



## Walden Two

*B.F. Skinner*

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This fictional outline of a modern utopia has been a center of controversy since its publication in 1948. Set in the United States, it pictures a society in which human problems are solved by a scientific technology of human conduct.

## **Walden Two Details**

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Author : B.F. Skinner

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## From Reader Review Walden Two for online ebook

### Thomas Strömquist says

DNF @ 25 %

A horrible experience. I started out wondering why the professor (not going back to look up his name) was so hostile and testy towards Frazier, the architect behind the meant-to-be utopia, Walden Two. Some pages later, I wanted to punch him in the face myself. You realise pretty early on that this is not a novel at all, but merely a framework for an odd philosophy, delivered as dialogue, and in the most patronising and self-righteous way. When I started having more than one objection, reservation or question per sentence, I knew this work and I had to go separate ways.

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### Jonathan says

My psychology professor informed us that Skinner at first intended to be a writer. I think the world is blessed in many ways that he changed his mind. My review of the novel (one star) is due to judging it as a work of literature, which is how he wrote it. It sucks. What he should have done was put forth a pamphlet of about 30 pages called "The Walden Two Manifesto" and described the construction, regulation, behavioral principals, etc, that make up the community. Lots of very interesting, progressive, creative, and - best of all - feasible ideas. He thought he could make a demonstration of the feasibility through literary exposition, and failed miserably. There's actually a decent amount we could learn from his ideas, if only they weren't trapped inside atrocious writing.

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### Avery says

Walden Two by B.F. Skinner is one of those books that you, at the same time, love and hate. Personally, I thought that the idea was a ridiculously interesting concept in and of itself, and Skinner made a valiant attempt to implement it in a fictional novel, but ended up with a pile of literary shit powdered with intellectual diamond dust. I'm sure that both parts of my analogy can easily be explained; Skinner is a Psychologist and not a creative writer. I have to say, I think I liked the book but the story telling was extremely formulaic, bland and just outright boring most of the time. I still want to finish it but don't know if I can bring myself to do it.

The story, which was written shortly after World War II, follows a college professor, and a group of unlikely companions, in modern (1950's) America who end up touring a small rural commune for two weeks. Skinner illustrates his controversial utopian society in which a planned economy, social engineering, arts, leisure, and community loyalty are stressed, and democracy and the value of a full workday among other things are rejected. The problem I had with the characters is that the 3 characters that had the majority of dialogue were too polarized; there was the protagonist (Prof. Burris) who started out as indifferent and slowly became partial to Walden two, and then there was Prof. Castle, who's role throughout the whole book was to challenge Frazier and Burris, and who frequently accompanied Burris, and then there was Frazier, the leader and founder of Walden Two, who emulated Skinner.

The book isn't entirely without merit though, the actual commune was insanely well thought out. Through a point system for jobs rather than currency, and a series of other improvements of efficiency for numerous tasks, and social engineering, members only work an average of 4 hours a day, and the community focuses on arts, while maintaining self dependency.

Although I still never finished the book, because of it's bland writing style, slow pace, and formulaic, predictable nature, I would still recommend it as at least worthwhile even if it doesn't have any other redeeming qualities. I still want to finish it myself, but don't know if I will, unless of course I have to for school.

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### **Laurent says**

Though I usually wait a few days before reviewing a book to properly let it steep in my murky mind, I could not wait to get my hands inky with *Walden Two*.

B.F. Skinner, a figure somewhat reminiscent of the incredibly talented and wonderfully intelligent Aldous Huxley, was a pioneer of Behaviourism: the position that **all** human behaviour is shaped and defined by a certain set of sociopolitical, economic, cultural and genetic factors. We could consider the science of behaviour the final blow to the postulations of the likes of Hobbes and Locke regarding our state of nature — the assertion: there is no state of nature, merely a conditioned behaviour. The novel ultimately upholds, as well behaviourism, determinism.

I am almost ashamed to say that I have not yet touched Skinner's academic works, yet I believe *Walden Two* to be a synthesis of sorts, of his research, the final compression of the behaviourist view into Skinner's hopes regarding its application and influence.

