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**Naturalistic–Instrumentalistic Axiology of B. T. Skinner.  
Philosophical Premises and Moral Consequences**

Naturalistyczno-instrumentalistyczna aksjologia B. T. Skinnera.  
Filozoficzne przesłanki i moralne konsekwencje

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Behaviourism in ethics is a doctrine which seeks to investigate the so-called *operant values* in accordance with a conviction that their characteristics can be made entirely independent of the investigator's personal preferences. For it assumes that these values belong to the being and are its properties or can be reduced to them. Therefore, they can be investigated as any other fact, fulfilling the postulate of scientific objectivism and ethical neutrality. The investigator must only refrain from judging the value of a goal, must treat it as an effect that must be achieved, and must investigate the reality to determine the conditions and causes in which this effect depends. On that basis, he can regard the selected goal as unreal or impossible to achieve at all or in a given situation. When he determines goals in that way, he remains on the ground of scientific objectivism. With Skinner, the postulate of scientific objectivism applied to the investigation of values was not fulfilled.

Even a cursory reading of his *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, which is a lucid exposition of Skinner's ethical views, permits to notice that the work contains two opposing tendencies: a tendency to deprive the description of cultural and psychological phenomena of any evaluation so that they could be examined as facts, and a tendency to reform social life, which cannot dispense with evaluation and selection of goals. As a result, the case for the values preferred by Skinner in his programme of changes is presented at the expense of the authority of science, because his own preferences are shown as resulting from the establishment of values in the non-subjective being. We are therefore dealing with the abandonment of the attitude of ethical neutrality and scientific objectivism, while the selection of goals, which resorts to the authority of science, is in effect a moral option since the selection between scientific and metaphysical goals and

even more so between likewise scientifically justified goals must remain arbitrary. We have no right to involve science in disqualifying some value-goals and in affirming others. For it is not true that science can be in any way imperative about the principal value-goals.

As we shall see presently, Skinner's reduction of all values to the operant ones leads him to numerous ethical dilemmas, theoretical difficulties and inconsistencies. An example of the last case is when Skinner is trying to formulate a scientifically justified programme of social changes. The formulation of such a programme requires that some goals be regarded as ultimate and good in themselves rather than as only operant. That is why Skinner regards the existence of a species as an autonomous value, which is no longer a means to any other value. The selection of the ultimate goals, of autonomous values, as dependent on preferences, is always relativized to the *Weltanschauung*, philosophy and ideology of the author of a programme. Skinner can be justifiably called an adherent of scientism. The philosophical assumptions of science function thus in his doctrine in the role of *Weltanschauung* and ideology. The preference of autonomous value is relativized to them. In this paper we shall seek to demonstrate the premises of this relativization and their value-normative colouring. The problem is by no means trivial: the position and character of values in the vision of the world, imposed by the standpoint of scientism. Skinner's views can especially prompt one to make such analyses because scientism is accompanied here by a technocratic ideology expressed in a programme of social changes called *technology of behaviour*, which approves the model of a consumer society efficiently controlled by experts, who have been raised above the society and are predestined, on the grounds of their exceptional competence, to govern in an arbitrary way.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BEHAVIOURISM

The application of scientific methods and theories to investigate the phenomena of values leads not only to the elimination of some standpoints and conceptions regarded as metaphysical but also prompts us to accept certain assumptions about the ontological status of values, the mode of their existence, the possibilities of cognition, procedures of verification of judgments etc. Primarily, it requires that values be recognized as manifestable in experience, as empirical facts or as reducible to facts or derivable from them. For that reason, a philosophical interpretation of experience becomes essential for the understanding of the phenomena of values.

In general, "experience can be regarded as a combination of our own nature with the environment, the disentanglement of the two interacting constitutens being part of the problem." The object of some epistemologies is "to find ourselves in this experience, the object of others – to find our environment in it".<sup>1</sup> If we accept after M. J. Siemek<sup>2</sup> that this "disentanglement" of knowledge present in experience can be done on two levels: 1. on the epistemic level, where the positive knowledge about the objects of the world around us and about man is completed, and 2. on the epistemological level, where

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Eddington: *Nowe oblicze natury*, Warszawa 1934, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> M. J. Siemek: *Transcendentalism*, "Człowiek i światopogląd", 1974, no. 4.

attempts are made disjunctively to separate knowledge or cognition in general from something which is not cognition but the *being*, the reality, that which *is* and is only cognized as such, then we must conclude that the two levels are identified with one another in behaviourism. For the theory of behaviour – notably in the interpretations of Watson's and also Skinner's – is not only a scientific theory but also a certain philosophical conception which contains assertions of an ontological and epistemological character.

