(In)Compatibilities Between the Rawlsian and Skinnerian Perspectives of Social Justice

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Abstract: Social justice is a controversial theme permeated by the dichotomy between social equality and economic equality. This paper attempted to explore contact and divergence points between the Skinnerian and Rawlsian societal models and their relation to justice. To this end, the two works, Theory of Justice as Fairness and Walden Two were used to characterize the structural contingencies prescribed by the authors in light of the constitutive elements of justice. Points of contact were identified regarding the adoption of ethical principles, i.e., a Conception of the Good that advocates human life as the ultimate end. Differences were observed regarding the appropriateness of justice. Unlike Rawls, Skinner conceived justice as a discourse to justify inequality and hide the social contingencies of control. The author defended an arrangement of structural contingencies that fostered economic and social equality as opposed to compensatory distributive criteria that legitimized and reverberated inequality. However, Skinner denied politics as the proper field for such changes. Finally, we highlight that the effective confrontation of inequalities is related to the struggle for a social transformation that results in a new political, economic, and social scenario.

Keywords: social justice, concealing inequality, radical behaviorism, social transformation.

The Federal Council of Psychology (CFP), to delimit the ethical-political commitment of Psychology, has adopted a position, explicitly in favor of promoting human rights and social justice. This position is justified by the interest in promoting psychologists' inclusion in different social spheres, from institutionalized to less organized spaces and to build strategies to face the relations of social and economic domination in cooperation with the community. The council draws attention to the recurring actions that violate human rights and the negligence towards situations of social inequality, a serious problem in the Brazilian scenario (CFP, 2011, 2016). But, after all, what does it mean to promote social justice? What practices are at stake and what model of society is under discussion in the search for social justice?

The answer to this question is not simple. Within the field of social and political sciences, the issue of social justice is controversial. The term acquires a polysemic character due to the different approaches that intend to define it, which sometimes present it as an institutional procedure related to formal justice, of material basis, and sometimes as an essential attribute of individual behavior related to ethics and morality, therefore of immaterial nature (Pizzio, 2016).

The imprecision of the term is further characterized by the scope of social justice. A profound dilemma is identified, qualified by the dichotomy between social equality (i.e., equal distribution of rights, freedoms, and opportunities within society) and economic equality (i.e., equal distribution of wealth and resources in society) (Arroyo, 2010, Azevedo, 2013; Barzotto, 2003; Fraser, 1995/2001, 2012, Junior, 2012, Pizzio, 2016). The debates about the role of social justice in the social conflicts and inequalities management have major impacts to the State[2] intervention in the promotion of public policies, which aim to maximally develop social equality and equity of opportunities (Pizzio, 2016).

The effects of these debates extend to the field of Psychology. Despite the CFP's efforts for a psychology committed to social justice, Bock (2016) drew attention to the fact that inequality is still ignored by Psychology as a determinant for the constitution of subjectivity, i.e., as a process that is built on concrete social relationships. The author pointed out that the reflection on inequality implies an analysis of distributive justice, i.e., a reflection on the practices of resource allocation and its effects on the population's quality of life and on the processes of subjectivation—a discussion not properly addressed by Psychology.

These initial considerations indicate that the characterization of social justice is a complex and arduous task, with direct implications to the practice of Psychology, particularly regarding the debate on equality and inequality in the distribution of social goods. That said, this paper attempted to characterize justice and its relation to egalitarian distribution from the Skinnerian and Rawlsian societal models.

To justify the current discussion, the merit of a comparison such as the one presented here, we point out that the problems faced by our contemporary societies require interdisciplinary thinking and out-of-the-box solutions. On the one hand, Rawls' theses are considered in this essay due to their unequivocal centrality in the field of political philosophy, in particular his political conception of justice, i.e., procedural foundations that support, to a greater or lesser extent, different legal systems, and characterizes it as one of the basic principles of liberal democracies (e.g., Brazilian Constitution of 1988) (Marques, & Sperling, 2012, Pizzio, 2016, Pinheiro, 2011).

The *Theory of Justice as Fairness* (Rawls, 1971) is one of the main current treaties on the procedural character of justice (i.e., the formulation and application of distributive criteria by controlling agencies). The author sought to promote an analysis of society guided by social justice, understood as the institution of rights in democratic regimes through the combination of two principles of justice: freedom and equality. These principles of justice are presented as criteria for regulating inequality, conceived as intrinsic within social dynamics (Rawls, 1971/1999, 1985).

Despite the undeniable contribution of the Ralwsian works to the political debate, especially regarding the principle of difference and its impact on the struggle of historically marginalized populations, the proposal has been the target of several interpretations and criticisms, ranging from its reformist position, i.e., the maintenance of the economic, cultural, and political determinants that produce the inequalities, to the criticism of representatives of liberalism on the denial of the role of merit and personal effort. For left-aligned critics, social justice attempts to reduce poverty and opportunity mismatches through social programs while promoting privatization and market deregulation. Equality cannot be achieved by contributing to the logic of labor exploitation and the land and income accumulation and concentration-exclusion (Arroyo, 2010; Fraser, 2012, 2017, Lizárraga, 2008). For example, according to the Oxfam report released in January 2023, for the first time in 25 years, extreme wealth and extreme poverty increased simultaneously. The 1% of the richest individuals in the world bagged nearly two-thirds of all wealth over the past two years, six times more money than 90% of the global population (7 billion people) earned in the same period. It was estimated that since 2020, each billionaire earned during the pandemic about US $1.7 million for every US $1 earned by a person in the poorest group. Billionaire fortunes are rising by $2.7 billion a day, while more than 800

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[2] In this essay, we depart from the concept of the State operationalized by Fernandes (2022), who defines it as a control agency due to its power to organize the contingencies under which citizens live.

million people have gone to bed hungry. In the last decade, this same 1% captured more than half of all new global wealth. The data represent the biggest increase in global inequality and the biggest lag in addressing global poverty since World War II (Oxfam, 2023).

Skinner's contributions are brought into the conversation due to his criticism of the traditional theses of freedom and dignity that, based on the concept of individual autonomy [autonomous man], sustain the justice discourses of liberal democracies, which obscure the relations of control and contribute to the maintenance of exploitation of human beings and nature (Skinner, 1971/1976; 1955/1999a, 1978abcef, 1987). In line with Skinner, Moore (2003) emphasized that Psychology's proposals for political action will not promote social justice as long as we focus on mentalistic explanations for discriminatory and oppressive practices.

In a remark on Rawls' work in his article entitled *The ethics of helping people*, Skinner (1978c) pointed out that the issue of being deprived of rights, i.e., of positive reinforcers, will not be solved by appealing to people's common sense, i.e., benevolent help from the rich. It is necessary to think about new social contingencies. In his novel, *Walden Two*, Skinner (1948/2005) presented a model of society in which the guarantee of material and socio-affective resources is the product of cooperative, sustainable, and solidary social contingencies. Although Skinner did not propose a theory of justice, certain theses advocated in *Walden Two* seem to reflect what the author meant by justice (Batista, 2018).