*Walden Two* depicts a society governed by these behaviourist principles — not a brave new world imagined by the likes of Orwell, Huxley and Bradbury — but a utopia encompassing the 'Good Life' sought after by philosophers as far back as Seneca. I will not go into lengthy details of its functioning except to say this: Skinner manages to masterfully challenge the widespread belief in democracy and instead offers the image of a 'good' despot, an invisible dictator whose power decreases the more he exercises it. This is but one of the myriad interesting ideas included in this account of what I can only take to be Skinner's dreams of a new, more functional take on Thoreau's social experiment, the original *Walden*.

We are all accustomed to dystopia, but over to you, discover for yourself a utopia that will leave you immersed in reflection long into the early hours of the morning.

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### **Nathan Titus says**

an appalling vision of a utopia. Unlike most utopia visions, however, this one is completely honest. It's not about making a "perfect society;" it's about controlling the members. The perfect society is both an effect of that cause and a tactic towards that goal. Create a society in which everyone is happy, and people will behave for the good of that society. their behavior will be engineered from day 1. and by day 1 I mean since

birth; infants are cared for by the community, and their physical environment, their external behavior, and their state of mind is carefully kept in line, monitored, and recorded. It's a vision of a society that is an extended experimental laboratory with all of humanity as the subject. TE Frazier, the author's alter ego, has set himself up as CS Lewis' "conditioner." (see *The Abolition of Man*.) In fact I can hear the words of one of CS Lewis' villains coming from Frasier: "Man will have to take charge of man. That means, of course that some men will have to take charge of others, which is a good reason to hop on the band wagon as soon as possible." (see *That Hideous Strength*.) Another person Frazier reminds me of is Elsworth Toohey. (see *The Fountainhead*.) At one point he straight up admits that he embraced selflessness, not because he believed in it as a moral ideal ( BF Skinner seems aware that there can be no morality without free will; to resolve this he treats morality as nonexistent, not even worthy of a discussion.) but because it is the only effective way of controlling others. "I'm the most selfless man you'll ever meet, Peter," says Toohey to one of his victims.

"You want me for what I help you with. I want want you for what I can do to you."

Even though this book was massively creepy, I give it five stars for being evil without pretension. The structure of the Walden Two society rests on a single axiom: that free will is an illusion, that we are all nothing but the sum of our conditioning. Therefore we may as well leave the conditioning in the hands of behavioral scientists, who will make it completely pleasant and also direct it to the noble goal of making society completely pleasant. In real life, Walden Two was a miserable failure. (check out the Twin Oaks "planned community.") With every aspect of their lives controlled, and with all the members disbelieving in free will, personal initiative, innovation, and intelligence went out the window. Rather than the automatic progress that Skinner and the soviet planners believed in, what the society experienced was stagnation, followed by regression. This book, and the real life experiment that copied it, proves the central thesis of my life correct. That thesis, of course, is that choice, free will, and individualism are the necessary and related sources of all human progress, all human joy, all betterment of human life, all human life, and all humanity. It's either freedom and prosperity, or control and stagnation. Make your choice.

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### **Kaitlynn says**

This book has two target audiences, really, and the quality varies strongly depending on where you fall.

As a fiction reader, this book falls short in so many, many ways. Characters are merely loudspeakers for the author, going so far as to be named after him. Most characters, while having distinct viewpoints and personalities, are one-dimensional. There is no discernible plot whatsoever. And I mean none. The plot is the same as a virtual tour on an apartment website. As this is a novel of a utopia, the flavor is bland. Everything is perfect for the residents of Walden Two. You almost resent them. I was bored, despite the brisk pace.

As a behavior analyst, this novel is almost pornographic. This novel is Skinner's dreamworld, a perfect application of successful behavior analysis to a voluntary community of a variety of educated persons. Its moving. Its beautiful. It is almost overwhelmingly optimistic and positive. It even supplies research ideas.

If you are a behavior analyst, you've probably read this already.

If you are someone with a passing interest in aba and an open mind, give it a whirl.

For anyone else, please, stay away. For your own sake.