The behaviouristic philosophical construction of the *epistemological level* imposes such an arrangement of data at the *epistemic level*, which would make it dispensable to distribute the sources of knowledge between two factors: subjective and objective, since this level at once arranges the data into exclusively objective categories. This device makes the course of experience independent of the conceptual schemes of its rationalization and makes possible a description of every fact in homogeneous and only objective terms. This certainly produces favourable conditions for the integrations of the assertions of different sciences since they all will therefore investigate the same: the external reality, the being, that which *is* – only they do it at different levels of complexity, determined by the objective structure of being. However, this integration takes place at the cost of impoverishing and simplifying the problems of particular sciences, especially of the humanities. "Behaviourism is a complete negation of the humanities because they are founded on the concept of the conscious subject, which Skinner (and earlier Watson) eliminates so vigorously".<sup>3</sup>

This justification of the epistemological level and the epistemic level is clearly evident in Skinner's conception of the subject and process of cognition. What is called "methodological behaviourism" limits itself, he writes, to what can be publicly observed.<sup>4</sup> In order to satisfy the postulate of intersubjective accessibility, a cognitive relation must be interpreted exclusively as an empirical fact: in behaviourism it is identified with behaviour. However, it is then difficult to distinguish between cognitive behaviours, and here Skinner was not successful. The interpretation of behaviour as a behavioural response also makes it impossible to distinguish between the epistemic subject and the epistemological subject, which results in the reduction of all humanities (including philosophy) to one science of only behaviour. The traditional humanistic disciplines lose their *raison d'être* since the separate character of the objects of their investigations will be questioned.

The question about the subjective factors in experience will thus have no grounds because the concept of the subject is eliminated from the language of science. The negation of subjectivity excludes the possibility of spontaneous initiation of behaviour and leads to a conviction that behaviour must be inspired every time by solely objective factors. That is why, for a behaviourist, a cognitive action is simply a response to stimuli, and the object of cognition – a stimulus or a group of them. Since every response is manifested externally (otherwise the behaviourist would not recognize it as a fact) and can be observed as much as a stimulus can, therefore, when analyzed in the ontological perspective, they must be included in the same range: in the being, in that which is. Thus,

<sup>3</sup> J. Szacki: *Introduction to B. T. Skinner, Poza wolnością i godnością*, Warszawa 1978, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> B. F. Skinner: *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, New York 1971, p. 190.

the distribution of knowledge between exclusively objective factors acquires a philosophical justification and is determined by the accepted method of investigation. The elimination of subjective factors, of consciousness, leads one to acknowledge that there is no qualitative difference between man and animal, between human and animal communities. A mechanistic vision of man and nature prompts Skinner to reject the hypothesis that consciousness could be a qualitatively new product of social life. The materialistic view also excludes a substantial difference between the private world of man's experience and the world outside. "The difference is not in the stuff of which the private world is composed, but in its accessibility."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, negation of the participation of consciousness in determining behaviour will remain for the behaviourist the only acceptable standpoint.

It must be stressed, however, that unlike "classical" behaviourism, Skinner's views are characterized by certain moderation. He is not always inclined to deny the existence of consciousness or self-knowledge. He often occupies the position of agnosticism, prompted by scholarly caution, which does not permit to go beyond the data of experience and make apodictic statements about the unknown. That is why, as a scientist, he is trying not to prejudge about the nature of not yet investigated facts and their role in determining behaviour. However, as a philosopher, Skinner seeks to construct a comprehensive vision of the world and this prompts him to advance judgments which cannot be justified only in science. He must then adduce the assumptions of the epistemological level in order, for example, to assert that "mind is an explanatory fiction" or "an idea is simply an imagined precursor of behaviour".<sup>6</sup> The conviction that the world can be essentially known, the belief in the adequacy of the behavioural method, and polemic adour provoke Skinner as a philosopher to abandon the cautious attitude of a scholar and to negate the difference between man's private world and the world outside; between what is empirical and what is not yet given in experience, between artificial and natural conditions.<sup>7</sup> He is also prompted to assert that "we do not need to try to discover what personalities, states of mind, traits of character, plans, purposes, intentions, or the other perquisites of autonomous man really are in order to get on with a scientific analysis of behaviour."<sup>8</sup> The hypotheses of "self", consciousness etc. are thus rejected by Skinner not, as it might seem, because their heuristic fertility is negligible but because they do not fit in the framework of behaviouristic philosophical premises.

The relation between stimulus and response is based on causality, and just as it is necessary to take into account the moment of time and causation to distinguish between cause and effect, so too it is indispensable while differentiating stimulus from response. The assumption of the relation of causation between stimulus and response will, in advance, exclude the possibility of a spontaneous modification of response. It is therefore regarded as an adaptation towards a stimulus. If so, then the variability of response must be analogous to that of stimuli. This conviction leads Skinner to conclude that only the environment has an active role in all processes.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

The limitation of investigations only to an area that can be determined by the methodological criterion of objectivity results in apprehending each fact as a "pure" datum, which is revealed in knowing in the forms in which it exists prior to all knowledge. It cannot be distorted by a cognitive act because the act itself is unequivocally determined by the datum and as such it is also a constituent of pure nature.<sup>9</sup>

The behaviouristic philosophical assumption about the homogeneity of being permits to include each fact isolated out of context into the interpretation scheme of the theory and assert that as part of the "pure" being it differs in no way from the facts that are already known and described. It also permits to predict that every possible fact in the future will not require any change in the methods of investigation and description. We are dealing here with a glorification, imposed by scientism, of one method of investigation applied to all phenomena. The adequacy of the method is confirmed every time by such a reconstruction of a given object as eliminates therefrom everything that could undermine this adequacy. Behaviourism must therefore accept the assumption about the complete homogeneity of the world, both substantial and structural. For only this assumption permits to infer from the known parts of the world about the whole of it or about its not yet empirical fragments.