It is essential to point out that Skinner's societal proposals are often controversial, and part of the related literature considers him someone whose positions on the matter lies between a utopian socialist project and a technocratic project (Lopes, 2015; Ulman, 1978; Rutherford, 2017), not to mention misinformed interpretations that accused him of right-wing authoritarian tendencies (e.g., Chomsky, 1971). However, throughout his work, Skinner repeatedly asserted that little effective progress in terms of promoting people's dignity and well-being will be achieved if we insist on maintaining corrective social contingencies, and in his later years he went on to confirm that the ideas defended in his so-called utopian novel were even more urgent and credible to him then, than when he published it forty years earlier (Skinner, 1984). Therefore, in the wake of the debate about strategies to solve social demands, this paper sought to promote an interdisciplinary reading of the procedural dimension of justice.

Method

The analysis of the Rawlsian and Skinnerian projects was performed from the books *Theory of Justice as Equity* (1971) and *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1948), primary sources of this study. The choice of the books is justified because they feature the authors' societal programs (Melo, 2008; Marques, & Sperling, 2012). As Walden is a fictional work, Skinner's *Science and Human Behavior* (1953), *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971), and *Reflections on Behaviorism and Society* (1978) were used as secondary sources for conceptual clarification of the term justice. Texts by analysts from the behavior-analytic field and from Political Philosophy, Political Science, and Social Science, who discussed the ethical and political aspects of Skinnerian and Rawlsian theory, respectively, were used to enhance the debate and clarify any doubtful points.

The analysis included reading the primary sources in their original language to typify the structural contingencies prescribed by the authors based on the constitutive elements of justice: (1) managed relations, (2) conception of the good, (3) end activity, and (4) elements of the justice genre (e.g., otherness, duty, appropriateness). By structural contingencies, we here refer to the production of goods required for the reproduction of life (i.e., material and socio-affective resources), as well as to the reproduction of social practices that determine the forms of social relations, such as relations between individuals and groups (e.g., values, beliefs, norms, among others). Additionally, the data obtained were organized in a table based on the interpretative proposal of Barzotto (2003).

The information was organized into three sections. In the first one, we briefly present the concept of justice in Rawls and its relation to the basic structure of society, whereas in the second one, we shortly describe the structure of the Walden community. The central role of these two sections is to contextualize the reader for the subsequent discussion on the points of divergence and convergence between the authors' proposals (section 3). Finally, we point out possible implications of the authors' views for the behavior analyst's role.

John Rawls' Political Conception of Justice: An Attempt to Offer an Objective Treatment of Justice.

In The *Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls attempted to offer a guideline for the distributive practices of social institutions through a political understanding of justice. To this end, the author articulated his proposal for justice in light of three elements: (1) object, i.e., the subject of the justice is the basic structure of society; (2) method, i.e., the procedure that supports distributive practices; (3) content, i.e., the principles of justice, which characterize the criteria that must be met by social institutions and by which these institutions will be evaluated. The central goal of the proposal is to suggest a sense of justice that justifies the intervention of social institutions through these principles regulating social relations, which the author classified as principles of social justice. Passing the speech to the author:

> In justice as fairness society is interpreted as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage. The basic structure is a public system of rules defining a scheme of activities that leads men to act together so as to produce a greater sum of benefits and assigns to each certain recognized claims to a share in the proceeds. What a person does depends upon what the public rules say he will be entitled to, and what a person is entitled to depends on what he does. The distribution which results is arrived at by honoring the claims determined by what persons undertake to do in the light of these legitimate expectations. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 73)

By basic structure of society, Rawls conceived the political constitution and the main economic, political, and social arrangements (e.g., "the legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family") (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 6). The author was interested in the forms of organization and arrangement of these social institutions and in how these institutions structure the conditions of social life, i.e., regulate the system of production of goods (social cooperation), as well distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of resources produced by this system of cooperation.

> Now primary goods, as I have already remarked, are things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants. Regardless of what an individual's rational plans are in detail, it is assumed that there are various things which he would prefer more of rather than less. With more of these goods men can generally be assured of greater success in carrying out their intentions and in advancing their ends, whatever these ends may be. The primary social goods, to give them in broad categories, are rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 79)

For this reason, Rawls (1971/1999) assumes that the central object of justice are social institutions, since the distribution of social goods is directly related to the basic structure of society, i.e., "liberties and opportunities are defined by the rules of major institutions and the distribution of income and wealth is regulated by them" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 79). For the author, the institutions of society favor certain starting places over others; what characterizes inequalities as intrinsic to the social structure,

> The primary subject of justice, as I have emphasized, is the basic structure of society. The reason for this is that its effects are so profound and pervasive, and present from birth. This structure favors some starting places over others in the division of the benefits of social cooperation. It is these inequalities which the two principles are to regulate. Once these principles are satisfied, other inequalities are allowed to arise from men's voluntary actions in accordance with the principle of free association. Thus the relevant social positions are, so to speak, the starting places properly generalized and aggregated. By choosing these positions to specify the general point of view one follows the idea that the two principles attempt to mitigate the arbitrariness of natural contingency and social fortune. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 82)

The author thus presented the methodological bases of his proposal for justice. Rawls assumed that there is, in social dynamics, a permanent conflict between the goods available in society and the practices of unlimited accumulation of these goods. The author pointed out that one of the greatest

challenges of political philosophy in defining the necessary conditions for a just society lies in deriving common principles in an undeniably plural society. Pluralism describes the existence of divergent and sometimes profound and irreconcilable conceptions about goods belonging to individuals and groups, which impact the delimitation of distributive practices that simultaneously guarantee the values of freedom and equality.

Based on pluralism and the premise that society is a cooperative enterprise, the Rawlsian solution for managing conflicts of interest consisted in establishing the distribution of rights and duties of its citizens as the task of social institutions to maximize opportunities for access to social goods. To make this task feasible, the author recognized that it would be necessary to derive principles of justice from a general position, conceptualized as the Original Position, which would allow relatively common interests to be met without hurting those who diverge.

The Original Position is a hypothetical situation that defines a suitable initial condition for securing agreements in the distribution of goods. The idea of the Original Position is to establish an "equitable procedure for any agreed-upon principles to be fair. The aim is to use the notion of pure procedural justice as a theoretical basis" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 147). In this position, participants are invited to consult about social conditions under the veil of ignorance. For the author, somehow, "we must nullify the effects of specific contingencies that place individuals in conflict and competition" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 147).

