

SCIENTOCRACY: A Defense of the  
Planner - Manager Form of Government

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*Introduction: A Review of the Basic Questions*

In the essay about which J. L. Edleson has found reason to complain (Nicolaus, 1978), I emphasized two basic questions which arise from the fact that people live together in groups. Because the government of a group is responsible for its success, it is the responsibility of government to discover and implement valid answers to these questions:

(1) What are the most effective ways for people to behave in order to insure successful group living?

(2) How can people be induced to behave in those ways?

The second question may ultimately be reduced to two component questions: the first concerns why people behave as they do; the second concerns how the behavior of people can be changed. In the final reckoning, therefore, we must deal with three basic questions:

(1) Why do people behave as they do?

(2) How can their behavior be changed?

(3) What changes in their behavior need to be made (in order to insure successful group living)?

These, then, are the three basic questions for which government must discover and implement valid answers.

Valid answers to the first two questions may be supplied by a science and technology of behavior. On these two issues I anticipated no quarrel with fellow behaviorists.

But the third question still causes trouble. And, in fact, I anticipated trouble when I stated,

Even some radical behaviorists have not devoted themselves sufficiently to acquiring an adequate understanding of the matter, and this has led them to retreat to a popular prescientific practice which then intervenes as an alien and hostile ingredient in an otherwise rigorously consistent scientific program.

The gravamen of Edleson's complaint is that I reject the "popular prescientific practice" of democracy in favor of a scientific analysis for deciding specifications of behavior which will promote successful group living. This is the issue of behavior design -- or, to the same effect, of the design of a "moral" or "ethical" or "legal" code of conduct.

Implicit in a scientific approach to the issue of behavior design under the conditions of group life is the notion of a government conducted by scientific specialists. This notion is inherent in the Planner - Manager method of government which was advanced by B. F. Skinner in *Walden Two*, and which I have provisionally -- and perhaps unwisely -- denoted by the term "scientocracy."

In discussing a scientific approach to the issue of behavior design and, by implication, a government based on science, I have tried to accurately describe Skinner's position and develop it in the direction to which it seems to point. Edleson seems to feel, however, that I have misinterpreted Skinner's position and, perhaps as a result of this, have drawn spurious conclusions from it. But after studying the particulars of Edleson's complaint, I feel no obligation to recant. On the contrary, I feel that it is Edleson who has misunderstood Skinner and, by extension, my account of his position. What follows, therefore, is a defense of my original statement.

*Government: Science Versus Democracy*

Before turning directly to the special issue of behavior design, we may consider Skinner's proposed medium for dealing with all three basic issues -- namely, the Planner - Manager method of government. In this connection, Edleson has complained about a "major flaw" in my "proposed scientocracy" where "government is conducted, not by laymen unschooled in social planning and management, but by specialists in the science of governing." He argues that this "elite class of governors is contrary to Skinner's vision of rotating citizen planners." He further argues that this "elite class" would "make decisions based on class self-interest," since it would behave no differently than its predecessors "given the same environment." I am further credited with the claim that "scientists are different," and for that reason would not become corrupt.

I find this indictment quite puzzling. In the first place, I do not argue for an "elite class of governors." In the course of my account, I repeatedly and explicitly endorse the *classless* society of *Walden Two* and its Planner - Manager form of government. The following citation alone should make this clear:

But planning and managing, like working at farming or manufacturing or scientific research, are viewed, in *Walden Two*, as nothing more than jobs that need to be done. No job is assigned any special status, nor endowed with any special privilege. All members of the community, whatever their vocation, have equal access to its wealth . . . In sum, *Walden Two* meets all the specifications of the socialist or communist ideal: all property is socially or communally owned; the society or community is classless and egalitarian . . . By the careful and comprehensive application of the method of science, *Walden Two* is able to achieve an effective socialism or communism (Nicolaus, 1979).

Again I would iterate that in describing the classless culture of *Walden Two*, I am also subscribing to the vision which it sets forth.