The above assumptions have a bearing on the way of understanding causality. Although Skinner does not say that explicitly, we have good reasons to assert that he interprets it as a one-to-one relation. Only this kind of interpretation permits to transfer the adequacy of causal relations of the empirical world upon the whole of being and makes it possible to construct a vision of nature which is totally ordered in its structure and dynamics. That is why the process of development is understood by Skinner as a constant infraction of equilibrium, caused by the environmental factors and determining a system into actions that eliminate infraction. At first, these actions are chaotic, and, from the standpoint of the final state (i.e. return to homeostasis), their operant value remains unknown. With time, under the influence of the reinforcing function of some effects, these actions begin to assume an organized form (the process of learning). They become quasi-purposeful. Moreover, this organization is the resultant of the structure of the system and the environmental factors, which are also composed of the effects of the system's actions. The survival of the system, the return to new homeostasis, is a measure of the adaptative efficiency of actions. If there is no efficiency, the system is destroyed and eliminated by the environment, which performs a selecting function.

Behaviourism treats the process of learning as a conditioning process, which takes place by trial and error. For that reason, every original response to stimuli must be devoid of rationality. It is a spontaneous and mechanical response. It is impossible to correct it just as it is impossible to correct an unconditional reflex. It is only the "reinforcing action" of the effects of the original response that modifies behaviour. But this takes place in the next S-R cycle. Behaviour is therefore corrected *post factum*: a correction is always belated towards a given instance of behaviour, which has a non-rational character for that reason. Rationality or non-rationality of behaviour is not a feature of much interest to a behavioural scientist. In this doctrine, behaviour is evaluated in an exclusively pragmatic way: as effective or not effective (the operant value of behaviour). Effective-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Chapter 9.

ness depends by no means on rationality or thinking, which precedes behaviour and programmes the order of operations. "One need not be aware of one's behaviour or the conditions controlling it in order to behave effectively – or ineffectively."<sup>10</sup> The operant value of behaviour depends on the effects that follow it, and these occur by virtue of the objective laws of the development of nature.

The criterion of adaptation is not the only measure of development, which Skinner employs. This criterion permits to understand development only as a constant reproduction of the same cycles, that is as a circle. That is why the dynamics of changes is enriched with the influences of the environment, which is manifested in the increase of complexity. In Skinner's view, the evolutionary development of a species has precisely this character. It is objective and has a direction and consists in "a steady increase in complexity of structure, in sensitivity to stimulation, or in the effective utilization of energy."<sup>11</sup> This criterion of evolutionary progress is clearly quantitative and objective. Skinner employs it to evaluate cultural phenomena, which will be discussed later.

The rise and development of a phenomenon does not follow a prearranged plan nor does it grow towards some terminal state of "maturity", because "terminal conditions have no bearing on the processes through which they are reached".<sup>12</sup> The only role of the future, admitted in Skinner's determinism, is that "both the species and the behaviour of the individual develop when they are shaped and maintained by their effects on the world around them."<sup>13</sup> It is obvious that the effects of any action at the moment the action is occurring do not yet exist: consequently, they cannot affect this action. It remains independent and determined by the past state and current conditions. The statement that the future determines the present is, on the ground of Skinner's views, a simplification. This can be explained only if we assume that every instance of behaviour is a link in the objective causal chain, which is also composed of its consequences. The conviction that the relation of cause and effect has a one-to-one character and that the world is a structure made up of the networks of these relations permits to assert that the effects of all behaviour are in a way "encoded" in the whole determining chain. The effect is "contained" in its cause in the sense that the effect is unequivocally determined by it. In Skinner's determinism, just as in Laplace's, the difference between the past and the future lies in that the former is already actualized by virtue of the objective laws of nature, while the latter is only potentially determined by the laws of determination of events. For that reason, the knowledge about the current state and about the past, obtained in any moment of the world's growth makes possible the full knowledge about the future reality, which then becomes transparent just as for Laplace's Demon. Freedom of events and behaviour is excluded and can be treated as fiction or appearance, as an illusion of the "autonomous" man. Each modification of behaviour has a necessary character both as to its course and its form and effects. Therefore, Skinner must regard the intentions and endeavours of men as seeming and with quasi-purposes.

