

## Review: Specificity & Plasticity & Richard Restak on Volition; B. F. Skinner & Behaviorism: Hegel's Absolute Idea & Dialectic: Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis

20. One behaviorist who had great initial and lasting impact on American society is B. F. Skinner, a Harvard professor of psychology:

Skinner firmly rejected the conventional model of man as a free agent who acts in accordance with the decisions of an inner self. Skinner envisages the use of scientific knowledge about the control of human behavior to create a planned man, one who will be conditioned to behave in the way best calculated to achieve society's goals. Behavioral engineering will have removed all of his antisocial tendencies, and he will want only what is good for himself and his society.

NOTE: The question arises: Who does the "conditioning," who determines what "society's goals" are, and who establishes what is "good"? Behaviorism pits an educational system that by attitude and law must reject the soul against the belief system of Christian students – a violation of the "free exercise" clause of the First Amendment.

The issue of separation of church and state did not originate in the Constitution but from a Supreme Court decision in *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947). Here is an excerpt from the majority opinion written by Justice Hugo LaFayette Black:

No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the federal government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups, and vice versa. In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect "a wall of separation between church and State."<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of Behaviorism compels one to examine carefully the issue of control in education. Skinner wants to use scientific control to bring about a society in which it will be easy to be good and to bring about an educational process through which it will be easy to be excellent. There is no alternative to control, in his view. It is simply a matter of *who* is in control. One does not grant a child "freedom" merely by leaving him alone. To refuse to use scientific control to shape human behavior is, for the behaviorist, a failure in responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0330\\_0001\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0330_0001_ZO.html)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Nash, "Education, Philosophy of," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979), 6:411.

21. Skinner's approach to education was influenced by John B. Watson, the father of twentieth-century behaviorism, but Skinner's approach to education is greatly influenced by the theories posited in Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), and the research done by Ivan Pavlov in the early twentieth century.
22. Marx's theories about economic socialism were influenced by Georg Hegel's philosophical ideas about the "dialectic." This is an ethereal term that is harder to define than it is to nail Jell-O to a wall. Dialectics have to do with logic in debate. Hegel's dialectic may be briefly defined as "thesis" plus "antithesis" equals "synthesis."
23. Hegel believed there was an unseen force, which he called the Absolute Idea, existing independently of human comprehension that will ultimately prevail by bringing about total freedom.
24. For Hegel the thesis is the Absolute Idea which controls the events of history. The antithesis is the imperfect human race which has devised systems that are in competition with the goal of the Absolute Idea. The synthesis is the ultimate victory of the Absolute Idea over the human race's failed systems producing total freedom for all.