In the second place, in my essay I nowhere state or imply that a government of scientists would behave differently than its predecessors in the "same environment." I nowhere state or imply that "scientists are different" in the sense of being immune to corruption. On the contrary, I repeatedly stress the need to explicitly design a government that will

guarantee a double result: (1) that competent governors be selected; and (2) that they govern for the good of the governed. But how can the competence and morality of governors be guaranteed? . . . The only intelligent and moral solution is to explicitly design contingencies of reinforcement which will effectively control governmental behavior to make it intelligent and moral, and this is exemplified in *Walden Two* . . . In *Walden Two*, then, the government is carefully designed to make biased control a virtual impossibility . . .

The following remarks should be equally exculpatory:

The behavior of the planners is no less controlled than that of the rest of the group's members. An analysis of their environment and environmental histories would show how that control is exerted. Such an analysis would include the governmental design which keeps their behavior within specific ethical bounds . . . No individual -- including a controller -- can step outside the stream of physical cause and effect.

Nor, of course, is the scientist exempt from this rule.

Again I would iterate my acceptance of the behaviorist position which explains governmental and scientific behavior by appealing to the contingencies under which it occurs. I would also iterate that I hold no brief for the contingency design of any currently existing government.

In the third place, the Planner-Manager system is a government, not by the people, but by specialists acting in the interests of the people. As a method of government, it has nothing in common with democracy, participatory or otherwise. A combination of easily verifiable paraphrase and direct quotation lifted from *Walden Two* will firmly establish this interpretation. At pages 54-55, for example, we may read as follows:

Our only government is a Board of Planners . . . They may serve for ten years, but no longer. . . The Planners are charged with the success of the community." The Planners are not democratically elected, but *co-opted*: "The Board selects a replacement from a pair of names supplied by the Managers." Nor are the Managers democratically elected: "The Managers (are) carefully trained and tested specialists. How could the members (lay citizens) gauge their ability? In response to Castle's statement that "Then the members have no voice whatsoever," Frazier replies: "Nor do they wish to have."

At page 164 we find Castle arguing that "Simple democracy requires public discussion of so fundamental a matter as a (behavior) code," to which Frazier replies,

"You won't find much 'simple democracy' here."

Frazier's full discussion of a behavior code -- and, by implication, of behavior design -- should be carefully reviewed when we turn directly to this topic at a later stage of the present account. At page 231 the following dialogue appears:

"But you have several times suggested that you have little faith in democracy," Castle said. "I will do more than suggest, if you like," said Frazier hotly.

At pages 266-267 the following language appears:

Voting is a device for blaming conditions on the people. The people aren't rulers, they're scapegoats. And they file to the polls every so often to renew their right to the title . . . Are the people skilled governors? No. And they become less and less skilled, relatively speaking, as the science of government advances. It's the same point I raised in our discussion of the group nursery: when we've once acquired a behavioral technology, we can't leave the control of behavior to the unskilled.

Implied support for the notion of "scientocracy" may also be found where Fraizer states (Page 195),

"I'm not arguing for no government at all, but only for none of the existing forms. *We want a government based on a science of human behavior.*"

At page 267, in reply to Castle's question, "Why not elect (the experts)," Frazier states,

"For a very simple reason. The people are in no position to evaluate experts."

At page 270 Castle argues that the people should at least have a voice in matters relating to constitutional changes. Frazier answers as follows:

"You're still thinking about government *by* the people. Get that out of your head. The people are in no better position to change the constitution than to decide upon current practices." (emphasis supplied)

At pages 269 - 270, Frazier offers further comment on the democratic method of government:

"Most of the people of Walden Two take no active part in running the government. And they don't want an active part. The urge to have a say in how the country should be

run is a recent thing. It was not part of early democracy. The original victory over tyranny was a constitutional guarantee of personal rights, including the right to protest if conditions were not satisfactory. But the business of ruling was left to somebody else. Nowadays, everybody fancies himself an expert in government and wants to have a say. Let's hope it's a temporary cultural pattern. . . In Walden Two no one worries about government except the few to whom that worry has been assigned. To suggest that everyone should take an interest would seem as fantastic as to suggest that everyone should become familiar with our Diesel engines."

At page 273, Frazier continues as follows:

"But the triumph of democracy doesn't mean it's the best government. It was merely better in a contest with a conspicuously bad one. *Let's not stop with democracy*. It isn't, and can't be, the best form of government, because it's based on a scientifically invalid conception of man." (emphasis added)

As a method of government, then, democracy is subject to replacement by a better method. Elsewhere Skinner has returned to this same theme:

No matter how effective we judge current democratic practices to be, how highly we value them or how long we expect them to survive, they are almost certainly not the *final* form of government (Skinner, 1972).