As we shall presently see, this view affects the interpretation of the reformatory

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

activity and the character of the programme of changes, which must lose its postulative and evaluative function. Consequently, it is identified with a theory which describes reality and it embraces only its regular and necessary elements. Programming and reforms can be basically reduced to such a modification of behaviour as could be in accordance with the objective order of the development of nature and society. The supreme value in such a programme can be only the adaptation to reality.

## CULTURE

Skinner also occupies the standpoint of natural sciences when he analyzes the origin, functions and evolution of culture, which he regards as a continuation of the natural evolution of the human species. A culture is a "collection of the contingencies of reinforcement". It evolves "as new practice arise, possibly for irrelevant reasons, and are selected by their contribution to the strength of the culture as it "competes" with the physical environment and with other cultures."<sup>14</sup> It is through a culture that the "goal" given to the human species by nature is realized. Practices developed within a culture determine the boundaries beyond which, under the threat of destruction of their species, individuals cannot go in search of the positive reinforcers or to avoid the negative. The boundaries of these reinforcers and their character do not depend on the special traits of a culture but on the environmental contingencies of survival of a species or a group. Skinner asserts that "all reinforcers eventually derive their power from evolutionary selection."<sup>15</sup> The function of culture is the control of the behaviour of individuals and groups by providing such reinforces which combine behaviour with its remote consequences. A culture provides numerous "conditioned reinforcers", which control the behaviour of individuals so as to induce them to work for the interest of the species, the community or the culture itself. The repertoire of conditioned reinforcers that function in a culture depends, on the one hand, on the genetic sensitivity to reinforcement, and on the other — on the living conditions and the environment. Nature thus controls a culture which "evolves when new practices further the survival of those who practice them"<sup>16</sup>

As can be seen, Skinner evaluates culture from the utilitarian and pragmatic standpoints. In the former case, he values culture for its biological functions of strengthening the life of a species. In the latter — for the effective performance of its controlling functions towards the behaviour of individuals.

"Survival, Skinner writes, is the only value according to which a culture is eventually to be judged, and any practice that furthers survival has survival value by definition."<sup>17</sup> The two judgments of culture have an instrumental character: a culture and all its products are not regarded as good in themselves but they are good as a means, as an instrument that makes it easier to pursue a natural goal, that is survival and life. Moreover, the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104–105.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

instrumental value of a culture can be seen, just as with an individual action, only *post factum*.

Resignation from evaluating a culture from the standpoint of some value already functioning in it, a search for the non-cultural criteria of evaluation, is possible when we assume that the "phenomena under observation have no cultural sense, that they are equivalent to behaviour of the elements of some organized and highly complex material system".<sup>18</sup> This requires that we become detached from our own culture and its conditions, which might give a subjective colouring to the object of investigation, that is culture itself. The search for such an objective basis of cultural studies and of the evaluation of different cultures leads to the apprehension of cultural phenomena only in their natural aspect. This standpoint, however, does not permit to grasp the specific character of culture itself. It also makes it impossible to account for the origin of culture because the naturalistic conception of the evolution of the world and man cannot recognize any particular moment as that of the birth of a culture. If such a moment were to be distinguished, this would have to be preceded by some conception, independent of natural history, about the essence of culture. But the naturalistic perspective would not be necessary any longer. Therefore, either we can retain the naturalistic standpoint and then exclude the possibility of accounting for the origin of culture and its specific character, or – with a definition of culture independent of naturalistic terms at our disposal – we will investigate the variability of cultures as a process which is different from, though dependent on, physical changes.

The treatment of culture as a natural phenomenon leads to an antinomy, which has been already emphasized by F. Znaniecki.<sup>19</sup> For it imposes on the investigator a duty becoming detached from his own subjectivity and assuming the attitude of the "pure" epistemological absolute. A similar perspective imposes an interpretation of culture as a collection of objects "in themselves", without any meaning for anyone, and yet produced by someone. Consequently, the same object must be analyzed as an object which has been produced "for someone" and "by someone", and at the same time as an objective fact, as a natural phenomenon and therefore "no one's". Skinner is trying to avoid this contradiction at the expense of eliminating all that is outside a naturalistic ontology from the cultural phenomena. He owes an appearance of reaching the cultural reality to the fact he himself constructed this reality and he is taking out of this conceptual construct only what he has put in before. Skinner's failure demonstrates that the standpoint of natural sciences (characteristic of behaviourism) and the standpoint of the humanities are mutually exclusive: natural sciences must analyze the world without taking into account the conscious subject in it whereas the humanities regard this concept as fundamental. That is why "the programme of a physical (and biological) treatment of culture seems utopian forever."<sup>20</sup> Skinner and other behaviourists do not suspect that the difficulty in reaching some phenomena may lie in the inadequacy of the adopted