Among the characteristics of this situation, the author highlighted the suppression of the most diverse social, economic and psychological aspects (e.g. biological and social variables, such as social class or status, belief, gender and race; inherited abilities, such as intelligence and strength, not even conceptions of good or particular psychological propensities), which would enable agreements to be established in a condition of equity between the parties (Rawls, 1971/1999). In the author's words:

> This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain. For given the circumstances of the Original Position, the symmetry of everyone's relations to each other, this initial situation is fair between individuals as moral persons, that is, as rational beings with their own ends and capable, I shall assume, of a sense of justice. The original position is, one might say, the appropriate initial status quo, and thus the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair. This explains the propriety of the name "justice as fairness": it conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 13)

The goal of the Rawlsian exercise is to establish context for a change of perspective, that is, to recognize oneself in a situation of vulnerability and to decide based on the principle of maximum/minimum. This principle provides the minimum guarantee of conditions that promote the well-being of each individual based on the thesis that the alternative chosen will ensure that, under conditions of inequality, the worst consequence, i.e., the most unfavorable condition, is a condition superior to the other possibilities of adverse consequences.

Drawing from the hypothetical condition of the Original Position, Rawls argued for state intervention based on legislative and legal practices that guarantee fundamental freedoms and the promotion of a minimum set of material conditions for all (Rawls, 1971/1999). But there was still a question to be solved: how would it be possible to put in order the social institutions and, consequently, the relations between individuals and their multiple and sometimes antagonistic interests, by means of a unified distributive system?

This was an issue to which Rawls devoted much attention: "for questions of social justice we must try to find some objective basis for such comparisons, which men can recognize and agree upon" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 78). A set of principles is needed to "choose among the various social arrangements which determine this division of advantages and to subscribe to an agreement on the proper distributive shares" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 4).

From his hypothetical exercise, Rawls then derived a set of criteria on which he believed there was common agreement among the parties involved in the Original Position, and which would establish a concrete metric for the basic institutions of society in the exercise of their distributive task of rights and

duties. The author was especially interested in how to promote an adequate distributive practice and to this end identified that justice essentially depends on two principles:

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others; Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 53)

Named the principle of freedom and the principle of difference, respectively, these "are the principles of social justice: they provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 4). Their formulation presupposes that, for the purposes of a theory of justice, the social structure may be viewed as having two more or less distinct parts, the first principle applying to the one, the second principle to the other. By establishing the first principle, the author sought to protect fundamental freedoms, as

> [...] political liberty (the right to vote and to hold public office) and freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person, which includes freedom from psychological oppression and physical assault and dismemberment (integrity of the person); the right to hold personal property and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as defined by the concept of the rule of law. These liberties are to be equal by the first principle. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 53)

Regarding the principle of difference, Rawls prescribed the types of differences that are permissible so that the conception of equality is not exclusionary. For the author:

> The second principle applies, in the first approximation, to the distribution of income and wealth and to the design of organizations that make use of differences in authority and responsibility. While the distribution of wealth and income need not be equal, it must be to everyone's advantage, and at the same time, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all. One applies the second principle by holding positions open, and then, subject to this constraint, arranges social and economic inequalities so that everyone benefits. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 53)

The second principle guarantees that, in the case of asymmetry of opportunities, the practices of society's basic institutions must be conducted in order to suppress disparities in opportunities, providing greater benefit to the least favored members of society. In this sense, with a view to maximizing the advantages for both parties (access to basic rights for all), unequal treatment is accepted to promote equality. This treatment must be dispensed in such a way "that both (a) provide the maximum expected benefit to the least favored and (b) are linked to open roles and positions" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 72), i.e., guarantee the affirmation of rights and equity of opportunities as corrective metrics of social justice.

Nonetheless, the principle of redress was not proposed as the sole criterion of justice, according to the author, "we are to weigh it against the principle to improve the average standard of life, or to advance the common good" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 86). From the Ralwsian position, it is considered that the author advocates for social mobility, but not for an equal distribution of income. The defense of equality in Rawls's work is the defense of everyone's position be improved and a of equal citizenship,

> I suppose, then, that for the most part each person holds two relevant positions: that of equal citizenship and that defined by his place in the distribution of income and wealth. The relevant representative men, therefore, are the representative citizen and the representatives of those with different expectations for the unequally distributed primary goods. Since I assume that in general other positions are entered into voluntarily, we need not consider the point of view of men in these positions in judging the basic structure. Instead, we are to adjust the whole scheme to suit the preferences of those in the so-called starting places. Now as far as possible the basic structure should be appraised from the position of equal citizenship. This position is defined by the rights and liberties required by the principle of equal liberty and the principle of fair equality of opportunity. When the two principles are satisfied, all are equal citizens, and so everyone holds this position. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 82)

This means that principles of social justice allow social institutions to take charge of resource distribution aimed at minimizing disparities between fundamental freedoms (e.g., free competition) and to provide attention to the less favored strata in democratic institutions (substantive equality) (Oliveira, & Alves, 2010). The prescriptions specify: antecedent conditions (situations of rights violation); the adopted distributive practices (e.g., affirmative action for income distribution, access and permanence in educational institutions, etc.); and the resulting class of events. Three sets of consequences can be observed: (1) minimum material resources for the full exercise of life (e.g., housing, food, education, health, social security, etc.), (2) minimum conditions of freedom and equal social coexistence, (3) conditions for the maintenance of people's physical, psychological, and social integrity.

> The liberal interpretation of the two principles seeks, then, to mitigate the influence of social contingencies and natural fortune on distributive shares. To accomplish this end it is necessary to impose further basic structural conditions on the social system. Free market arrangements must be set within a framework of political and legal institutions which regulates the overall trends of economic events and preserves the social conditions necessary for fair equality of opportunity. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 63)

In summary, the Rawlsian model describes the social function of justice as the coordination, efficiency, and stability of distributive practices through the compatibility of individual and collective plans that allow access to legitimate rights for each member of the group. The term social justice is coined to delimit the subject of the action, i.e., the State that must establish fundamental rights and duties, as well as distribute the resources generated by society in such a way that it is possible to promote collective welfare while maintaining and protecting individual freedom.

In the practical field, the Rawlsian proposal represented a third way out that sought to reconfigure the foundations of classical liberalism, especially in relation to the accumulation of goods and the consequent social inequality, such as the intensification of poverty and social vulnerability, but without incurring the abandonment of private property of the means of production, as supported by socialist/communist theses. Due to this position, Rawls' theory receives criticism from left and right theorists because the author intends to serve two masters simultaneously: the market and society (Lessa, 2014; Lessa, & Weber, 2017; Oliveira, & Alves, 2010; Silveira, 2007).

In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Sandel (1982) pointed out that the Rawlsian epistemological position based on a rational ethical principle, intrinsic to the human person, cannot be sustained, since it denies an obvious fact, i.e., that in relationships there is no reciprocally disinterested condition. For the author, in the process of deliberation on political issues, all those involved are biased by their beliefs, values, their personal backgrounds, their position in society, their conceptions of good that hinder the legitimacy of the principle of difference.

A criticism frequently directed at Rawlsian justice by representatives of the left refers to its defense of a reformist model, often characterized as a kind of "humanized capitalism" (e.g., Lizárraga, 2009; Mouffe, 2000). For those who share this thesis, the Rawlsian exit represented a return to individualism based on ethical-moral precepts that suppress the concrete bases of inequality and naturalize it (Mouffe, 2000). The social effects of the naturalization of inequality (aspects of the social environment that no longer have a discriminatory function), as a structural condition of society, have suggested that, in the medium and long term, corrective models (interventions in social practices) fail when it comes to effectively guaranteeing the social equality (e.g., rights of different social actors); and accentuate economic discrepancies, the depletion of natural resources, the devastation of nature, social violence and the disparity of political power.

