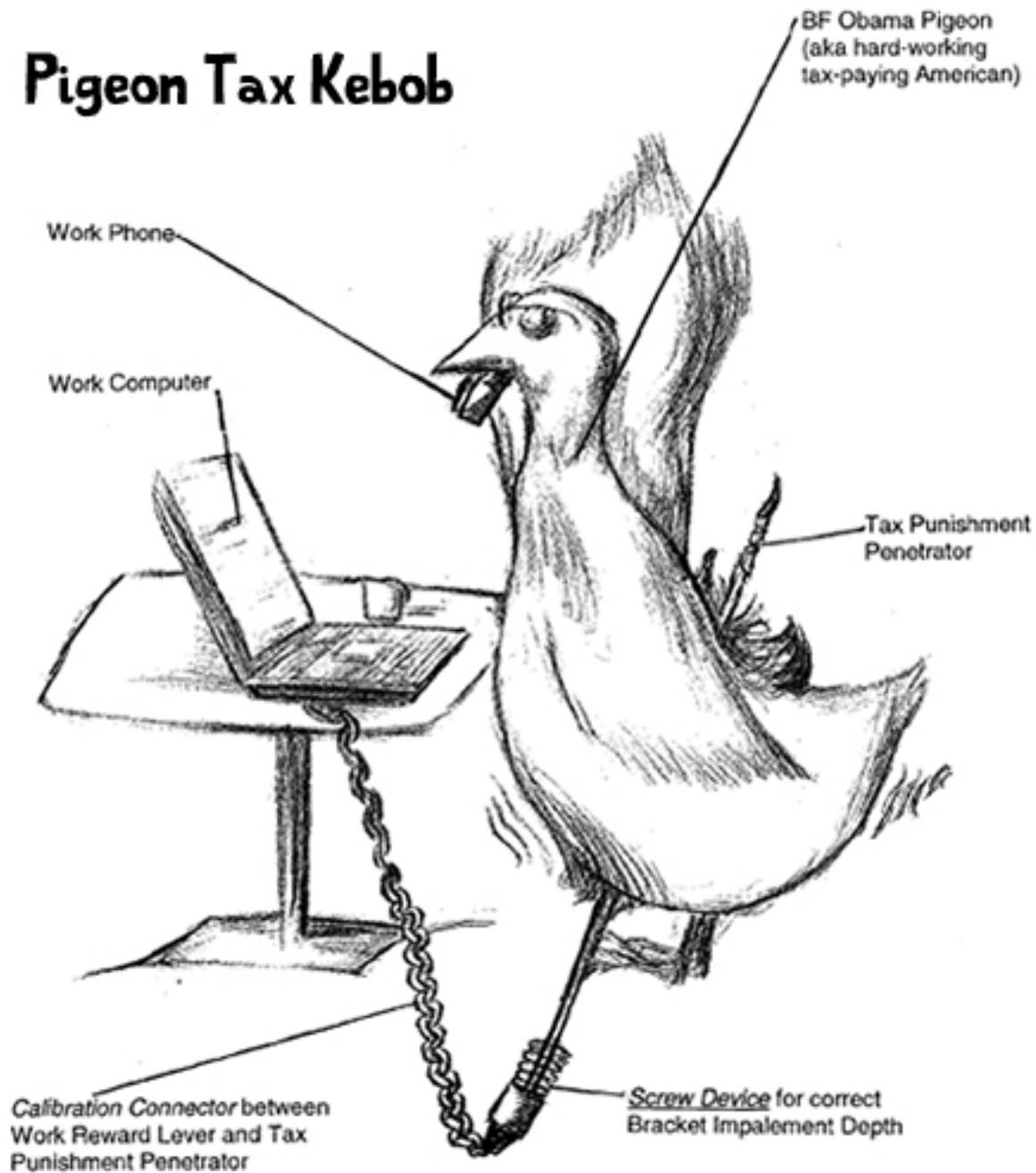


# Pigeon Tax Kebob



## **WHY OUR TAXES ARE INSANE**

This will be an unusual discussion of tax policy, inasmuch as it will make not a single reference to economists, finance, or even to any of the gnarly details of our Byzantine and confiscatory tax structure. Neither is there a single econometric projection cited (nor, for that matter, have any even been reviewed for background research purposes).

Instead, I rely heavily on narrow, proven science, primarily the science of Operant Conditioning which Harvard psychology professor BF Skinner pioneered.

But since our economy is now going to the dogs, that's where we need to go first, as well.

### **Pavlov**

In the 1890s Ivan Pavlov began experimenting with the involuntary physical responses of dogs to the stimulation of food, and especially their response to the derived stimulation of non-food noises which were arbitrarily linked to the food. Specifically, whenever he'd feed the dogs, he'd ring a bell at the same time. The dogs came to associate the bell with the onset of food. Before long, the identification between the food and the bell became so strong in their minds that the dogs would begin to salivate heavily at the sound of the bell even when there was no food present or forthcoming.