<sup>18</sup> S. Lem: *Etyka technologii i technologia etyki*, [in:] *DIALOGI*, Kraków 1972, p. 318.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Wocial: *Znaniecki i dwuznaczność postawy antypozytywistycznej*, "Człowiek i światopogląd", 1978, no. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Lem: *Biologia i wartości*, p. 369.



method of investigation and description. The conviction that the S-R scheme is entirely sufficient prompts behaviourists to negate the facts which do not yield to their description rather than correct the method and broaden the interpretative schemes. We share J. Szacki's view that Skinner "regards as real only what he can explain by means of his theory."<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Morality

A similar way of constructing the object of investigation in accordance with the adopted paradigms can be found in Skinner's ethics. His study of values and moral norms is included in the theory of behaviour because it is "a science of values", which is concerned with "operant reinforcement".<sup>22</sup> The difference between descriptive statements and value judgments (norms and evaluations), which is articulated by many present-day metaethicists and logicians, is blurred in Skinner's theory. In his view, the former statements concern facts while the latter – either "concern the future" (being thereby a kind of prediction) or concern "how one feels about a fact".<sup>23</sup> Since the sphere of private experience is not accessible to investigation, it is difficult to find out its role in determining behaviour. For that reason, Skinner denies that there is a causal relation between fact and emotion. Emotions can accompany behaviour but they do not constitute the objective basis which would permit to attribute some value to facts and phenomena. The objective basis of evaluation is the relation between stimulus and behaviour, and between behaviour and its effects. "To make a value judgment of its reinforcing effects."<sup>24</sup> What is evaluated are things or behaviours of other people – never emotions.

The naturalistic image of the world does not allow Skinner to accept the hypothesis that objects called "good" have a common trait which permits to group them in one class. "Good", like other "subjective" properties, is attributed to objects following the response they elicit in our organism or behaviour. For some things (stimuli) determine behaviour in a definite way: they either provoke a response to be repeated – and are thus "positive reinforcers", or they muffle it (negative reinforcers). And here is a definition of "good": "the only good things are positive reinforcers, and the only bad things are negative reinforcers".<sup>25</sup>

"Good", or positive reinforcers, are discovered in the process of interaction with the world. They are objective and independent of the decisions of the "autonomous man". They are not instituted but only "recognized". They are given to a man together with the structure of his organism and the properties of the environment. However, they do not exist without the two factors. For the operant value, a good thing, is "fitness for something". As a relational value, it presupposes some correspondence between the physical traits of an object and the organism. How this correspondence emerged is accounted for

<sup>21</sup> Szacki: *Introduction to: Skinner: Poza wolnością i godnością*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Skinner: *Beyond Freedom...*, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

by the theory of evolution and genetics". It is part of the genetic endowment called "human nature" to be reinforced in particular ways by particular things".<sup>26</sup> Behaviour is the empirical test of values attributed to things. A repetition of behavior is the evidence that the object has retained its positive value, a change in behaviour — that the object has lost it. Since behaviour is always adaptative towards stimuli, then the value of stimuli must be revealed in it. The behaviour can be judged as effective or ineffective — depending on the results. If they are positive reinforcers, the behaviour is considered effective.

It must be stressed that the value of behaviour (its effectiveness or ineffectiveness) can be seen only *post factum*. For the elimination of consciousness from the behaviour-determining factors excludes the possibility of planned actions. Nor do emotions have any bearing on it because, as Skinner asserts, emotions are "by-products of behaviour" and do not determine its process and effects.<sup>27</sup> For that reason the notion of the purpose of behaviour has a particular sense for Skinner: "the purpose" of individual behaviours and the "purpose" of natural processes arises only and exclusively as a sequence of events and processes. For example, "the primate hand evolved in order that things might be more successfully manipulated, but its purpose is not to be found in a prior design but rather in the process of selection".<sup>28</sup> The only difference between biological and individual purpose is in that the latter can be felt. The foregoing reflexion substantiates St. Lem's assertion if we apply it to Skinner's views: a difference between the presence and absence of axiology, just as a difference between a real purpose and absence of it, is discovered no more dilemmatically than a difference between a bald head and a hairy one".<sup>29</sup>

A number of objections can be raised against this conception of operant values. Firstly, it is extremely vast and can be found almost on all levels of the organization of living beings, and even in physics if the concept of behaviour were to be broadened to cover every case of energy consumption under any stimulus. The cybernetic models of self-controlled systems are described with this concept. Values then turn out to be "certain relations between physical states" and these relations are such as "statistically determine the behaviour of a system".<sup>30</sup> So broad an interpretation of operant values explains too much to explain anything.

Secondly, basing on this conception it is difficult to find out a difference between human and animal operant values. In Skinner's philosophy they can be differentiated only qualitatively. They are all of one sort: that of vital values. That is why Skinner cannot determine the character of aesthetic values and distinguish them from, for example, moral values. For either has an operant character — the two are "positive reinforcers" and provoke repetitions of response. Either kind has also been shaped in the society as a certain norm of behaviour advantageous for the survival of a species and its development. Skinner's views thus lead to a distinction of one kind of values in the world.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>29</sup> Lem: *Biologia i wartości*, p. 366.