For the representatives of this criticism, the applicability of the Rawls' proposal seems to impose limits on the effective promotion of human dignity by excluding economic equality and considering only social equality. While acknowledging the need to strive for equality, Rawls is unable to conceive of a society in which the socialization of the means of production and the abolition of exploitative practices are promoted (Mouffe, 2000; Lizárraga, 2009; Pizzio, 2016). It is necessary to consider economic equality so that there is social equality, therefore, a truly committed battle for equality permeates the rupture with the economic situation of the State based on capital and its institutions, a posture recognized as a revolutionary position (Mouffe, 2001; Fraser, 2017, Lizárraga, 2009).

Echoing Moore's (2003) warning of Psychology's commitment to social justice, it is important to us to adopt an anti-essentialist and anti-mentalistic stance on social phenomena if we want to think about strategies that promote a fair society. We take as a possible starting point the conceptual contributions of radical behaviorism due to its explanatory model based on the functional relationships between behavioral events/cultural practices and environmental/contextual events, which distances this proposal from a social phenomenon treatment (e.g., ethics and politics) in light of a causal agent of an immaterial dimension, and associates it with a materialist (Morris, 1997) and relational (Lopes & Laurenti, 2023) ontology. The following section presents some of Skinner's ideas about social behavior and culture.

Walden Community: Contours of the Skinnerian Societal Project

In his novel, *Walden Two*, Skinner (1948/2005) presented his moral, social, and political project by outlining a model of a planned society, based on the applicability of behavioral technology in favor of what he called "the good life." In this work, the author presents how behavioral principles contribute to the reorganization of the social order, that is, to the planning of new alternative cultural practices to the system of exploitation, oppression, and social discrimination that constitute our model of capitalist society.

The narrative develops around dialogues that contemplate economic, social, governmental, and cultural aspects of the community and that are woven by three main characters: (a) Burris, a Psychology professor, as the book's narrator; (b) Frazier, founder of Walden; and (c) Castle, Burris's university colleague, a philosophy professor who, throughout the work, seeks to question Walden's ethical and political project. Skinner claimed to have used one of the characters in the story, Frazier, to express many of the ideas about social issues that he was not yet ready to talk about (Skinner, 1956/1999), since, at that time, the application of behavioral principles to social issues was only a promise.

Throughout the course of the plot, Skinner described a set of social, political, and economic contingencies (e.g., sharing of means of production, access to [almost] all goods/rights to all members of the community, rotation of basic services among group members for the maintenance of the community, Walden Code of social coexistence, the Walden administrative committee, participation of all group members in each other's care practices—such as childcare as opposed to the centralization of care in the nuclear family). These contingencies were organized to provide a set of positive reinforcers (material and socio-affective resources), listed, according to the author, due to the recognition of the concrete interests and needs of community members (Batista, 2018).

Walden's planning of the economic structure appears to have been designed to replace the liberal model that underpins Western democracies.

> We all go back to the farm for food and clothing, or someone goes back for us [...] There's nothing wrong with hard work and we aren't concerned to avoid it. We simply avoid uncreative and uninteresting work. If we could satisfy our needs without working that way at all, we'd do so, but it's never been possible except through some form of slavery, and I can't see how it can be done if we're all to work and share alike. What we ask is that a man's work shall not tax his strength or threaten his happiness. Our energies can then be turned toward art, science, play, the exercise of skills, the satisfaction of curiosities, the conquest of nature, the conquest of man – the conquest of man himself, but never of other men. We have created leisure without slavery, a society which neither sponges nor makes war. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 68)

For the author, the fight for true economic freedom contemplates a community organized so that there are no economic privileges, so that work is not subjected to any form of exploitation, so that education is not commodified, so that there is sustainable consumption. In your hypothetical project, a societal model based on economic equality could promote social equality[3], mutual respect and group cohesion. In the author's words:

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[3] We emphasize that the discussion about social equality is controversial in Skinner's work (e.g., gender and sexuality – see Villa, 2021)

> In a world of complete economic equality, you get and keep the affections you deserve. You can't buy love with gifts or favors, you can't hold love by raising an inadequate child, and you can't be secure in love by serving as a good scrub woman or a good provider. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 118)

Material and socio-affective resources guaranteed in the Walden community would theoretically promote the full right to life (i.e., the promotion of physical, psychological, and social integrity, and freedom, understood as ethical and social autonomy and happiness), as well as contribute to a cohesive, flexible, sustainable, and concerned community with the future of humanity (Batista, 2018).

> [...] everyone is treated with affection by everyone [...] Here we favor friendship based [...] on genuine affection (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 129). The community is free of negative emotions: in a cooperative society there is no jealousy because there is no need for it (Skinner, 1948/ 2005, p. 92) [...] we are also not subject to irritation due to overwork or carelessness due to lack of knowledge (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 90) [...] in which there's no crime and very few petty lapses (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 161). The happiness and equanimity of our people are related to the self-control (self-government) they have acquired. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 164)

In this work, Skinner outlines his thesis that full individual development depends on the success of the community, for this reason, "group members must always think of the group as a whole" (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 147). The author draws attention to the relationship between the particular-collective, in which the individual benefit is related not only to the well-being of current members of the community, but to the maintenance and preservation of the environment and resources for future generations.

Following Skinner, it is possible to characterize this particular-collective relationship from the recognition of the values advocated in Walden. Dittrich and Abib highlighted the "existence of a set of reinforcers due to its supposed ability to contribute to the survival of cultures" (e.g., health, education, productivity, love, cooperation, mutual support, experimentation, among others), named by them as secondary values (2004, p. 433). The term was coined to elucidate the relationship of subordination of these values to the fundamental Skinnerian value, the survival of cultures, which, ultimately—even though there are divergent interpretations of it in the literature—can be understood as the preservation of human life (Melo et al., 2015). All secondary values involve the production of personal goods (reinforcers for our own behavior) and goods of others (reinforcers for the behavior of those with whom we live) (Dittrich, & Abib, 2004).

The Walden community was thought of as a deinstitutionalized model in opposition to government policy and the centralization of power in social institutions. In the thesis, the proposal sought to eliminate institutions as much as possible and make the contingencies between the governed and the rulers more horizontal (governors under control of the same social contingencies as the governed – for example, health and housing systems). A few central institutions, such as the Board of Planners and the Board of Administrators, would make Walden's policy decisions (e.g., how resources are distributed, how the means of production and social rules are arranged, or any other decision related to the functioning of the community) (Batista, 2018).