This was a pioneering experiment in the response of an organism to stimuli, but was focused only on involuntary physical response. The next stage in the experimental research into organisms' response to stimuli was undertaken by BF Skinner, who focused on the actual volitional behavior of organisms in response to stimuli, not their involuntary responses.

### **Skinner**

Skinner conducted his most famous and groundbreaking experiments with a device called, aptly enough, a Skinner Box. This was a simple affair involving a box with two levers. One lever, when appropriately pressed, produced a tasty food pellet. This was the Reward Lever. The other lever -- the Punishment Lever -- delivered upon pressing a mild electric shock. Various organisms were tested with this device, but the most famous of Skinner's subjects are pigeons and, aptly enough, people (in particular his own infant daughter). Whether Skinner had a sufficient sense of humor to intentionally so link people and pigeons -- who are not known as Einsteins of the avian world -- is unrecorded, though clearly the Obama administration approves of this linkage.

So long as the levers were not switched around (or otherwise confused by contradictory reinforcement) and could be distinguished from one another, and so long as they gave reasonably consistent and predictable results, most organisms swiftly learned how to get food and avoid the shock. The Psychology Department

doubtless has copious film evidence of overweight pigeons happily pressing away on the pellet producing lever.

Skinner used this simple model to develop the science of Operant Conditioning, which in a nutshell elaborates on how all organisms with any intelligence respond rationally to the various rewards and punishments with which the environment surrounds us. Indeed Skinner came to explore these matters to an unusual degree. For example, as previously noted instead of raising his infant daughter in a play-pen or the like, he constructed a Skinner Box just for her, in order to facilitate his research and provide her with an environment full of **stimulus**. (Those curious as to the effects of this experiment in the psychology of child-rearing might try Googling “Skinner daughter nervous breakdown”).

### **Beyond Freedom and Dignity**

Skinner’s other in-depth intellectual exploration of this new science he developed was in his book “Beyond Freedom and Dignity.” This most interesting piece of philosophical psychology argues that there is no good and evil, no “inner man” impelling people to pick or choose one course of action or another. Per Skinner, there’s only behavior reinforced by specific rewards or punishments, and what may be going on inside the entity displaying the behavior is secondary.

For example, his theory argues with great force why people who grow up in the ghetto are statistically more likely to become criminals than others, because the ghetto environment reinforces certain criminal behavior that produces one set of results in the inner-city and another set of results in other environments. (Putting it another way, you’re more likely to join a gang and victimize others if not joining pushes the Punishment Lever whereby you’ll become much more likely to be victimized yourself.)

Doubtless there’s some, and perhaps much, truth to Skinner’s philosophy. On the other hand, existentialists and religious philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard in “Fear and Trembling” and “The Sickness Unto Death” argue utterly contrary conclusions with equal force. But the purpose of this essay is not to address whether one’s conscience is instinctive or conditioned by the environment or some combination of both (which is my vote).

### **Tax Structure and the Skinner Box**

Rather, this essay strives to assess our income tax structure from the perspective of the Skinner Box. After all, any economic system is essentially a giant, complex Skinner Box consisting of its own particular levers which produce financial rewards, and the punishment levers which produce metaphorical shocks. Put another way, the free market has the Reward Levers which are hard to push and sometimes hard to find, but which can produce copious money pellets when pushed with effort, diligence and dexterity. Likewise, the tax code comprises the economic Punishment Lever.

What's bizarre from a Skinnerian perspective in our tax system is the fact that the Punishment Lever is inextricably linked to the Reward Lever but functions in reverse, taking pellets away. In effect the harder the pigeon in our Skinner Box pushes on the Reward Lever, the more severe the shock which accompanies the pellet.

### **The Great Economic Skinner Box**

In this metaphor between our economy and the Skinner Box, it's vital to bear in mind that the most dexterous and driven pigeons produce not only a large amount of money pellets for themselves, they enable most of the other pigeons to ratchet up their own pellet production too. They create more and more levers for the other pigeons to press and get more money pellets for both themselves and the driven dexterous pigeon who created that job lever by virtue of its driven nature. In effect our heretofore largely free capitalistic market has produced copious Reward Levers (i.e. jobs). Indeed our giant economic Skinner Box has in the past produced massive, unprecedented production of money pellets, because it has permitted the driven pigeons to reward themselves and in the process of doing so, provide the opportunities for all or most of the other pigeons to produce more money pellets themselves.

So far, so good. We have a giant economic Skinner Box which maximizes personal reward reinforcement for performance. The system has worked better than any other conceived by the mind of man – with “better” being defined by maximum production of total money pellets shared by all in direct proportion to their willingness and ability to push the levers, and especially for those driven pigeons who work frenetically to push extra fast and hard and create levers for others to leverage their own receipt of money pellets also.