<sup>30</sup> Lem: *Etyka technologii...*, p. 347.

Thirdly, the conviction that the world of values is a product given to man together with the structure of his organism and the properties of the environment leads to non-historism. That is why the history of human societies can be analyzed by the behaviourist only in its naturalistic aspect.

Fourthly, viewing the world of values as a datum leads in normative ethics to accepting only such actions as would leave this datum intact. This has a bearing on the interpretation of moral norms.

Skinner identifies value judgments with descriptive statements. This applies to norms as well: "A rule or law includes a statement of prevailing contingencies, natural or social".<sup>31</sup> This can also be formulated in a hypothetical statement: "If you are reinforced by the approval of your fellow men, you will be reinforced when you tell the truth".<sup>32</sup> The translation of norms into a descriptive language is Skinner's first step towards meta-ethical naturalism. But this does not lead to the loss of the function of evaluative language, which is manifested in affecting behaviour. In behaviourism, every utterance is treated as "verbal behaviour", which is a stimulus eliciting a corresponding response. If the function of language and the meaning of terms are interpreted not only as a means of communication but primarily as an instrument of acting upon behaviour, then the difference is blurred between a factual statement and a value judgment or a norm. The understanding of either must be seen in the recipient's behaviour. That is why Skinner fails to see the difference between a "rule" as a scientific law, which describes the discovered relations, and a social rule: legal or moral.

Morality understood as a system of rules and recommendations is, in Skinner's view, a collection of regulations that determine modes of behaviour useful for the whole of society and the species. Just like a highway code, morality is a derivative of some instrumental approaches selected in social and natural evolution and intended to minimize possible conflicts by providing such conditioned reinforcers as would be most beneficial for the survival of a local community or the whole of mankind and which would not, at the same time, impose too many burdens on the individuals (they would then have an aversive effect). In Skinner's conception, morality is analogous to genetic stereotypes of behaviours found in the animal world. He writes that "there is a kind of natural morality in both biological and cultural evolution".<sup>33</sup> In both cases we have to do with a relatively stable stereotype of behaviours, which has been shaped in evolution and with some purpose from the standpoint of species survival. Therefore, the behaviour that follows the rules imposed by culture has an operant effect for the survival of the species. For what culture imposes on us as a stereotype of behaviour is in keeping with the "gradients of evolution of nature".<sup>34</sup> Any other type of behaviour will make a culture and its society perish sooner or later. Therefore, Skinner is demonstrating that what is good for the species is consequently good for the individual, and every deviation from the rule will ultimately result in the destruction of a culture, its society and hence the individual.

<sup>31</sup> Skinner: *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>34</sup> Lem: *Etyka technologii...*, p. 343.

A question then arises whether all rules imposed by culture can have such an operant effect. The question is pertinent, the more so that Skinner asserts that "not every practice in a culture, or every trait in a species, is adaptative".<sup>35</sup> Most moral norms could be interpreted after Skinner, that is they could be treated as stereotypes of behaviours in a species. Some "elementary" or universal rules can be conceived as ancillary to the life of a species. Every known morality accepts them with minor modifications; in each there are rules of co-operation and exchange, solidarity in the struggle against the elements of nature, rules of solving conflicts between individuals, rules of married and family life etc. All of them are obviously necessary for the survival of a social group, for the life of its members. But doubts could be raised whether all the rules found in different cultures could be interpreted like that. There are numerous "perfectionistic" rules, which cannot be considered directly useful for the life of a species. Skinner does not see at all that these rules exist. The restriction of morality to vital values only is a consequence of his philosophy of scientism. On account of his interpretation of causality, Skinner must reject perfectionism because it is a doctrine which assumes at least some margin of freedom evident in the act of negating the existing state regarded as imperfect and in the endeavour to change it, which is not unequivocally determined by the rules of reality. On the other hand, Skinner interprets every endeavour to modify the existing state as the necessary consequence of what is or was. The spontaneity of act of negation, emphasized by a perfectionist, is entirely unacceptable for Skinner since it cannot be apprehended in the causal formula. That is why he seeks in "human nature" only those tendencies that are stable and universal, that can be repeated and experimentally verified. He finds them in biological factors of the human nature as these satisfy his expectations: they are stable, because they have been shaped by the objective laws of nature; they embrace the whole species and are present in all its members, and can thereby be repeated; they can be investigated by means of scientific methods and experiments. These convictions permit to regard Skinner as a representative of naturalism in its broad sense.

According to Skinner, the variability of values of things does not depend only upon the existing and future effects of behaviour, nor is it their simple derivative. It must be confined to an interval determined, on the one hand, by the structure of an organism — and on the other, by the physical properties of objects. Values or reinforcers have thus a definite area of occurrence. The boundaries of that area are determined by the level of adaptation to the environment, which a species has achieved and by "genetic mutations".<sup>36</sup> Only within this area there can occur an adaptative change of particular behaviours of the individuals, and, consequently, individual differences in reinforcers — values.