These boards function as a kind of committee that plans and executes public policies based on their techno-scientific knowledge of collective issues. As an argument in favor of his model, Frazier stated that the board is in a better position regarding decision-making on collective issues due to its status as specialists (based on scientific knowledge), which would result in more accurate decisions and result from the analysis of the conditions of the community with a view to the well-being of all members. Frazier further assured that conditions of corruption are less likely in his project, as the:

> [...] elite do not command a disproportionate share of the wealth of the community; on the contrary, they work rather harder, I should say, for what they get […] in the end the Planner or Manager is demoted to simple citizenship. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 218)

Author was convinced that, through face-to-face control, it is possible to increase direct contact with the consequences produced for community members, which could favor less aversive and more supportive social relationships. Furthermore, the power to dispose of contingencies is temporary and the Board of Planners changes regularly, however the choice of new members is carried out by the current Planners who select their successors from a list of names granted by the Board of Administrators

(Skinner, 1948/2005). While Frazier stated that anyone in the Walden community can apply for the "position," in practice, application is conditional upon certain minimum requirements (e.g., being at least one administrator) (Batista, 2018).

In summary, Skinner sought to exhort his audience about the feasibility of building a social environment in which people take pleasure in living from the arrangement of structural contingencies based on positive reinforcement contingent on cooperative, sustainable, and solidary practices. To this end, it promoted a discussion about replacing the contingencies of competition, exploitation, and accumulation of goods. It is possible to infer from the author's text that guarantee of material and socio-affective resources are essential requirements to create a full and satisfactory life for everyone, in other words, "the good life." In a societal model in which economic and social equality are promoted, community members would be more likely to experience positive and empowering feelings, such as joy, love, friendship, free affection, mutual respect, cohesion, and security. The hypothetical Skinnerian social project seems to have maintained—at least in parts—a certain commitment to promoting more respectful and collaborative human relationships:

> We carefully avoid any joy in a personal triumph which means the personal failure of somebody else. We take no pleasure in the sophistical, the disputative, the dialectical. He threw a vicious glance at Castle. "We don't use the motive of domination, because we are always thinking of the whole group. We could motivate a few geniuses that way–it was certainly my own motivation–but we'd sacrifice some of the happiness of everyone else. Triumph over nature and over oneself, yes. But over others, never. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 100)

A controversial aspect of Walden's government concerns the effective political participation of community members in decisions about the interests of community life: "Then the members have no voice? […] Nor do they wish to have" (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 49). Skinner seems to have sacrificed collective construction, assuming that the other members would not be interested to participate in the public sphere, since there is a group of specialists who are in a more suitable position for the political and economic decisions of the community (Batista, 2018). According to the author:

> In Walden Two no one worries about the government except the few to whom that worry has been assigned. To suggest that everyone should take an interest would seem as fantastic as to suggest that everyone should become familiar with our Diesel engines. Even the constitutional rights of the members are rarely thought about, I'm sure. The only thing that matters is one's day-to-day happiness and a secure future. (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 253)

Popular participation seems to be allowed in terms of the right to report disagreements and dissatisfaction to Administrators or even Planners. At this point in his work, Skinner seems to have opposed any form of popular articulation as a counter-control measure:

> As to disagreement, anyone may examine the evidence upon which a rule was introduced into the Code. He may argue against its inclusion and may present his own evidence. If the Managers refuse to change the rule, he may appeal to the Planners. But in no case must he argue about the Code with the members at large. There's a rule against that. I would certainly argue against the inclusion of that rule, said Castle. Simple democracy requires public discussion of so fundamental a matter as a code. You won't find very much 'simple democracy' here, said Frazier casually, and he resumed his discussion as if he had referred to the absence of white flour in the Walden Two bread (Skinner, 1948/2005, p. 130).

Given these positions, we can assume that Skinner overestimated the role of science and technology in dealing with ethical and political demands at the time of the work. First, the expert's central role vis-à-vis other Walden members in the community's political and economic decisions suggests a simplistic and naive reliance on the moral disposition of planners at the expense of effective institutional arrangements for popular participation. There is a kind of idealization of the scientist as an impartial individual, exempt from the influences of social, political, and economic determinants. It must be remembered that scientific knowledge itself is not exempt from this determination. Science can help us identify demands and choose more effective procedures to deal with them, but it does not put the

scientist in a better position regarding participation in public life (Calvert, 1979; Dinsmoor, 1991; Lopes, 2015).

Second, the possibility of members' participation in the debate on social goods is restricted (e.g., community members cannot vote to change the Constitution or the code of Walden, nor do they articulate discussions and disputes about the code) and the determination of assets occurs in a vertical manner by experts, without an apparent public consultation initiative, which suggests a departure from its society model of a face-to-face control proposal (Dinsmoor, 1991; Lopes, 2020; Moxley, 2006; Vaz Luiz & Lopes, 2022). Contrary to Frazier's insistence that popular interest in the dynamics of government is an unnecessary issue, ensuring popular participation in society's political decisions is a fundamental condition for building a community free of domination and inequality.

The planning of structural contingencies requires considering a transition period, since the exercise of power by planners is susceptible to the influence of competitive and coercive contingencies typical of the regime to which they belong. This means that practices that institutionalize popular management mechanisms (e.g., forums, councils, assemblies) are valuable measures to increase the chances of effective countercontrol, as well as to favor learning opportunities for new forms of decentralized management (Calvert, 1979; Dinsmoor, 1991; Fernandes & Tibério, 2023).

Towards a Synthesis: The Adequacy of Justice in Rawls' and Skinner's Proposals

We begin our effort by pointing out that the scope of social justice is unclear, especially regarding its goal, i.e., social equality versus economic equality. To further elucidate this concept, we turn to the procedural dimension of justice, that is, to the criteria that guide the distributive practices of institutions and that allow us to evaluate them in terms of their effectiveness. Our task is then to characterize the scope of justice and its adequacy based on the Skinnerian and Rawlsian societal models. In this section, it will be presented our considerations. Although Skinner (1948/2005) did not intend to be a theorist of justice, when presenting the bases of his societal project in 1948, the author contemplated, even if implicitly, the basic elements that constitute the foundation of a meaning of justice, i.e., guidelines for the organization and regulation of social relations. Table 1, below, presents the elements for comparing the two proposals. Then, a discussion will be held in terms of points of contact and divergences between the authors.

Table 1.
Characterization of justice in the societal projects of Skinner and Rawls

Constituent terms of justice		Authors	
		Skinner	Rawls
Managed relationships		Relations between the individual and the community	Relationship between the individual and society
Conception of good	General	Humanity	Human dignity
	Direct object	Collective good (survival of humanity)	Good of the individual
	Indirect object	Good of the individual (secondary values)	Collective good
Purpose Activity	Project	Societal planning	Corrective distributive practices
Elements of the genre justice	Otherness	Identification of the other as an equal being and worthy of protection	Identification of the other as an equal being despite human plurality
	Duty	Promotion of social and economic equality	Promotion of social equality
	Adequacy	Socialization of the means of production and resources of society	Principles of freedom and equality

Note: Adaptation of the interpretative proposal made by Barzotto (2003, p. 6-7). Elements of the justice genre: 1. Alterity, the relationship between the "I" and the "other", i.e., the relationship between different subjects. 2. Duty, specifies the attribution of something to someone by a 'rational necessity'; 3. Adequacy, criterion for determining the 'quantum' due (Barzotto, 2003, p. 6).