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### **Melissa says**

I have to say that I find it funny how often the user reviews call Walden Two "boring." I get as bored reading a philosophical treatise as the next person, but Walden Two is actually easy and engaging to read. It's even funny in the little ways the narrator mocks the hero Fraser as well as the daft intellectual Castle. Skinner has this great way of describing when conversation is awkward, or when people misunderstand each other in little ways, or when a person's ego is showing. I mean, ok, it's not exactly a rollicking romp of a book - it's a conversational back-and-forth that celebrates living in a way that uses pragmatic and scientifically-grounded solutions to the problems of living in a society instead of adhering to a set of principles that are unlikely to result in a life that produces maximum happiness and satisfaction. Yes, Skinner's book advocates for behaviorist approaches to fixing society's problems, and it's got some air crib usage in it, if that's what you signed up for. I recommend it.

And, you know, if you were bored reading it, it's too bad you don't live in Walden Two, where you could just say, "This is boring to me," and everyone would be totally cool with that.

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### **Ieva says**

2/3 knygos buvo ?domu skaityti. Knyga sukelia klausim? ir norisi diskutuoti. Tai jos stipryb?. Visgi, po grupinio k?diki? auginimo atskirose patalp?l?se, siekiant, kad jie neprisirišt? prie vieno suaugusiojo, aprašymo knyga visai nebeatrod? utopiška. ?ia kaip nesuprasti esminio gyvenimo d?snio. Šiai laikais tiesiog ne?tik?tina (atrodo, kad visi bent kiek psichologiškai apsišviet? suprantame, kaip svarbu k?dikiui prisirišt? prie saugaus suaugusiojo), o ir tais laikais, kai knyga buvo rašyta, turb?t buvo keista. Iš viso Voldeno gyvenimo aprašymo man labiausiai patiko darb? pasiskirstymas ir pastangos nepersidirbt? "Bet, po galais, juk aišku, kad žmon?s gali b?ti laimingi ir, "netur?dami, ko veikti" (citata). Nepaisant to, kad knygoje gyvenim? Antrojo Voldeno bendruomen?je bandoma pateikti kaip utopij?, skaitant ? galv? ateina mintis iš kito nemirštan?iai taiklaus k?rinio - "visgi vieni buvo lygesni už kitus".

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### **ddjiii says**

Walden Two was assigned to me by a professor who apparently thought Skinner's extremely half-baked notions of what would be a great society to live in had some value to us. I guess they did, because I had a great time writing as furiously sarcastic a review as I could (which I unfortunately can't find), but throughout the book I was astonished that a guy who clearly must have some brains, and who had devoted his life to the study of how people behave, could be so clueless about how they actually act. To cut the thing short, I thought Walden Two completely absurd as a model society from beginning to end. Skinner is looking for the same place as the rest of us, where we can all live freely, productively and with dignity, but he's hiking in the wrong direction and has tied his shoelaces together.

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### **Jessaka says**

I remember liking this book in college and had to read it for a class I took. After reading it we had to write a term paper on what we considered a utopian society. Back in the early 70s I was interested in communes, but I doubt if any lasted due to problems within the commune. All I remember about this book is that the people changed their jobs from one day to the next so they wouldn't become bored.

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## Erik Graff says

I don't much like B.F. Skinner's radical behaviorism, but I enjoyed his novel, *Walden Two*, assigned by Professor Alan Jones for his seminar, "Utopia and Society", at Grinnell College. My appreciation may have been exaggerated by having just read More's *Utopia* and Zamyatin's *We*, neither of which were easy reading, More because of my ignorance of his times, Zamyatin because of the turgidity of the translation. Compared to them, Skinner was a breeze, his book a pleasure.

Behaviorism began in Germany as a movement in psychology which eschewed occult inner states for testable, objective factors. Originally, this included medical reference to the human organism and, specifically, to neurology. Skinner went a step further, confining himself to gross, public behaviors. This made more sense, of course, in his time when neuroscience was in its infancy.

The problem people have with Skinner is that we all live out of our inner states, the volitional part of which involves the moral dimension of our lives, our choices and decisions. Skinner seems to take that away and, with it, our worth, substituting the spectre of social manipulation and conditioning. That certainly is reason to approach him and his ilk with caution. The point of this critique is less that they are wrong, scientifically speaking, but that they might be right enough to significantly succeed.