A question therefore arises about the relation between the level of the adaptative behaviours of individuals and their values, and the level of the adaptation of a species and non-individual values. Changes in the behaviours of individuals are clearly adaptative whereas changes in the behavioural stereotypes of a species, therefore also in morality, take place at a different level and are not a simple resultant of spontaneous adaptations. Furthermore, spontaneous and individual adaptation is likewise not a simple result of

<sup>35</sup> B. F. Skinner: *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

genetic transmissibility. As S. Lem has aptly asserted, "ethics is such a programme of behaviours, which is not transformed at the same level of events at which it works effectively".<sup>37</sup> Skinner gave these problems a too superficial treatment whereas the separation of the environmental factors from the genetic ones in determining behaviour is essential, especially for someone, who, like Skinner, is trying to work out the techniques of manipulating the environment in order to change behaviour. Thus, it is not clear what derives in behaviour from a culture and the environment, and what from "nature" – the man's genetic endowment.

#### 4. Conclusion. A Model of Education and the Hierarchy of Values

The characteristic one-sided approach of behaviourism to many complex problems and reduction of others that do not fit the adopted pattern of explication yield such proposals in normative ethics and in Skinner's pedagogical conception as could by no means be accepted at least on moral grounds. Skinner's model of education, expounded in *Walden Two*,<sup>38</sup> is based on manipulating one's behaviour with praise and reproof in such a way as to make the manipulated individual entirely devoted to the goals of the community represented by specialists in behavioural engineering. In this system the pupil is entirely subordinated to the teacher, who can exercise an effective control of the pupil's responses by applying his knowledge about the rules governing human behaviour. The relation between the pupil and the teacher is asymmetric: the former is the object of education understood as manipulation of behaviour, while the latter is active because he organizes "the educational environment" to achieve the intended goal. The pupil's resistance is excluded in advance because a wise teacher uses only "positive reinforcers", praises, influencing thereby man's hedonistic feelings, so essential for his nature. Frazier, a character in *Walden Two*, asserts that it is now possible to control the behaviour of man because any situation that he enjoys can be created and any situation he finds unbearable can be eliminated.<sup>39</sup> The fundamental value adopted in this model as man's natural aim is the desire of pleasure or the search for positive reinforcers and avoidance of the negative. "Happiness, writes Skinner, may be taken to represent the personal reinforcers which can be attributed to survival value and esteem some of the conditioned reinforcers used to induce a person to behave for the good of others".<sup>40</sup> The effect of pedagogical practices is therefore measured by happiness which the pupil reveals in his behaviour, while the socialization of the individual consists in establishing such stereotypes of behaviours as would be in accordance with "the gradients of development of mankind".

Skinner's educational ideal is thus an endeavour to make every member of a community a highly efficient and willing supporter of its current and future goals. Culture will also serve this purpose. "A culture needs the support of its members, and it must provide for the pursuit and achievement of happiness if it is to prevent disaffection or defection".<sup>41</sup> For a culture is a repertoire of conditioned reinforcers that control

<sup>37</sup> Lem: *Etyka technologii...*, p. 305.

<sup>38</sup> Skinner: *Walden Two*, New York 1948.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> Skinner: *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

behaviour in the interest of a community. The stereotypes of behaviour, shaped according to such an ideal of education, are aimed to teach rational ways of response, that is discipline, obedience, resistance to disturbing stimuli, effectiveness in finding positive reinforcers. The development of personality and shaping character are not necessary in this conception because they do not control human behaviour. The problem of the selection of goals of action, both individual and public, is excluded by the behaviourist because he presumes that these goals are already given with the rise of the human species and because he questions the freedom and consciousness of man. Skinner's utopia presents, therefore, a vision of "man without traits" and without "peculiarities", the man who has lost his unique individuality and ability of spontaneous action. Instead, he has become an undistinguishable atom of a community entirely devoted to one task: the organization of the social environment in such a way as to make particular human atoms lead maximally conflict-free lives. This is the society Skinner is dreaming about. He writes that "no reasonable balance can be achieved as long as the remoter gains are neglected by a thoroughgoing individualism or libertarianism" and further on "Presumably, there is an optimal state of equilibrium in which everyone is maximally reinforced".<sup>42</sup>

Skinner's conception of education is based on a definite hierarchy of values, where:

- the human individual is not an autonomous value, a value *per se*;
- the individual is recognized only as an operant value and can be valued only for its usefulness in the realization of higher goals required by the interest of the human species. Man as an individual is thus a means to an end rather than the end itself. It is difficult to find a more explicit negation of humanism.

- the life and activity of the individual is entirely and unreservedly subordinated to the interest of the community;

- the man is almost entirely identified with a role assigned to him by the system of social organization and can be valued only for his performance of the role.