The perspectives of Skinner and Rawls differ regarding their diagnosis and proposals of social inequalities, particularly with regards to the concept of good and its influence on the disposition of social contingencies that govern the lives of members of society. Distinctions can be observed in their opinions regarding the production and distribution of goods (adequacy), the scope of equality (duty) and, consequently, antagonistic interpretations of justice.

Both thinkers, even if implicitly in the case of Skinner, address the conflict between individual and collective interests based on the foundation of alterity, i.e., the identification of the other as an equal in rights. In their works, Skinner and Rawls presented an alternative project to the utilitarianism model, which prioritizes a distributive criterion that sacrifices the well-being of a minority for the majority. The authors advocated in favor of proposals that considered all members as target subjects for the distribution of social goods, rejecting the idea that society is superior or distinct from its members. Central to the theorists is the idea that the specific development of each individual was directly related to group cohesion, since people have interests that, to a greater or lesser degree, converge, which would allow for social cooperation. This is because, as a member of a specific community, each individual is seen in common because they share social and cultural contingencies (e.g., exposure to social conventions such as speech, rules, regulations, among others) that influence the individual learning history of group members (e.g., money acquires its reinforcing property when used as a medium of exchange for other goods) (Ulman, 1979).

Skinner and Rawls advocate for a balance between individual and collective well-being, underscoring the idea that the good of one should be synonymous with the good of all. For the authors, there is a differential disposition of, in Skinnerian terms, positive and aversive reinforcing consequences based on specific variables (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, among others) that determine inequalities. This arrangement of contingencies [described by De Freitas & Nobrega (2022), Mizael & De Rose (2017), Mizael & Sampaio (2019)], results in significant harm to the physical, social, and psychological well-being of individuals. The central objective of Skinnerian and Rawlsian proposals is to offer solutions to these disparities, although differing in their ontological positions on the interpretation of the good.

Skinner's analysis of the ethical and moral phenomenon is marked by the rupture of the ontological dichotomy of fact *versus* value. For the author, moral and ethical issues require an analysis of the concrete social conditions, i.e., of what people and groups value, since the value is a fact, "to be found in the social contingencies control. It is an ethical or moral judgment in the sense that ethos and mores refer to the customary practices of a group" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 112) and, in this sense, in the means that refers to reinforcement contingencies is the object of a science of behavior. The author identified three categories of assets: Personal goods, positive reinforcers with respect to the behavior of the person producing them; Other people's goods, provision of positive reinforcers for other people's behavior, or removal of aversive events; Culture's goods, consequences of cultural practices that contribute to the strengthening of the group and the survival of the culture promoting such practices (1971/1976).

While the production of these goods is not mutually exclusive—meaning individuals can simultaneously produce more than one type (Dittrich & Abib, 2004)—Skinner (1971/1976) acknowledged potential conflicts, recognizing that certain personal goods may clash with cultural goods (Melo et al., 2015; Skinner, 1971/1976). Castro and De Rose (2015) pointed out that the Skinnerian ethical solution to this conflict was the choice for the good of the cultures. Skinner's fundamental value, the survival of cultures, is related to selection. The survival of cultures presents itself as a final criterion, in the sense that cultures can survive or become extinct. And this will happen regardless of whether we choose to promote their survival or not (Dittrich & Abib, 2004; Skinner, 1971/1972).

For the author, to speak of a culture is to consider its members, as they are the "individuals who survive and transmit cultural practices such as the characteristics of a species" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 129), thus, "there is no reason to talk about a single culture" or to encourage competition between cultures. At that moment, the author sought to clarify that his defense for the survival of cultures is, ultimately, the defense for human life: "our preoccupation with the great and serious global problems leads us to point out many reasons why people should be concerned about the well-being of all humanity," for this reason, "we must provide contingencies under which the consequences promote the survival of humans" and this involves "current members and establish conditions for the survival of future others" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 137-138). Batista (2018) pointed out that the prescriptive aspect of Skinner's moral philosophy contemplates concern for humanity as a central criterion for regulating

collective life, with an emphasis on cooperative, altruistic and sustainable practices that promote what Skinner called "the good life," i.e., an opportunity to produce and enjoy social goods cooperatively, exercise talents and skills, relax and rest and to build and nurture relationships of respect, love and care for the environment for members now and for others to come.

In Rawlsian work (1971/1999), human life is elected as a good through the rescue of the Kantian concept of human dignity. For the author, it is possible, through the exercise of rationality, to present a universal ethical conduct that recognizes the intrinsic value of each human being in the social order, his dignity—that is, each person deserves all the goods necessary for his full development and must be respected in his uniqueness (Rawls, 1971/1999). In the author's words:

> Once the conception of justice is on hand, the ideas of respect and of human dignity can be given a more definite meaning. Among other things, respect for persons is shown by treating them in ways that they can see to be justified. But more than this, it is manifest in the content of the principles to which we appeal. Thus to respect persons is to recognize that they possess an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. It is to affirm that the loss of freedom for some is not made right by a greater welfare enjoyed by others. The lexical priorities of justice represent the value of persons that Kant says is beyond all price. (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 513)

The Rawlsian thesis highlights the importance and inviolability of individual autonomy and establishes the practice of justice as the exercise of practical reason in democratic institutions, which allows for an agreement, the result of free moral reasoning between equals:

> The original position may be viewed, then, as a procedural interpretation of Kant's conception of autonomy and the categorical imperative within the framework of an empirical theory. The principles regulative of the kingdom of ends are those that would be chosen in this position, and the description of this situation enables us to explain the sense in which acting from these principles expresses our nature as free and equal rational persons. (Rawls, 1971/1999 p. 226)

A crucial point is that, given a Kantian interpretation of the Original Position, this concept of justice aligns with idealism, enabling the "freedom in the choice of a system of final ends" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 222). Despite justice as fairness displaying individualistic characteristics, its distinctiveness lies in how it defines the initial situation—a condition of unanimity within the procedural conception of the Original Position. This condition shapes the content and principles aligning with our considered judgments. Thus, a synthesis of autonomy and objectivity emerges, wherein autonomous acts adhere to objective principles representing general desires, such as the pursuit of primary social goods, which individuals would universally endorse.

In a well-ordered society according to justice as fairness, autonomy is affirmed, and the objectivity of individuals' considered judgments of justice is fostered. Contrary to the notion that individuals have complete freedom in forming their moral convictions, justice as fairness shows that limitations exist. This limitation occurs when defending values imposes conditions violating principles that each individual would consent to in a fair situation. In such cases, the focus shifts from literally respecting individual will to respecting the person, achieved by constraining actions within the bounds of mutually acknowledged principles (Rawls, 1971/1999).