But the critique goes deeper than this. There is, in fact, no occult inner life. The personal ego is a fiction. Everything we experience, whether or not primarily referred to public phenomena under ideal observational conditions, is public in the sense that its meaning and signification is accessible by reference to our shared languages, broadly defined to include all forms of semiotic and symbolic expression. The self, the ego, is a linguistic construct with primary reference, in our culture at least, to individual human bodies. If there is such a thing as a truly private, personal experience unmediated by public languages, we cannot express it--indeed, we cannot even know it. This is not to say that there is nothing more or less private, just that even our most private experiences gain whatever meaning they have by reference to the public phenomena of language. One might keep a secret forever, but one could also tell of it and others can understand.

The issue, then, is the manipulation of persons, preferencing ideal observational conditions and the creation of these conditions at the expense of human autonomy and volition.

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## Megan says

One time, I threw this book out a window. That should probably tell you how much I detest it. It was required reading for a class, and I fully acknowledge that this "review" is basically just venting the resentment and bafflement that still lingers.

Part of my ire is that *Walden Two* is presented as a novel (albeit blandly written with no care for depth of characters, emotions, or plot), and man, do I as a reader detest poorly-written fiction that's ultimately trying to argue something. (Well-written fiction that tries to argue something? I fully approve! Check out Derrick Bell's *Faces From the Bottom of the Well* for a golden example.) Storytelling-as-a-way-of-teaching-or-explaining is an ancient tradition. I'm all for it! But you have to have a good story for it to work. There's no story here, so it just felt useless and manipulative to me to have Skinner present his argument in a story form.

Not being able to point out the flaws in his arguments (and having to witness straw man arguments representing the opposition) made this a frustrating read. Being that I was a woman of color reading this in the year 2003, so much about this book felt irrelevant to the world I live in. You know, the world where women are not just men with ovaries, where I wouldn't trust a privileged white man in power to assure me that everyone is equal because race is irrelevant, and where heteronormativity is toxic and actively critiqued. Just in regard to reproductive issues: oh, after giving birth to four children, a 23-year-old woman still enjoys both youthful "body and spirit"? OH REALLY? A woman's body doesn't change irrevocably with pregnancy? That having given birth multiple times might not have changed how she relates sexually to her partner, or how she relates to her own body? Pregnancy complications don't affect a woman mentally? Sure, some of this might be culturally conditioned, but most of it, I suspect not.

Two cheers for Skinner for being able to imagine a community where no child goes unloved or hungry, where people are more than commodities or workers. I want a world like that too. But *Walden Two* is just flimsy, and yeah, I value democracy and individualism and have not been convinced that those values are the root of catastrophic failure in our society.

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### **Charly Flores says**

Me encantó.

Una maravillosa novela que te pone a pensar, objetar, y que sin duda te dará mucho de que hablar.

Obviamente el contexto es medianamente diferente a la sociedad actual ya que fue escrito en (si no me equivoco) 1948. Lo cual, en contraste con *1984*, de ese mismo año, causó una gran polémica, dejando a las personas a una opinión contraria unas de otras.

¿Extremista? Sí ¿Egoísta? Tal vez.

Una novela que disfrutarás ya que se lee fácilmente pero que en contraste querrás volver a leer con mayor detenimiento.

La recomiendo muchísimo. Yo la leí por que uno de mis géneros literarios favoritos son las *distopías* y por ello pensé ¿por qué jamás he leído una utopía? y me lancé al reto. La verdad valió la pena. Y como llevaba tiempo pensando en lo extraño que era que se escribiera tan fácil sobre destrucción, maldad y egoísmo... pues que contraste que te da.

También en tema de *utopía contra distopía* recomiendo la película "Tomorrowland", aunque es una recomendación muy personal pero me gustó, aparte de que entra en el contexto de ¿por qué es tan fácil escribir sobre destrucción, maldad, etc.? Y pues ya...

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### **Joe says**

'It's all one big debate. That's my problem.' Jim said as he and I crested the hill. 'The characters just go back and forth debating the merits of *Walden Two*'s behaviorist society. So while there are basic story elements; characters, setting and so forth, it's not really much of a novel.'

