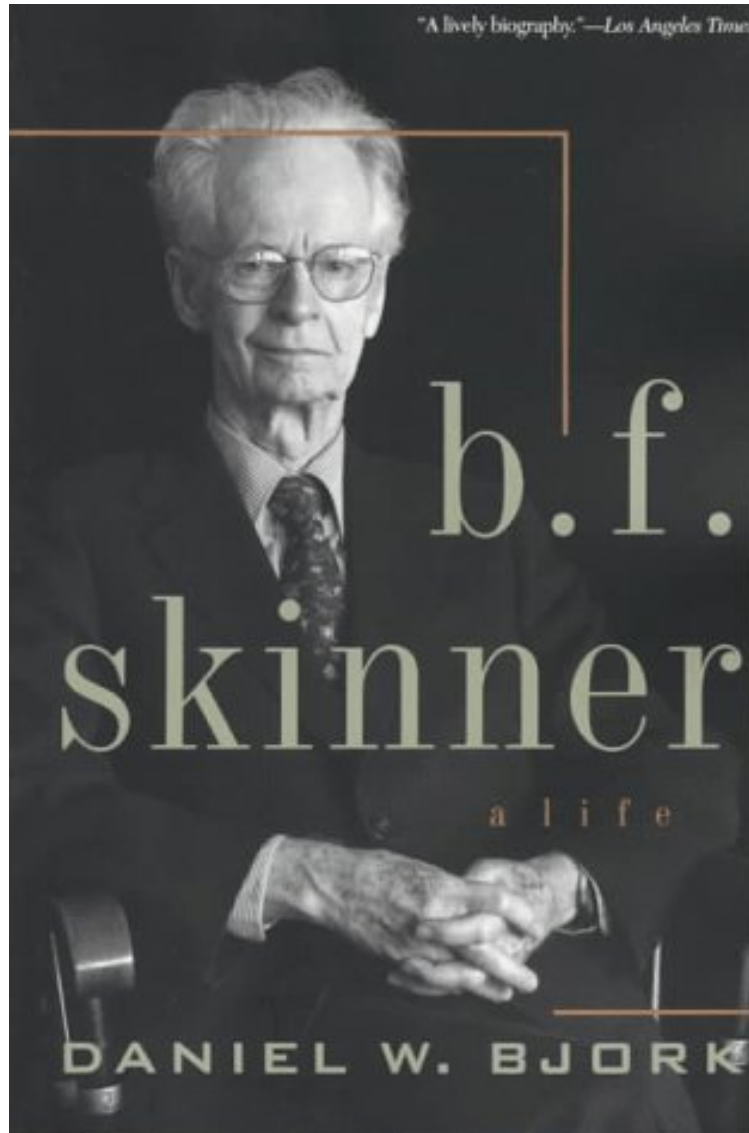


[Ebook free] B.F. Skinner: A Life

B.F. Skinner: A Life

Daniel W. Bjork

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Daniel W. Bjork : B.F. Skinner: A Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised B.F. Skinner: A Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. AN EXCELLENT AND IMPARTIAL BIOGRAPHY OF THE CONTROVERSIAL BEHAVIORISTBy Steven H ProppAt the time this book was published in 1993, author Daniel Bjork was professor of History at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. He wrote in the Preface, "In writing this biography, I have tried not to take sides; I will not seek to prove Skinner's detractors or his supporters wrong... I