The thesis of individual autonomy stands out as the central point of incompatibility between Rawlsian and Skinnerian proposals, leading to distinct distributive procedures in each model. Despite both Rawls (1971/1999) and Skinner (1948/2005) beginning with the premise that political actors should ensure the maximization of goods for all group members, the divergence lies in the specific mechanisms each author advocates to address inequality and promote rights. The term "rights" encompasses a category of primary, culturally conditioned reinforcers covering material aspects (e.g., health, safety, housing, education, food) and socio-affective dimensions (e.g., identity, psychological and moral integrity, well-being, policy, and personality rights). These resources must be guaranteed to group members for their comprehensive development (Batista, 2018).

While Rawls (1971/1999) conceives inequality as an inherent and inevitable condition of the social structure and advocates for corrective actions that promote equity of opportunity and social equality, as a result of a disinterested free and rational choice, Skinner, in his turn, sought to show, throughout his

works, that inequality is a product of control contingencies that support the disproportionate distribution of power and resources (Skinner, 1971/1976). Skinner pointed out how the essentialist notion of the individual—as an "autonomous man"—pillar of Political Liberalism, supported corrective practices and contributed to the maintenance of contingencies of oppression and exploitation (Fernandes, 2021; Pessotti, 2016). This position seems to suggest a break—at least in part—with the capitalist structure and the traditional concept of justice that underpins liberal democracies.

On the other hand, Rawls (1971/1999) was concerned and attentive to political disputes and defended democracy as a mechanism to guarantee respect for differences through its open spaces for political articulation and dispute over social projects (principle of freedom). In *Walden Two*, Skinner (1948/2005) was skeptical about the possibility of social change through political means. The author seems to have mitigated the possibilities of socialization of society's controlling contingencies by restricting political decisions exclusively to its administrative boards.

By proposing his idea of justice as equity, Rawls (1971/1999) hoped to convince his audience that the legal systems of democratic institutions must protect the classical values prescribed by political liberalism, without thereby incurring in the reproduction of injustices by establishing the principles of equitable equality and difference (Rawls, 1993/1996). This represents his understanding of social justice, the action of social institutions "to regulate the choice of a political constitution and the main elements of the economic and social system" (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 7) for the distribution of goods and duties. Political justice is the justice of the constitution for Rawls (Rawls, 1993/1996), i.e., the State, through its institutions, especially the legislative and legal sectors, must ensure the coordination of economic and social relations (e.g. tax system, rights materials and market structure) to promote a set of actions (e.g. identification of demands, formation of agendas—selection of priorities, preparation, execution and evaluation of projects) aimed at correcting social disparities and guaranteeing civil rights (personality, property and equality before the law); political rights (e.g., citizen participation in the governance of society—voting, forums, community associations) and social rights (education, job security, fair wages, health, housing). It is up to state actors to fulfill the State's social function of "alleviating degrading and insufficient living conditions and seeking, through an effort of solidarity, to offer minimum vital conditions for the less favored" (Lacerda, 2016, p. 81) through gradual and continuous correction of the distribution of opportunities.

In Skinner's view of the matter (1953/1965, 1971/1976), the existence of a social structure based on the centralization of wealth and the unequal distribution of goods between controllers and controlled leads to the need to resort to principles of justice. In theory, the proposals for justice were designed to think of solutions that would promote balance between personal and social goods. With the intensification of poverty and the threat of a nuclear war, among other serious human problems, the democratic regimes adopted the rights foreseen in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and a conception of justice that legitimized the intervention of the controlling agencies to correct the disproportionate access to opportunities and resources between members of society and ensure the protection of human life (Skinner, 1953/1965, 1978ac). Nonetheless, the solution offered was in reformist practices that led governments to sustain structural contingencies based on aversive control (e.g., punishment or negative reinforcement) (Skinner, 1971/1976, 1978abc, 1979).

So, the debate about injustice and human dignity is approached by Skinner as a question of privation of social goods and its deleterious effects on full individual development—referred to as inequality (Skinner, 1953/1965). In the author's words:

> The technology now devoted to the production of reinforcing goods is far more extensive than that concerned with the avoidance of exhausting labor and physical damage, and unless it is restrained it will soon exhaust the world's resources. It has another serious effect because people differ in the ability to acquire property and hence in the quantities they possess, and since possession usually makes acquisition easier, differences have become very great. Positive reinforcement has led not only to great wealth but to extreme poverty. When the poor become numerous enough or otherwise powerful enough to protest, they may be given some share of the wealth, but that leads to further trouble. (Skinner, 1978a, p. 7)

> We have minimum wage laws and other laws restricting some uses of money, but we have no maximum wage laws restricting the extent to which money can be acquired for use. And money is only one of the more conspicuous instruments of control. (Skinner, 1978c, p. 46)

Although justice—including the liberal ideal of social justice—presents itself as a mechanism to guarantee people's freedom in Western democratic regimes, the unstated objective of this thesis for a societal organization consists in strengthening the agency itself (Skinner, 1955/1999a). Giving the floor to the author:

> We have seen how the literatures of freedom and dignity, with their concern for autonomous man, have perpetuated the use of punishment and condoned the use of only weak non-punitive techniques, and it is not difficult to demonstrate a connection between the unlimited right of the individual to pursue happiness and the catastrophes threatened by unchecked breeding, the unrestrained affluence which exhausts resources and pollutes the environment, and the imminence of nuclear war. (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 208-209)

The author pointed out that a fair society, i.e., one that really considers a relationship of equity among its members and that is effectively concerned with the well-being and freedom of its people, will not be possible if the conditions that produce disparities are violently neglected "by a radical individualism or libertarianism [...] by an exploitative system" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 123-124). The central question for Skinner "is not who should have how much of what but, rather, how they are to get what they have" (Skinner, 1978c, p. 38). With this discussion, Skinner (1971/1976) denounced that the techniques used by institutional agents attack the effects, but not the contingencies that produce the problems, as they produce immediate positive reinforcement—and often allow the controlled person to experience the feeling of freedom and protection—but which generates aversive consequences in the medium and long term (Laurenti, 2009, Holland, 1974).

The defense of individual autonomy prevents an effective approach to the serious social problems we face, as they shift attention from the real conditions that produce inequalities to the individual level. These control procedures are effective in masking controlling contingencies, i.e., minimize the probability of people identifying the social control and, consequently, reduce the possibility of counter-control (Skinner, 1953/1965, 1971/1976), a phenomenon that he seems to have named "concealment": "when practices are concealed or disguised, counter-control is made difficult; it is not clear from whom one is to escape or whom one is to attack" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 99).

Based on Skinner's analysis, it is possible to admit that the discourse of justice, which sustains liberal democracies, is only justified because it favors the interests of those who hold power. This is because, for Skinner (1953/1965), power derives mainly from economic control, that is, from who has money and goods necessary for the exercise of a quality life and, therefore, can establish the conditions of access to important personal reinforcers for individuals.