'Would you rather Skinner wrote an essay; An Outline for Utopia, or something like that?' Kara replied as she joined us on top of the hill. 'Would that have made him more persuasive?'

'Oh, no no.' Jim said and laughed. 'Walden Two is certainly readable; we all breezed through it in a couple days. The problem is the debate can't go anywhere... I could go on for a bit.'

Kara smiled but wasn't about to grant permission for Jim to dominate the conversation. As usual I felt a little more permissive. 'Proceed with your screed.' I said.

'Well, so most of the debate centers on Frazier vs. Castle right? Frazier represents Skinner's behaviorist model.'

'And perhaps Skinner himself.' I added.

'Yes, perhaps.' Jim said 'Anyway, Castle represents more conventional philosophical thought and he's constantly searching for holes in the Walden Two model, or ethical issues, or potential future problems and whatnot. "Don't you run into problems with human ambition? Isn't it unethical to condition children from such an early age? Does such extreme egalitarianism stifle genius?" That sort of thing.'

Jim paused for breath. I glanced at Kara, who wore a look of patience. Jim continued:

'And these are worthwhile questions; but Skinner wins the argument every time, he always holds the hammer. Walden Two, in the book, works flawlessly; everyone is happy, productive and creatively engaged. You can't complain "but what about potential problems x, y and z" when everything you witness runs so perfectly. Castle's criticisms come of as petty and blind in the book.'

'Well, Skinner clearly believes in these ideas...' I said uncertainly, more to inject a little conversation than as a counterpoint.

'Sure. Sure.' Jim said. 'But you can't just say "look at how well my ideas work in fantasy land. Don't you want to see them applied to the real world?" That's not persuasive; that's assuming your argument.'

Jim put his hands on his hips and stared toward the sunset. It was mid-fall and quite cool. A visible shiver ran through Kara and she turned to head back toward the university. I joined her and Jim jogged to catch up after several seconds of gazing into the horizon.

'I think' Kara said, starting slowly to soften her rebuttal 'that Skinner's message lies not so much in the efficacy of his fictionalized results, but in the train of logic that led there. Take, for instance, the painstakingly Socratic method by which he explains the time-saving benefits of Walden Two's work-scheduling; how eight-hour days could be cut to four-hour days through basic theories about motivation and efficiency.'

'Well, yes.' Jim replied 'Skinner argued that part thoroughly. And I must admit that the prospect of a 20-hour work week tempts me fiercely. But none of Skinner's other arguments are as rigorously logical and he usually leaps past the point where the basic, nuts-and-bolts planning happens and that's the trickiest part. We never even meat the planning committee much less see it in operation.'

'True.' Kara said. 'But you wouldn't fault a Science-fiction writer for not personally inventing inter-galactic transportation or designing a real-world functional space-ship. Take the insightful parts of Walden Two and

don't dock Skinner so hard for not reinventing society. Take his description of an egalitarian community that treats men and women as equals in work, care-giving and authority. Take the notion that we'd all be happier if we could let go of our acquisitiveness. Take the notion that, while talent matters, we all work best when we develop everyone's skills and deemphasize 'genius.' These are the sorts of things our society hasn't fully come to grips with yet, but the more we study them the more we find wisdom in this line of thought. And he was writing about this in the forties.'

'What stuck out to me.' I interjected 'was when he talked about the multitude of unused books most universities have.' I pointed towards our own university's library; six stories high and glimmering white. 'I think that sucker could be half the size and nobody would even notice.'

We all laughed. It felt good to produce a useful point while also relieving tension. Jim was still smiling when he said 'I appreciated the part when he described the value of physical work for even the most scholarly individuals. I often feel primed to write after some light exercise. Ghandi was big on that idea.'

'Carl Sagan too.' Kara replied.

'Oh yes.' Jim said. 'But not everything Skinner talks about makes sense. Take that part about his advanced teacups with the bucket-like handles. What was that about? Sure, teacups are normally made with style emphasized over functionality, but why not just a simple plastic cup? If you carried your cup around using a handle, not only would you look like a fool, but you'd have to switch hands every time you wanted to take a drink. Completely impractical.'

We all laughed again, and Kara added. 'Are we agreed then? *Walden Two* is a readable novel and Skinner makes several insightful points.'