Skinner's vision of the society presented in *Walden Two* and in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* should be a warning to our contemporaries. It proves that when a man is treated extremely subjectively, manipulated from the moment he is born until he dies, consistently conditioned in one value: happiness at the expense of freedom, he has faint chances of self-realization as an autonomous subject responsible for himself and for others. Especially *Walden Two* demonstrates what possibilities the individual can be deprived of if he is subject early enough to the pressure of one-sided action. For if the man is to survive on condition that he becomes the object of manipulation, acting in accordance with the model imposed by the system of social organization, and that he is deprived of any other alternative, then it is easy to predict that he will yield to pressure and abandon his subjective freedom and independent search for values. In the end, his experiences will be identified with the imposed meanings.

Skinner is aware of these ethical implications of behaviourism and of his utopia. He seems, however, to approve them, in which he is consistent and in accord with his philosophical convictions and *Weltanschauung*. His belief in science and his conviction that the "technology of behaviour" will lead mankind on the road to peace and happiness allows him to remain indifferent to values, at the expense of which this goal can be

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

achieved. That is why he supports the assertion by T. H. Huxley: "If some great power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being some sort of a clock and wound up every morning before I go out of bed, I should close instantly with the offer".<sup>43</sup>

Skinner's technology of behaviour is an offer of exchanging values for comfort. Skinner's ideal is a society where it is not necessary "to do good" to anyone because no one needs it, nor is evil done because it would be toilsome, complicated and with no advantage. A not entirely concealed assumption of this conception is a maximal mistrust of man. It may be rational but certainly not very inspiring. A question arises therefore whether this "perfect" society without good and evil, beyond freedom and dignity, is worth materializing.

### STRESZCZENIE

W artykule autorka przedstawia krytyczną analizę aksjologii i filozofii B. T. Skinnera. Wykazuje, że próba wyeliminowania ocen z opisu zjawisk kulturowych i psychologicznych, charakterystyczna dla scjentyzmu Skinnera, w połączeniu z programem reformowania świata rzekomo opartym na nauce – prowadzi do licznych błędów teoretycznych i wywołuje obiekcje natury etycznej. Po pierwsze – redukcja wszystkich wartości do wyłącznie instrumentalnych nie udaje się i sam Skinner jako reformator musi niektóre z nich uznać za wartości autonomiczne. Po drugie – popełnia on tzw. „błąd naturalistyczny”, sprowadzając wartości do faktów dających się opisać językiem fizycznym. Wskutek tego musi on uznać, że to co JEST, być POWINNO. Konsekwencją tej redukcji staje się wetyce propagowanie trwania gatunku ludzkiego jak najwyższego dobra, któremu ma być podporządkowany cały program reform społecznych, politycznych i obyczajowych.

Rzekomo naukowo uzasadnionym ideałem Skinnera jest model społeczeństwa umiejętnie sterowanego przez specjalistów z zakresu technologii zachowania i inżynierii społecznej, w którym interes całości społecznej (bezkolizyjne trwanie) staje się nadrzędny a wszystkie poczynania jednostki muszą mu być podporządkowane. Antyindywidualizm Skinnera wyrażony w wizji społeczeństwa żyjącego „poza wolnością i godnością” prowadzi w istocie do powierzenia władzy oligarchii uczonych technokratów, wyniesionych ponad ogół i z racji swych kompetencji powołanych do arbitralnego sterowania innymi.

### РЕЗЮМЕ

В данной работе критически проанализировано аксиологию и философию Б. Т. Скиннера. Автор показывает, что попытка исключения оценки из описания культурных и психологических явлений, так характерных философии Скиннера, в соединении с программой преобразования мира, будто бы научно обработанной — ведет к многим теоретическим ошибкам и вызывает сомнения этического характера. Во-первых — сокращение всех значений, включая инструментальные, не возможное, и сам Скиннера как реформатор, некоторые

<sup>43</sup> Quoted after Skinner: *Beyond Freedom...*, p. 66.

из них зачисляет к автоматическим значениям. Во-вторых, Скиннер совершает т.н. „натуралистическую ошибку“, сводя значения к фактам, которые можно описать физическим языком. Поэтому ему приходится признать то что „ЕСТЬ“ и быть „ДОЛЖНО“. Результатом этого сокращения становится в этике пропагирование продолжительности человеческого рода как самого большого добра, которому должна быть подчинена вся программа общественных, политических и нравственных мероприятий.

Будто-бы научно доказано, что идеал Скиннера — это модель общества умело управляемого специалистами по технологии поведения и общественной инженерии, в котором добро всей общественности становится вышестоящим, а все мероприятия личности должны быть ему подчинены. Антииндивидуализм Скиннера представлен картиной общества живущего „вне свободы и чести“ сводя к тому, что власть в этом обществе передана олигархии ученых технократов, которые выдвинуты над широкие круги общества из-за своих компетенций и дано им самовольно управлять другими.