have kept the central focus on the relationship between Skinner and the American tradition... he was also an alienated and cynical intellectual in the 1920s, parting company with mainstream culture, especially its boosterism and business orientation. Another persona, however, came to dominate his career as a behavioral scientist. Skinner became the American-as-inventor, a man fascinated with devising gadgets, an inventor whose optimism and mechanical cleverness allowed him to find and develop not only a new science but also a novel American technology of social invention with which he hoped to design a better world." (Pg. xii) He observes after Skinner started college, "he was able to step outside himself and view himself as another person. His freshman year, with its social isolation and disregard for the importance of intellect, had caused him to imagine himself as another person, one who now stood apart from the anti-intellectual environment that surrounded him... This was the Great Change... His suffering during that first year moved Fred toward the detachment that characterizes the objective scientist." (Pg. 36) He notes, "[Skinner] had watched his brother die with remarkable detachment... he observed his brother's death as if he were a level-headed stranger happening on the scene... 'I tend to take major things of that kind without any emotion... When something happens I accept it.'" (Pg. 38) He states, "he found himself breaking away from other behaviorists---Hull and Tolman as well as Pavlov. There was a radical strain in Skinner's science that departed from all the others and that would, in the end, mark him as the most scientifically formidable as well as the most socially inventive of all the twentieth-century behaviorists. Skinner felt uncomfortable not only with mentalist psychologists; some behaviorists also made him ill at ease." (Pg. 105) He adds, "Skinner... for years saw himself as being unappreciated by the scientific community. Indeed, it was not until the 1940s that his science began to recruit a corps of dedicated graduate students." (Pg. 113) He says, "Whether he eventually married the ideal person, even though his marriage lasted well over half a century, is open to question. His love interests were always tempered to some degree with ambivalence and disappointment. And, indeed, Skinner would have a reputation as a womanizer." (Pg. 115-116) He comments of *Walden Two*, "The novel was a bold extrapolation of the results of operant conditioning with animals, an imaginative effort to create a better way of life for humans... Skinner's voice, Frazier, maintains that behavioral science is superior to all traditional ways of improving the human condition, whether they be the wisdom of common sense, religious sanctions, the social rewards of capitalistic competition, or the socialistic redistribution of wealth." (Pg. 149) Of Skinner's autobiography [*Particulars of My Life; The Shaping of a Behaviorist; A Matter of Consequences*], he said, "if Skinner had written an autobiography about the way he felt---even from memory...---he might have convinced more people both to like him and to be like him. The objective tone of his autobiography was ... behavioristic in the sense that it simply presented a record of what had happened to him..." (Pg. 219) Regardless of one's views of Skinner and his ideas, this fair and objective biography will greatly help one understand both much better. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Bernard Grant, Sr. a tool everybody needs in their library 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Pet Parent Excellent biography of B.F. Skinner!

This biography of one of the world's most eminent psychologists describes Skinner's youth, family and education, his early and lingering desires to become famous as a writer or artist, his lifelong fascination with literary and "bohemian" figures, his difficult life and his devotion to his children. The author strips away many misconceptions about the great behaviorist pointing out that far from having a rigid, mechanistic view of humans, Skinner had an expansive, highly moral vision of the possibilities of human achievement. He shows Skinner's ideas as immensely practical with immediate "real world" applications through books geared to the general public, and through his interventions - machines and devices that could streamline everything from daily activities and teaching to missile guidance. The author has drawn on scholarly source material as well as personal correspondence, diary entries, interviews and other informal sources. The result is a narrative of Skinner's life, of the breakthroughs he made as a researcher and the lasting influences that his work still has on the science of psychology.

From Publishers Weekly By Bjork's reckoning, the man who raised his infant daughter in a glass-encased, thermostatically controlled crib came to behaviorism not as a cold, unfeeling nihilist but as a sensitive, unhappy romantic who cared deeply about helping humanity. Raised in a small Pennsylvania town by a lawyer father whom he viewed with contempt and by a controlling, critical mother, Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990) evolved into an alienated, cynical intellectual increasingly appalled by the consumerism of mainstream culture. According to Bjork, Skinner was a doting father and a lover of music (especially Wagner), who saw behavioral technology as a means to reverse global destruction and to liberate the individual from a wasteful, competitive lifestyle. While Bjork's defense of Skinner's ideas is not likely to impress his detractors, this intimate biography does provide a striking portrait of an embattled social engineer. Bjork is a history professor at St. Mary's University in Texas. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA fair-minded, insightful portrayal of the life and ideas of one of America's most controversial thinkers, by Bjork (History/St. Mary's University). Born to an undistinguished middle-class family in central Pennsylvania, Skinner survived an awkward youth. Initially keen to be a writer, he abandoned storytelling in order to pursue graduate work at Harvard, where he made his mark in a dissertation that boldly challenged prevailing trends in academic psychology. Deemed rigid and fanatical but also recognized as brilliant, Skinner built a reputation

as a behavioral scientist at universities in Minnesota and Indiana, where, in the postwar years, his interest in social invention first received national attention through his controlled- environment air-crib (better known as the ``baby box"). His desire to improve society through systematic behavioral control and positive reinforcement also manifested itself in two widely read books, *Walden Two* and *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, the latter of which ignited a firestorm of protest, when published in 1971, for its assault on ideas dear to freedom-loving Americans. By then near the end of his career at Harvard, Skinner maintained a productive scholarly life in spite of increasing isolation, battling deafness and blindness before dying of leukemia in 1990. More engaging when discussing ideas than when probing Skinner's roots or private life, and hardly the definitive biography; but, even so, Bjork gives a clear view of an American original whom posterity could judge more kindly than did his contemporaries. (Photos) -- Copyright copy;1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.