

MORAL EDUCATION

The central point of Skinner's Walden Two and Beyond Freedom and Dignity is that it is possible, nay necessary, to set up social environments in which man will want to be good. Whether this proposal ₁ for implementing such state of affairs are suitable, is a matter of great practical importance but of limited ethical interest: only social psychologists are equipped to tell us whether Skinner's proposals can work. What the moral philosopher is interested in knowing is whether Skinner's proposal is morally acceptable, particularly in view of the hostile reception Skinner got in the humanistic and literary circles. Indeed, he has been accused of wishing to establish a totalitarian society based on thought control, and he has been attacked in the name of freedom of thought. All this is sheer hi-

pocrisy, for, as Skinner's main scientific adversary has written,

"civilization depends on an all-pervasive thought control established in infancy, which both maintains and is maintained by the social environment, consisting of the behavior of the members of society. (...) We do not bring up children with open minds and then when they can reason, let them reason and make up their minds as they will concerning the acceptability of incest, the value of courtesy in social relations, or the desirability of democratic government. Instead we tell them what's what, and to the extent that we are successful as parents and teachers, we see that they take it and make it part of their mental processes, with no further need of policing" (Hebb 1961).