'Just keep him away from the tea!' I said.

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### Thomas says

*Walden Two* contains no plot, clumsy writing, and characters that serve as nothing more than mouthpieces for B.F. Skinner, our author. That being said, if you want an intellectual exploration of a Utopian world ruled by behaviorism, this book may be for you. Skinner proposes many thought-provoking questions in *Walden Two*: what if we strove to eliminate class differences so that everyone could work in equal measure? What if we used positive reinforcement to reward people for their good behaviors instead of punishing them for their bad ones? What if we trained everyone in our society to let scientific principles guide their actions? I think about these questions and the shortcomings of arguments about "free will" all the time. Yes, a woman may feel empowered and independent when she puts on makeup, but until she can walk into a job interview without makeup and have an equal shot at the position as a man would, is it truly free will? Or is it conforming to standards of appearance put forth by the patriarchy? Or both? Similarly, people who complain about firearm restrictions say that those laws would infringe upon their free will. But is it really free will if their behaviors and attachments surrounding guns are governed by a society that encourages aggression and toxic masculinity? *Walden Two* may not address all of these issues related to our society today, but the intellectual rigor of its contents calls on readers to connect its ideas to how we function in the contemporary world, unruly and awful president-elects and all.

Overall, a decent read unless you want plot or character development. *Walden Two* is an intellectual treatise

disguised as a novel. Once you know that, feel free to take it or leave it.

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### **Stephen says**

2.0 to 2.5 stars. Better as a review of Skinner's scientific theories than as an actual novel, this "utopian" novel deals with an experimental community based on solving problems via application of the scientific method. It has been a while since I read this and I may re-read this at some point to see if my opinion has changed.

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### **Melissa Robinson says**

Walden Two earns four stars not for its literary value (it's not terribly well written or compelling only as a story), but for the thought provoking social science concepts it raises. Intellectual stimulation earns it a place on my great books list.

The concept of behavioral engineering is both repulsive and intriguing to me. The line between behavioral engineering and brainwashing is just too fine. I have enough Professor Castle in me to balk at the ideas that freedom is nonexistent and democracy a terrible form of government. At the same time, I cannot disregard the idea that we are already being "behaviorally engineered" by our current educational, governmental and (most concerning to me) corporate interests.

The community aspect, the sustainability options it presents, the idea that labor can be minimized and "leisure" maximized and the overall picture of a peaceful, productive and happy community with true equality might be enough to compel me to sign onto the Walden Code. What I find interesting (and relieving) is that a community, Twin Oaks, exists that was founded on the principals of Walden Two. Twin Oaks, has however, abandoned the Skinner's behavioral engineering and instituted a form of democratic governance. Could that be the best of both worlds?

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### **Bruce says**

When I think of stories about utopian societies -- Brave New World, 1984, The Time Machine, and Gattaca for example -- I really think of a genre that sends up a *dystopia* as a means of satire. It's like a subgenre of mystery, with a well-worn formula. The protagonist introduces us to an 'ideal' world whose darker implications are only later revealed (the mystery lies in the discovery of what these implications really are). In the end, the protagonist has either escaped, been co-opted or killed, or brought the system crashing down. I began Walden Two expecting the genre to be followed but gradually grew disillusioned as I waited for the shoe which never dropped. Instead, the protagonist (a psychologist) decides the utopians were right all along and sets off to join them. Say what you like about B.F. Skinner, he's an original thinker.

That's right, this is a novel by the behavioral scientist B.F. Skinner, inventor of the notorious Skinner Box (an insidious device that had rats atavistically slapping the button of their own private automat like an OCD sufferer with a heroin addiction). Given the way his yarn spins out, I suppose this work can be considered Skinner's proposal to structure a similar behaviorist heaven-on-Earth for people. I didn't inject a spoiler into my first paragraph mind you... the point -- and fun -- of this book is solely the exposition of "Walden Two's"

outre social system.