Elsewhere Skinner has also endorsed science as a means by which a better form of government may be devised:

It has been argued that it was the well-governed city-state which suggested to the Greeks that the universe itself might show law and order and that in their search for the laws that governed it they laid the foundations of modern science. The problems of government have grown more difficult, and no modern state is likely to be taken as a model of a lawful system. It is possible that science may now repay its debt and restore order to human affairs. (Skinner, 1969).

So much, then, for the "major flaw" in my "proposed scientocracy" in which "government is conducted, not by laymen unschooled in social planning and management, but by specialists in the science of governing." If my argument is flawed, then so also is Skinner's, and I may console myself with the thought of having joined such distinguished company.

#### *Behavior Design: Science Versus Lay Wisdom*

It is perhaps astonishing that a professed behaviorist would show so little confidence in the scientific method. It is true that science can supply no final answers or absolute certainties. It is also true that where the empirical evidence produced by science ends, guesswork begins. Even so, the accomplishments of science and scientific technology are staggering. But the decisive argument in favor of science is simply this: *What else do we have?* The innate wisdom of the common man? No. It is science or nothing.

Edleson notwithstanding, science is capable of discovering facts, including facts about the consequences of particular forms of behavior. In the essay which forms the object of the present controversy, I quoted at length from the writings of Skinner on the issue of behavior design. Two quotations seem especially pertinent in the present discussion.

Why not experiment? The questions are simple enough. What's the best behavior for the individual so far as the group is concerned? And how can the individual be induced to behave in that way? Why not explore these questions in a scientific spirit?

A science that clarifies (the relation between behavior and its deferred consequences) is in the best possible position to specify a better world in an ethical or moral sense.

This language forms part of the basis of my discussion on behavior design. Facts about the relations between behavior and its deferred consequences are facts about cause and effect relations in the natural world. The business of science is to discover these very kinds of facts. These are the kinds of facts we need for designing behavior and, by implication, for constructing a behavior code. Edleson, however, disagrees.

Nicolaus has condemned democracy as a "polling of a general opinion" about the relations between behavior and its consequences. Such a definition is accurate but not a weakness. To the contrary, the strength of participatory democracy is this decision making process.

This statement is prejudiced by the effects of traditional democratic teaching. The "innate wisdom" of the common man is a dangerous substitute for the empirical evidence that is discovered in the course of a scientific analysis.

The matter may be clarified by viewing it in widest perspective. This may be done by noting that the design of behavior is not confined to the kinds of conduct traditionally called "moral" or "ethical." I tried to make this clear when I stated,

(A) program aimed at discovering the most effective ways for people to behave in order to live together successfully is in principle no way different from a program aimed at discovering the most effective ways for people to behave in order to construct houses successfully, to raise crops successfully, to successfully achieve and maintain optimum health, or to successfully control their own and each other's behavior. What we call morals or ethics, then, is simply a special case of the general tendency of all living organisms to learn ways of adapting or adjusting successfully to the conditions of their environment — in this case, the conditions of their social environment. In all cases, success is judged by appealing to the consequences or effects that arise from the particular action taken.

If we were to apply the democratic method consistently, we would trust to the wisdom of the layman for deciding specifications of behavior not only in respect to promoting successful group living, but also in respect to promoting the successful construction of houses, the successful raising of crops, the successful maintenance of health, and so on. This, of course, is absurd. The design of behavior in respect to any special goal is the task of the relevant specialist.

The lesson, then, is simply stated. Designing behavior that will produce the most reinforcing effects is a problem of many dimensions, and it can only be intelligently solved by an empirical analysis of each case. And since science is the most effective method for conducting an empirical analysis, the design of behavior needs to be based on science.

The design of behavior on the basis of facts does raise a difficulty, but it is not the difficulty cited by Edleson. The difficulty is that some facts are unwelcome, since they point to the dangers of reinforcers to which many people are accustomed. The use of hostile evidence in designing a behavior code may incite protest. But to acknowledge the ethical legitimacy of this protest would be a serious mistake, for it would permit the reinforcing environment to be designed by chance and prejudice. This is what happens when the democratic method is used to design the behavior — and hence the environment — of a group of people. As we have noted in different terms, the reinforcement histories of laymen are a dangerous substitute for a scientific analysis of the relations between behavior and its remote reinforcing effects.