Naturally, because some pigeons are more driven and dexterous than others in pushing and creating money pellet levers, the allocation of the reward money pellets is, by definition, unequal. But the allocation *is equal* to the effort and dexterity with which the Reward Levers (i.e. jobs) are pushed and created. *It is equal to the economic value which each pigeon brings to the table from which all the pigeons eat.*

Vitaly, this economic Skinner Box has a theoretically infinite supply of pellets, just like Skinner's original for all practical purposes. That is, in our economic Skinner Box the driven pigeons do not get more money pellets for themselves by reducing the take of the other pigeons (except for George C. Soros, most congressmen and many members of the Tort bar). Rather, they get more because by creating the levers for others and pushing harder on their own, they actually produce more pellets for all. It's not a zero-sum game. BF Skinner argues most persuasively via his numerous experiments that the reason the most productive pigeons behave this way, is because they get to keep a sufficient amount of the money pellets for themselves. In other words, people respond rationally to a system of rewards and punishments like virtually all intelligent organisms, including even Democrats, in seeking the reward and avoiding the punishment.

And as one might expect, the food pellet production for all is greatly reduced -- there's a pigeon depression, as it were – when the Skinner Box has confusion

between the Reward Levers and Punishment Levers which drives the pigeons insane.

### **What Drove Skinner's Pigeons Insane?**

Clearly, switching or otherwise confusing the allocation between rewarded behaviors and punished behaviors produced poorly performing pigeons. They became torpid and generally indifferent to any reinforcements, for their world had gone wildly awry. When the behavior that produced a food pellet yesterday did not do so today, or when the pellet came with a shock, the pigeons didn't know what to do and as such, effectively succumbed to catatonic-like withdrawal from that insane environment. Any system designed to reinforce certain behavior collapses as the critical reinforcement linkage between behavior and result diminishes.

And, sadly, Skinner's scientific experiments suggest that in days soon to come (or here already) **We The Pigeons** will likely go similarly insane as BF Skinner's in our own giant Economic Skinner Box, precisely because of the massively increasing **Obama Confusion** of its Rewards and Punishments. As president Obama ratchets up this confusion of reinforcement by establishing truly confiscatory taxes for the most productive pigeons, adding further to the already-existing massive disincentives to economic productivity, we can predict with solid Skinnerian confidence that the total production of pellets will drop considerably. Many of today's existing Reward Levers will disappear, and some have begun to do so already, for the Skinnerian Incentive to increase productivity and create those Reward Levers loses its purpose.

When the positive reinforcement of the money pellet is taken away, i.e. when providing that job no longer has any net economic purpose for the employer, the job goes away, in our giant economic Skinner Box.

Likewise, in Skinner's original when the food pellets came with a greater and greater shock, hunger became the fallback of choice for BF Skinner's pigeons. The massive job losses we have already incurred, and the more massive ones looming ahead, are the equivalent for **We The People** who are **BF Obama's pigeons**. (True, BF Obama's *shocking* tax increases have not actually started to kick in yet, but unlike Skinner's originals BF Obama's pigeons can anticipate the coming *shocking* stimuli of the soon-to-be higher voltage Punishment Tax Lever and react accordingly).

### **Overview**

The precipitous 40% drop in the Dow from its 2008 high of over 13,000 that's already occurred since then-Senator Obama became the presidential favorite in May of that year suggests that the market has far better capabilities of Skinnerian prescience than the author, at least as measured by my meager 401(k).

And with a truly Kierkegaardian leap into the abyss of politically incorrect heresy, one can further observe that roughly, it's *only* the top 25% or so of the most productive and job-supplying American pigeons who currently pay roughly 95% or more of the taxes that fund our massive and growing Federal government and all its income

redistribution schemes. This is the minority of people who earn – and produce – the most, and are already paying 50% (or more in some states) of their income reward pellets to The State when all the taxes are added up. Being less than a majority, this minority of extra-productive pigeons bearing virtually all the tax load for everyone else regularly experiences effective **taxation without representation** already, and as a result have essentially become everybody else's **slaves**.

Or more accurately, roughly 50% of their lives are enslaved, i.e. that hugely unfair and disproportionate portion of their productive efforts confiscated by the government *from them only*. Granted, with the remaining 50% they are admittedly well-fed slaves, with comfortable lodging, but still slaves nonetheless, with only one of their legs in shackles since they do get to keep possibly up to half the fruits of their labor. (However, that looks to shrink to less than half under BF Obama's peculiar interpretation of Skinner's scientific findings).

### **Summary**

President Obama's expressed and aggressive taxation intentions will not only further punish our most productive and economically valuable pigeons and drive them even more insane, with many, many more job losses and further massive declines in the Dow as a likely result.

That is, **High Lord OhMyGod! Obama's** quest to reductively morph our society into a kinder, gentler, castrated version of the Soviet Union will not only greatly hurt us, it will also add to our Founding Fathers' spirits' torture. For, the increasingly repressive extent of Washington's Leviathan is far, far more massive and confiscatory to we their descendents than the British Crown ever was to them, and has thus evolved to pervert their originally great creation.

Likewise Abe Lincoln must be writhing in the grave because the bloody war he oversaw which was supposed to end slavery has actually resulted only in slavery's reconfiguration.

Damocles  
March 2009