This book has three major shortcomings: first, as a shill rather than foil for a proposed social system, Skinner's antagonists throw only straw arguments (or no arguments) at the feet of his fictional utopian hosts. For example, in a passage (p. 60) discussing how *Walden Two*'s enforced 4-hour work day equates to an 8-hour day elsewhere, Skinner's guide Frazier argues, "'When a man is working for himself instead of for a profit-taking boss... [w]aste is avoided, workmanship is better, deliberate slowdowns unheard of.... Do you agree?'" "'I should be contentious if I didn't,'" is the response. Teetotaler Skinner likewise seems incapable of conjuring a positive argument in favor of alcoholic beverages (though titillation, relaxation, and taste all come readily to my boozing mind).

A second major flaw resides in the book's datedness, reflecting the mores of 1948 when it was first published (either that, or else a sexist Skinner could not envision or embrace women's equality): "The women!... There's our greatest achievement! We have industrialized housewifery!... Some of our women are still engaged in activities which would have been part of their jobs as housewives, but they work more efficiently and happily." (p. 63) Later, the two women in the tour group are spirited off for a private tour of the things in which ladies (as opposed to gents) might presumably take an interest. Tough luck for them.

Finally, no one can lay claim to mastery of all subject matter, and Skinner's utopian schemes suffer where he proposes reforms to practices about which he appears ignorant. For all I know, there may be many such examples, but two that jumped out to me are his theories about child-rearing and artistic endeavor. Regarding the former, Skinner's surrogate community keeps babies in isolettes on plastic sheeting devoid of swaddle. "Clothing and blankets are really a great nuisance.... They keep the baby from exercising, they force it into uncomfortable postures -- When a baby graduates from our Lower Nursery,... it knows nothing of frustration, anxiety, or fear." (p. 98) Dr. Skinner stops short of dictating a specific SIDS-inducing posture, but he's no Dr. Spock. As for the arts, "There are only a few works of any importance which require more than forty-five minutes" (p. 86); "This [sic - the post-war era? the 20th century?] is not a great age in either art or music" (p. 88); "Leisure. Opportunity. Appreciation.... All you need [to create great art]" (p. 92, apparently accounting for hours of practice and development of both technique and audience but discounting inspiration, stimulation, etc.). I suppose Skinner's tastes must have been limited to short pellets of Scriabin... mechanically administered?

Two stars for interesting ideas here about the definitions of leisure and labor, government, marriage, sex, economics, pacifism, civic participation, and (especially) cultural norms of etiquette, all viewed through the (to Skinner, virtuous) lens of submission to appropriate behavior controls. *Walden Two* offers insight into the philosophy of its author. Despite Skinner's aspirations, (p. 316: "You must realize that some fool professor is going to assign [this] book as outside reading in a course in political science."), this book doesn't quite live up to the bar set by Thoreau. But it makes a fine bathroom browse.

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## **Jan Priddy says**

"We are only just beginning to understand the power of love because we are just beginning to understand the weakness of force and aggression."

B.F. Skinner asks if you knew how to manipulate people into living in an ideal society, wouldn't you do it? We are all products of our experiences and responses to societal conditioning. Wouldn't it be best if we

deliberately created a society that conditioned us to live harmoniously and happily?

If readers are looking for a conventional novel, there *is* a plot here, a beginning and middle and end. But that story is mostly beside the point.

The story is a thought experiment first conceived immediately after WW2. Here an academic psychologist Burris visits another psychologist, Frazier, taking with him a pair of veterans, their "girls," and a philosopher Castle, also an academic. The structure of visitors observing and interacting with members of a utopian community has been used many times. *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1907) is an earlier example. The visitors argue against the workability of a society that clearly is working just fine.

In 1970, my first term at the University of Washington, I took a psychology class taught by a recent retiree from the US Navy. The man was a behaviorist, of course, and had spent 20 years training porpoise to commit acts of war. I worked hard in that class, harder than was typical for an intro class. I read and wrote a paper about *Walden Two*. Mostly what I remembered was the clever way work was set up in this imagined utopia. Everyone had to do at least a little manual labor, but all work was chosen. Payment was in credits and each member of the community had to earn 4 credits per day. Some jobs such as cleaning out sewers earned more than a credit/hour. Some, such as working in a flower garden, earned less than one credit/hour. "Payment" was adjusted if more or fewer workers were needed than takers. I loved that system.

