

Book Reviews

ALFRED KINSEY

Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research.
By WARDELL B. POMEROY. Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. Pp. 479. Price £4.20.

Alfred Kinsey's monumental study of human sexual behaviour is, according to the cover notes of this biography, comparable in scientific importance to the works of Darwin and Freud. Without detracting from the importance of the mass of normative data so painstakingly collected by Kinsey and his co-authors, it must be said that the work did not lead to any major change in conceptual thinking on sexual behaviour or generate any new major theory. Like the work of Darwin and Freud it did provoke intense social, religious, moral and medical indignation, but there the parallel ends. Serious criticism has been levelled at Kinsey's selection of subjects for his case studies, and Dr. Pomeroy's biography provides further interesting glimpses into this aspect of the project. Like many of his predecessors in the field of sexual biology, Kinsey had to tolerate much uninformed criticism as well as misinterpretation of his work by the popular press, with whom he came increasingly into conflict. His complete conviction of the authenticity of his work led him to reject vehemently any form of criticism, even from the allied fields of anthropology and psychoanalysis. Increasingly, however, one develops sympathy and admiration for this shy, sensitive biologist who from his early interests in insect taxonomy was led through his involvement in the Marriage Course at Indiana University to enter upon a major study of human sexual behaviour.

The interview remained the instrument of Alfred Kinsey's project, and it was to his credit that he resisted the pressure to use the inferior method of the postal questionnaire.

In the latter part of his life, particularly after the publication of the 'female' volume, Kinsey and the Institute were subjected to increasing criticism from all sides, and eventually political expediency forced even the Rockefeller Foundation to withdraw its financial support from the Institute for Sex Research. This financial blow led to Kinsey's breakdown in health, and his death was perhaps accelerated by the intensity of his quest for supporting funds.

This is a commendable biography of a dedicated scientist whose professional life became totally committed to the study of human sexual behaviour, and it

will no doubt take its place as a companion volume to the 'male' and 'female' on the shelves of medical libraries throughout the world.

JOHN JOHNSON.

B. F. SKINNER

Beyond Freedom and Dignity. By B. F. SKINNER.
London: Jonathan Cape. 1972. Pp. 225. Price £2.25.

The success of operant conditioning in the artificial circumstances of laboratory research has emboldened Skinner to widen his horizons and write this book. It is intended to adumbrate a technology of behaviour modification which could bring about such changes in human culture and conduct that man's misbehaviour resulting in overpopulation, pollution, spoliation of world resources, and the like is abandoned, and a utopian future emerges for a behaviour-controlled mankind. But the premises on which Skinner's argument rests are so peculiar that it follows from them, rather paradoxically, that it cannot, or should not, be said that he intended writing the book or that he can claim any responsibility for it.

His premises are that, from his scientific viewpoint, the behaviour of man is not controlled by free decisions on his part or by a sense of responsibility. Hence the title of the book which proclaims that the concepts of man's freedom and dignity in shaping his behaviour are to be replaced by the dictum (it can only be a dictum) that 'a person's behaviour is determined by a genetic endowment . . . and by the environmental circumstances to which as an individual he has been exposed'. Man thus becomes a creature of circumstance whose behaviour is not decided by him but by environmental 'contingencies of reinforcement'. Admittedly, there are snags in this 'scientific' approach, especially when it comes to the evaluation of such psychological features as character traits or the cognitive activity of thinking. Yet such snags do not deter Skinner, who sweeps them aside by asserting: 'The inadequacy of our analysis is no reason to fall back on a miracle-working mind. If our understanding of contingencies of reinforcement is not yet sufficient to explain all kinds of thinking, we must remember that the appeal to mind explains nothing at all.' Skinner is convinced that the only hope for mankind lies in scientifically viewing man as