Unwelcome facts are not difficult to imagine. An analysis of drug - using behavior, for example, might lead to factual statements about its ultimate disadvantages for the behaving individual, for other individuals, and for the future of the group. The elimination of the use of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, marijuana and so on would then be indicated. This would present no problem for members of a new generation, since these reinforcers need never appear in their environment. They would simply never be exposed to the reinforcing effects of drugs, and thus they would never develop a "need" or "want" for them. The same would hold for worthless or dangerous foodstuffs — such as refined carbohydrates that are linked to tooth decay, obesity, and other metabolic disorders. If people were never subjected to the reinforcing effects of dangerous food, their behavior would never come under its control.

The real problem arises when the human products of a bad cultural design are brought into contact with a well - designed culture. Their reinforcement histories have accustomed them to one way of life, while the new contingencies demand quite another. This leaves them unprepared for a substantial ethical advance. As a result, the new pattern, however superior, may appear objectionable in the extreme. Because many customary reinforcers are missing, they may insist that the new design omits the "important things in life." There is nothing surprising in this, for it simply demonstrates the expected power of earlier contingencies. It also demonstrates the inadequacy of lay wisdom.

What may be surprising, however, is when apparently educated people take a liberal view of the matter. A cannibal may find a diet of beef steak unexciting, but we are not likely to adopt a permissive attitude in the matter of his preferred menu. The example may seem strained, but this is only because the aversive effects of cannibalism are immediate and conspicuous. But as science makes all the remote effects of behavior similarly conspicuous, it may require only a modest extension of this point to recognize the need for changing men who are products of bad design. To make a better design acceptable, a different personal history is required. Once science has supplied a behavior code based on facts, the task of behavior technology will be to reconstruct personal histories. In matters of moral priority, this course must be adopted for remedying the products of a prior design.

People are capable of being reinforced and hence controlled in many different ways, and the greatest mistake is to allow the reinforcing or controlling environment to remain the product of accident and bias. Questions that arise when constructing a behavior code cannot be answered by appealing to what is *currently* reinforcing, for this would embrace most of the accidental and biased contingencies to which we have been led to object. Capitalist practice has in great measure designed the reinforcers which control people in our society, and these same people defend those reinforcers through democratic practice. The first step in breaking with the liberal design is to recognize that all ethical questions are empirical questions which need to be answered by a scientifically conducted empirical analysis. To defend the wisdom, native or acquired, of the common man and the method of democracy is to defend the theory and practice of an earlier design which is now dangerously obsolete.

A scientifically consistent behaviorist program may be summarized in a single sentence: A scientific behavior code, implemented by a scientific behavior technology, forms the indispensable moral or ethical basis for controlling the use of all technology — physical, biological, and behavioral. This, and not some extrascientific conception of participatory democracy, is the next intelligent step in the evolution of government.

### Conclusion

Perhaps no claim will more thoroughly arouse men of the liberal - democratic tradition than the claim that the democratic method of government can almost certainly be replaced by a better method. Skinner has made this claim, and in so doing he has trod on the hoof of a sacred cow. This is abundantly shown by the liberal - democratic response to *Walden Two*.

Edleson, I suspect, represents a special case. His commitment to democracy, I think, ultimately stems from a deep concern for the *problem of countercontrol*. He fears that behavior will be designed, not for the good of the group, but for the good of the designer -- the lawmaker, the governor, the controller. I share this concern and this fear. But the problem of countercontrol cannot be effectively solved by democracy, participatory or otherwise. A much more plausible solution is the Planner - Manager method described by Skinner in *Walden Two*.

In the last analysis, however, the issue will not be decided from our armchairs. Nor will it be decided by "rational discussion" followed by "majority vote." Neither will it be decided by force of arms -- by "blood and iron" in accordance with the Bismarckian formula. *The issue can only be decided by actual*

*experiment in a pilot community*. We need to experiment to discover the best cultural practices, including the best governmental practices, for promoting the common good. This, I believe, is the most important lesson of *Walden Two*.

### Note

Specific page references are from B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, 1948 edition.

### References

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