I also recall that the founder, Frazier, was not liked much but was tolerated in his utopia, and was actually not very good at following his own utopian guidelines.

There was a great deal I did not recall after all this time, and mostly that is because Skinner got so much wrong. He is wrong to remove children from one-on-one care by parents. He is wrong in the way he describes "teaching" young children to withstand frustration, and ironically he is wrong to underestimate the impact of "delayed gratification" as a necessary skill for adolescents and teenagers. I would have recognized some of this at the time since I was familiar that group-raising infants in the USSR had proven unsuccessful. Promoting childbearing by age 15 or 16 is *not* "much better" than waiting to have children when the body is mature. Child-bearing is not something to get out of the way while still a child. And since Skinner is squeamish about religion and extra-marital sex, he fails to address the issues that come with promoting marriage among very young teenagers.

"In a cooperative society there's no jealousy because there's no need for jealousy."

He insists there are no laws in *Walden Two*, yet there is a Code and violating the Code has consequences. That is law. His Managers and other officials are not government because government is irrelevant unless it is local. Citizens of *Walden Two* are told how to vote in local elections.

"The majority of people don't want to plan. They want to be free of the responsibility of planning. What they ask for is merely some assurance that they will be decently provided for. The rest is a day-to-day enjoyment of life. That's the explanation for your Father Divines; people naturally flock to anyone they can trust for the necessities of life... They are the backbone of a community—solid, trust-worthy, essential."

Skinner argues hard for his scientific approach and claims that his invented society is egalitarian about race and gender. What he refers to as "Girls" and women are supposed to be on an even footing, yet we have mostly all men everywhere in charge in this novel. There is a cheerful woman dentist. All the childcare givers are women, though he insists men help too. All the characters seem to be white, and all the girls are pretty—this is actually remarked upon early. Men are "caught" by women—an out of date notion about

marriage. ("The man chases the woman until she catches him.") The character Castle is said to be a strong debater, but he is a peevish straw man opponent here, often failing to make his point in arguing with Frazier. Frazier himself is set up as a failure to his own cause, which is probably the most compelling and realistic detail.

There is a great deal to argue with in specifics. I might wish he knew more about biology and anthropology, especially the latter. I am sorry he demeans history repeatedly as mere "entertainment", while freely referencing [Western European white] history to make his case. He is actively hostile to every other scientific field. That last is particularly unfortunate.

Yet I am still intrigued by his underlying question about a perfectible society, by his approach to labor, and his emphasis on cooperation rather than competition. He might have made a stronger case had he focused less on specifics such as his tea carrier and more on how humans have cooperated for millennia. He failed to see the population bomb coming and his setting this confrontation in an agrarian society during summer is a sort of naïve cheat that repeats in many discussions and debates between characters. Remove the favoritism of parents and their poor knowledge of scientific method, remove competition, use behavioral principles and there will be no envy or jealousy. Snap! Problem solved. (I can hear the whining from here.) I found myself repeatedly thinking that his daughter was fortunate that it was her mother who was the primary caregiver.

"In the summer of 1945, B. F. Skinner wrote *The Sun Is But a Morning Star*, a utopian novel he published in 1948 as *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1948). An impetus for the book arose over the course of a dinner conversation in the spring of 1945 with a friend whose son-in-law was stationed in the South Pacific as World War II was coming to an end. Skinner mused about what young people would do when the war was over. "What a shame," he said, "that they would abandon their crusading spirit and come back only to fall into the old lockstep American life—getting a job, marrying, renting an apartment, making a down payment on a car, having a child or two" (Skinner, 1979, p.292).

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"Skinner's utopian vision, then, was not about any of *Walden Two*'s practices, except one: experimentation. His vision was to search for and discover practices that maximized social justice and human well-being. This was Skinner's unique contribution to the utopian genre; it distinguishes *Walden Two* from all the others. As he later exhorted, "Regard no practice as immutable. Change and be ready to change again. Accept no eternal verity. Experiment" (Skinner, 1979, p.346).—B. F. "Skinner's Utopian Vision: Behind and Beyond *Walden Two*" by Deborah E Altus and Edward K Morris

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## Rose says

boring, sexist and dated

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