Therefore, we are talking about a thesis of justice, based on the defense of social equality, that naturalizes economic inequality, promotes the maintenance of economic and political practices that reverberate patterns of labor exploitation and concentration-exclusion of land and income, which accentuate social vulnerability and affect important processes of class identification (Arroyo, 2010; Azevedo, 2013, Fraser, 2012, 2018ab). Appealing to the foundations of justice is ultimately a way of maintaining the capitalist structure:

> If there is any special economic agency as such, it is composed of those who possess wealth and use it in such a way as to preserve or increase this source of power [...] To that extent we may speak of the broad economic agency called "capital." (Skinner, 1953/1965, p. 400)

In the historical trajectory, the same State called upon for social protection is the entity serving the protection of bourgeois interests (Arroyo, 2010). Any return to an explanation based on an idealistic moral dimension, in "outworn conceptions of human nature" (Skinner, 1955/1965c, p.40) to face human problems that are materially based will incur a flawed—not to say perverse—approach to these problems. According to Skinner, the rejection of a scientific view of the human being "at this time, in a desperate attempt to preserve a loved but inaccurate conception of man, would represent an unworthy retreat in man's continuing effort to build a better world" (1955/1965c, p. 40). For the author, the choice is clear: "either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives" (Skinner, 1978f, p. 66).

One way to effectively address the unequal distribution of power and resources, i.e., inequality, occurs through the construction of structures that resulted in an alternative societal project to the capitalist project (Skinner, 1971/1976, 1978abcef, 1979). In the Skinnerian project, an effort to solve social problems and bring about effective change is based on a radical transformation of structural contingencies. In Skinner's own words: "I pointed to the importance of cultural practices in bringing out the best that the individual is capable of" (Skinner, 1979, p. 1), "what has to be changed [...] are the environmental conditions that control a person's behavior" (Skinner, 1971/1976, p. 77). Striving for more dignifying relationships means staying under the control of concrete social contingencies and advocating for an equal distribution of reinforcers (Holland, 1978; Laurenti, 2009; Skinner, 1971/1976, 1978c), to promote a balance between both individual and collective consequences (Melo et al., 2015).

As seen in *Walden Two*, Skinner advocated for "the good life" as a product of a societal project in which—at least in theory—contemplates social and economic equality as central and inseparable elements in its planning. The community's economic contingencies were organized to eradicate practices of exploitation, capital accumulation and, consequently, social, and economic inequality. For the author, "the exploitation of the worker must certainly be avoided" (Skinner, 1979, p. 7) and a societal project must put "mass production within the reach of all as a consequence of cooperative life" (Skinner, 1968/2005, p. 35).

In *Walden Two,* the author seems to have assumed that the democratization of the means of production and social goods is an important condition for a good life and for group cohesion. This position also opened space for thinking about a new relationship with natural resources and between people themselves (e.g., facing forms of discrimination). It is possible to infer from his work, at least in some respects, that Skinner assumed a position committed to a social transformation based on the elimination of the contingencies of oppression and exploitation typical of the capitalist systems. This can be observed in initial texts (e.g., Skinner 1948/1965) and even in contemporary manifestations (e.g., Skinner, 1978a), especially considering that the cry for democracy at the political realm was not followed through at the economical basis of society. However, in restricting the participation of community members at the expense of centralizing political power to boards of experts does not seem to help the case for equality.

In short, Rawls' conception of justice inaugurated a legal perspective based on the struggle to overcome social inequality, guaranteeing minimum rights and equal opportunities, especially to historically marginalized sectors. Although he proposed that justice is a political element, i.e., it refers to the form of organization of the basic structures of society, the solution offered for inequality was through a reformist project under the thesis of a moral capitalism that, ultimately, sacrifices economic equality to make it impossible to overcome private property. In turn, Skinner denounced that the appeal to justice will not be enough to promote an effective system for confronting inequalities, since it does not break with an arrangement of contingencies characteristic of capitalist systems. In *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1948/2005), the author defended social transformation through the socialization of the means of production and social goods but imposed limits on the achievement of equality by sacrificing the democratization of political control. This is because the author was skeptical about the efficiency of politics for this endeavor.

Final Considerations

Revisiting the history of the struggle for social justice makes us think about new meanings to the discourses that are presented to us as necessary and inevitable, as well to see an alternative economic and social model as viable, that is, a radical transformation of the social structure (Fisher, 2009/2020). The debate over ethical and political issues in *Walden Two* pointed to the fact that the struggle for a social model will inevitably reflect the value biases of the actors involved in designing contingencies to promote socially desirable behaviors. The central question is: what model of society are we going to defend?

We reiterate Skinner's call to fight despotism and its threat to human life (Skinner, 1978d). The concrete effects of the so–called free enterprise increasingly accentuate the precariousness of human life and the ecological crisis (e.g., the reports Global Multidimensional Poverty Index and Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released by the United Nations in 2022). We believe that an effective response to the serious and increasingly profound problem of inequality will not come from solutions that seek an ethical dimension of capitalism for its conservation. The

struggle for social justice must include a praxis for a new social organization, i.e., the construction of alternative mechanisms of production and provision of social goods (economic equality) allowing new forms of relationships with nature and among people (social equality).

Although certain aspects of the Skinnerian proposal are contradictory to revolutionary politics (Calvert, 1979), Skinner's critique of the idea of individual autonomy proposed by Rawls is important in a scenario of social change. We emphasize that it is not necessary to – nor should we – blindly adopt Skinner's political and ethical proposals to integrate his worldview and the contributions of his science to understanding the root of human problems. Adopting the assumptions that make up the ontology of Radical Behaviorism allows us an anti-mentalistic approach to psychological and social phenomena, i.e., the replacement of final explanations of behavior centered on the individual by the contextual/social determinants that produce inequality and its effects on subjectivity.

As we have seen, one of Skinner's great contributions was to denounce the process of hiding the concrete social conditions that produce inequality and reiterate the importance of thinking about an alternative model to private property and the accumulation of wealth (Skinner, 1971/1972; 1978d). From the Skinnerian societal program, it is possible to extract a conception of justice, albeit indirect and with several caveats, i.e., a just society is one that is built from reinforcing structural contingencies to the detriment of immediate and/or postponed aversive ones, i.e., based on overcoming oppression, exploitation of human beings and nature, and the accumulation of wealth. In our view, the fight for justice is identical to the transformation of the societal conditions and, therefore, to the relations between individual and society.

We must now, as Fernandes (2021) pointed out, combine Skinner's psychological dimension with a political dimension, which can provide a valuable tool to analyze different sets of contingencies and their effects on people's lives. Seeking political strategies that consider the materiality of social relations and a return to the class struggle is essential for confronting inequality (Mouffe, 1993; Fraser, 2017). As Fernandes and Rezende (2016) remind us, not only do behavioral principles serve revolutionaries, but revolutionary principles can guide the political practices of behaviorists.

Finally, we emphasize that this essay does not intend to present a single and definitive path for the research on justice, societal programs, and behavioral technology, nor a static reading of the concepts in the mentioned articles. Our position is not exempt from historical, political, evaluative, economic, and cultural influences and, therefore, we emphasize that the interpretation presented is one possible among others in the political arena of how to conduct behavior analysis—and Psychology for that matter—theories and practices.

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