

swimming tank. Having lost “all hope of escape,” he wrote, they simply let themselves drown. This research grew out of public-health efforts to exterminate rats in urban areas, though Richter thought it might also help explain sudden death in humans suffering extreme shock or fear. Richter also found that diets lacking salt, protein, fat, and other nutrients triggered hungers for those substances; and he explored nerve pathways that control motor reflexes in different mammals. He also developed techniques to assess spinal damage in American soldiers wounded in World War II, based on skin resistance and perspiration.

The author or coauthor of some 250 scientific papers and two books, Richter continued his lab work into his nineties. He received honorary degrees from the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Pennsylvania, and was nominated for a Nobel Prize. When he died in 1988, at 94, he was eulogized as a giant in his field, or, more precisely, his fields—specialists in several disciplines now laud him as a founding father. As Schulkin suggests, Richter dedicated his long life to the pragmatic tradition of American inquiry exemplified by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

—Lynne Lamberg

Skinner’s Utopia

THE AUTHOR OF THIS INTERESTING but oddly structured book set out to find an experimental community that embodied the model depicted in B. F. Skinner’s novel *Walden Two* (1948). What she found were several mostly rural communities that tried, with every good intention and in a variety of ways, to institute a behaviorist way of life. But most failed. Even if they managed to survive, their success was almost a measure of the distance they had traveled from Skinner’s initial blueprint.

Skinner, a longtime professor of psychology at

Harvard University, developed his theory of behaviorism—the teaching and conditioning of human behavior through positive reinforcement—starting in the late 1930s, while at Indiana University. In *Walden Two*, he imagined a society founded on his theory of behavioral psychology. Although the theory’s outlines were clearest in the fictional Walden’s schools, which used positive reinforcement as an incentive to learn, the entire community was organized to stimulate the most cooperative and socially useful behavior.

Hilke Kuhlmann, an assistant professor of American studies at the University of Freiburg, Germany, opens with a critical exploration of Skinner’s novel and his later book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971). She reprises many familiar criticisms of behavioral psychology, but also adds some compelling notions about characters in *Walden Two*. She goes on to suggest that Skinner himself is to blame for the failure of many of the *Walden Two*-inspired experiments, in part because he never addressed such matters as the basically undemocratic nature of his planning system. Kuhlmann depicts Skinner as a social philosopher fascinated by the theory of community founding but uninterested in the reality. What she doesn’t explain is his novel’s odd reception: Published in 1948, it became popular only in the 1960s.

Kuhlmann talked with participants from a number of so-called intentional communities, primarily in the United States, and includes several of the interviews verbatim in an appendix that constitutes almost a third of the book. She provides capsule histories of many of the communities, recording their proximity to or drift from Skinner’s ideal. In the case of Los Horcones, a successful community in Mexico founded in 1973, she concludes that strong, charismatic leadership accounts for its longevity. Yet, in a curious footnote, she relates that her own hostility toward behaviorism prompted residents there to “break off all communication.” So her information remains incomplete.

The community given the most attention here is Twin Oaks, founded in 1968 in Charlottesville, Virginia. The history of Twin Oaks—the most successful and long-lived of the *Walden Two* commun-

LIVING WALDEN TWO:

B. F. Skinner’s Behaviorist Utopia and Experimental Communities.

By Hilke Kuhlmann.
Univ. of Illinois Press.
245 pp. \$35

ities—suggests that many of the novel's proposals are simply unworkable, including the behaviorist educational system and the elaborate work-credit arrangement. Kuhlmann asserts that Twin Oaks succeeded partly because its founders were willing to move away from Skinner's model, and partly because it developed a profitable business making hammocks. Most important, as the author discovered, the survival of Twin Oaks depends upon a consistently large turnover of members, which maintains newcomer enthusiasm for the communal experiment while preventing the institutionalization of discontent.

As an exploration of Skinnerian intentional communities, this account is a moderate success. The discussion of actual and defunct communities is informative, although more research on Los Horcones would have been welcome because it might have challenged the author's thesis that such experiments are virtually doomed to failure. Kuhlmann may be right in arguing that Skinner invented an unachievable Utopia. But that doesn't explain why we, as a society, continue to aspire to remote, planned communities that exist on the edges of Somewhere.

—James Gilbert

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Poet of the Psalms

IN JOSEPH HELLER'S 1984 NOVEL

God Knows, a wry first-person retelling of the life of King David, the monarch and psalmist quips that although no book of the Bible

is named after him, his story is the best one in there: "Moses has the Ten Commandments, it's true, but I've got much better lines."

These lines now find a deft interpreter in former U.S. poet laureate Robert Pinsky. Pinsky's own poetry, which can leap from one register of speech to another, experiments with the collisions, as he has put it, between "the worldly and the spiritual, the petty and the noble." An ear for such incongruities turns out to be just the sort of sensitivity needed to reimagine the life of David in this beautifully written book.

Pinsky observes that although we never get to see Achilles humbled by old age, for instance, or Lear in his youth, David's life, told mostly in 1 and 2 Samuel, comes to us complete. We see him as both handsome upstart shepherd and anguished old man, as "under-

THE LIFE OF DAVID.

By Robert Pinsky.
Schocken. 209 pp.
\$19.95

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