

B. F. Skinner



"The major problems of the world today can be solved only if we improve our understanding of human behavior"

Overview of Life

- Burrhus Frederic Skinner, better known as B. F. Skinner, was born in 1904 in Pennsylvania.
- After graduating from Hamilton College in 1926, he studied at Harvard University and got his masters in psychology in 1930 and his doctorate in 1931.
- Later he married Yvonne Blue and had two daughters.



Overview of Life Con't

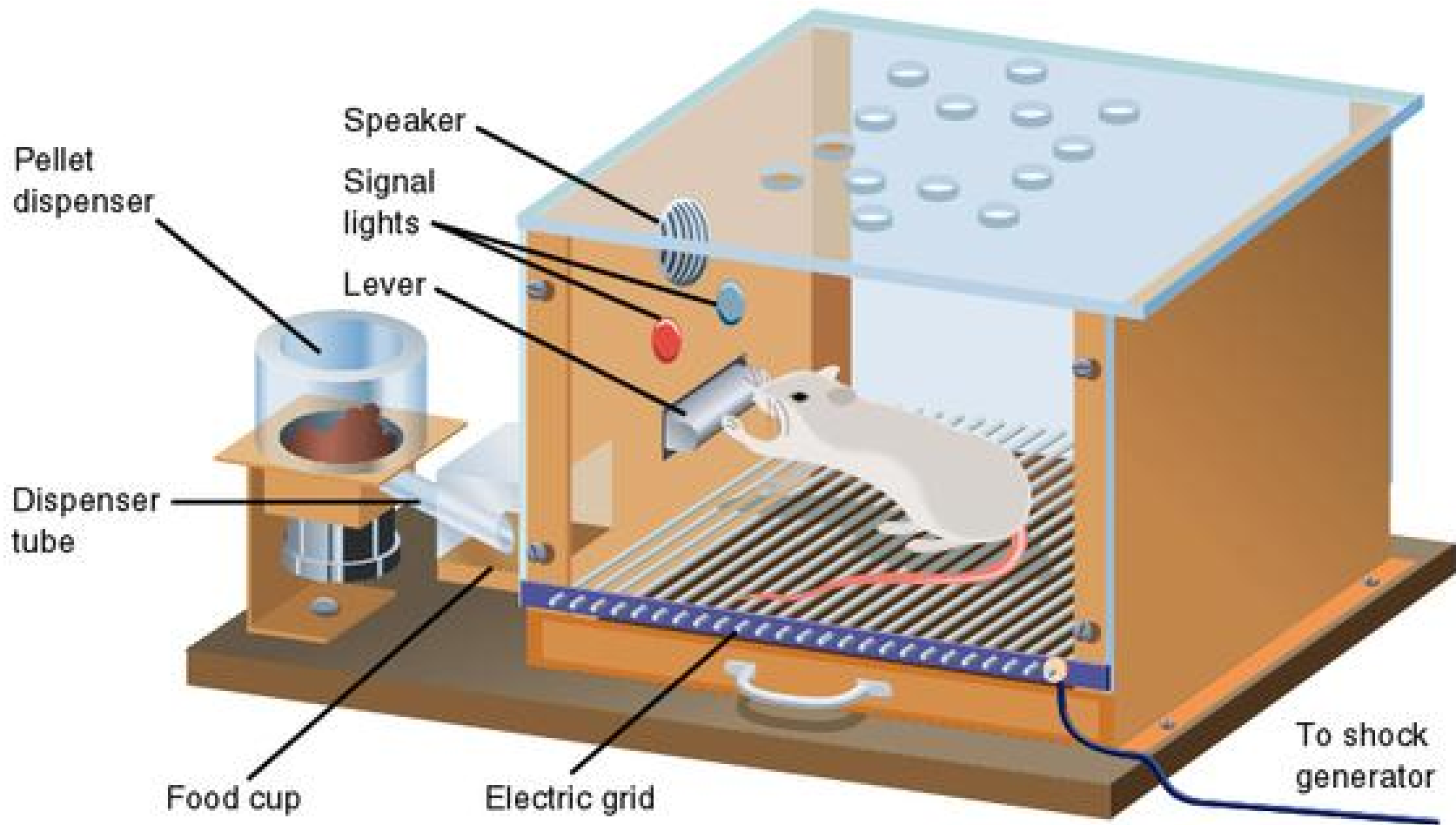


- He spent several years writing, teaching and researching at various universities before joining the Harvard faculty in 1948, where he remained for the rest of his life.
- He died on August 18, 1990 from leukemia.

Major Theory – Operant Conditioning

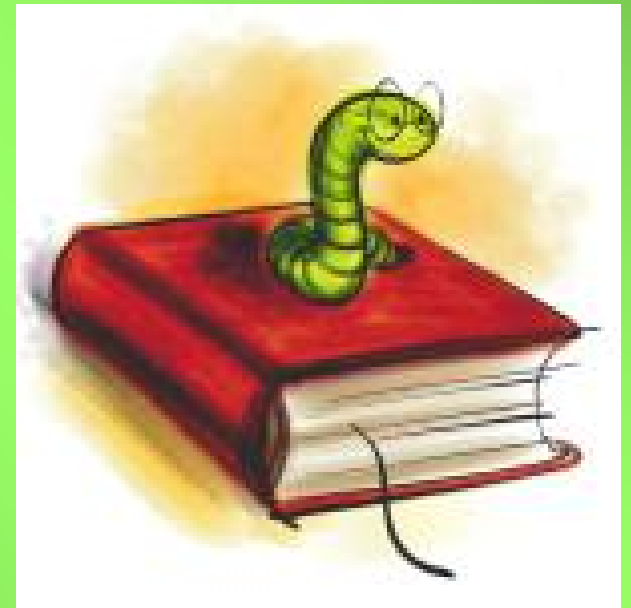
- The theory of operant conditioning is a type of associative learning based on stimulus-response behaviour.
- The reinforcing stimulus, also called the reinforcer, can be either positive or negative.
- A positive reinforcer is a pleasant stimulus rewarded immediately after the behaviour.
- A negative reinforcer is taking away an unpleasant stimulus.

Skinner Box



Contributions to Learning Theories

- Skinner also developed **programmed instruction**, in which learning material is presented in a sequence of small units that slowly increase with difficulty.
- He designed a teaching machine that presented students individually with questions to do, and feedback after each answer.
- It proved to be successful, as by the end, students were able to answer questions that they were unable to do in the beginning.



Interesting Facts!

- Skinner was inspired to develop programmed instruction while attending his daughter's grade four math class on Father's Day!
- Skinner was rumored to have conducted experiments on his second daughter when she was baby, by placing her in a Skinner Box. This however is untrue. Skinner was actually a loving father who designed an Air-Crib for his daughter.
- He received the first Citation for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Psychology by the American Psychological Association, only eight days before his death.

Application of Theory

- A simple example of applying operant conditioning is when training a dog to do a new trick.
- Operant conditioning can also be applied in institutions such as psychiatric hospitals, juvenile halls, and prisons. For example, prisoners may get a token everytime he/she behaves appropriately. These tokens can then be traded for things like cigarettes, games, movies, time out of the cell etc. However, if the prisoner behaves poorly the token is taken away.
- An example of programmed instruction, is instead of giving an entire tutorial with a quiz at the end, tutorials are broken down into steps and require feedback after each step in order to advance to the new level.

Conclusion



B. F. Skinner was an American psychologist, who had a great influence on the school of behaviorism, and his research and controversial publications had a powerful impact on teaching methods and the learning theory.