

Skinner's Early Documents on Verbal Behavior

When Skinner was working on the draft of *Verbal Behavior*, he occasionally taught classes on the subject at venues including Clark University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Chicago. He taught one such class during the summer term at Columbia University in 1947, at the invitation of Fred Keller. Ralph Hefferline, skilled in shorthand, took detailed notes of those classes. Mimeographed copies of these notes were distributed widely but were never published. An edited version of the **Hefferline Notes** is now available under this heading. Many passages are doubtless verbatim, but others are clearly just a summary. The expert will find in the notes a fresh perspective on the 1957 book as well as important passages that are unique to the notes.

In the fall of 1947, Skinner delivered the **William James Lectures** (now available under this heading) to the psychology and philosophy departments of Harvard University. The lectures are of particular historic interest because of their substantial divergence from the Hefferline Notes. For example, the term autoclitic does not appear in the Hefferline Notes: the concept is subsumed under a discussion of primary and secondary languages. Since the two sets of lectures were given just a few months apart, it is apparent that Skinner was waiting for the more prestigious forum to unveil his latest analysis. Much of the text of the William James Lectures appears unchanged in *Verbal Behavior*. Nevertheless, the Lectures repay study. Skinner's discussion of response strength and atomic repertoires is in some respects more complete than in the book itself. Moreover, the Lectures contain a historic gem found nowhere else in Skinner's writing: An explicit statement of the heart of the concept of joint control, anticipating Barry Lowenkron's analysis by four decades.

In 1945, Skinner published a landmark paper, drawn from his work on verbal behavior and recapitulated in the book 12 years later (Skinner, B. F. (1945). The operational analysis of psychological terms. *Psychological Review*, 52, 270-277, 291-294. Reprinted in every edition of *Cumulative Record* available from the B. F. Skinner Foundation www.bfskinner.org.) The paper, addresses the question of how a verbal community can teach speakers to describe private events. Skinner identifies four possible ways and points out that none of them permit very sharp stimulus control. Consequently, the language of self-description is commonly vague and metaphorical. Surprisingly, people know the external world (in the sense of being able to describe it precisely) better than they know themselves.