

Column 1: Exploring Mysteries of Living: Welcome



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A Los Alamos member of The International Behaviorology Institute

Why these Columns? Because human behavior causes global problems, and solving these problems requires changes in human behavior... So *everyone* benefits from knowing something about the natural science of human behavior (called behaviorology) that these columns relate. Having first appeared as newspaper columns, these columns began appearing on **BehaviorInfo.com** starting in 2020.

Welcome to the first of many columns exploring some of the mysteries of life and living, especially some behavior–related mysteries. Each column will include where to find more information. And each column provides some basics of a scientific account for its mystery.

Behaviorology, the little known 100–year–old natural science of behavior, supplies the informing science. Indeed, in these columns, the words “science” and “scientist” always mean “natural science” and “natural scientist.” This avoids confusion. Alone, “science” can mean something very different. For example the theology department at the university in Leuven, Belgium, officially goes by the name, “Faculty of Theological Sciences.”

Your columnist (whose last name is pronounced “la–due”) holds a Ph.D. in The Experimental Analysis of Behavior. That’s a mouthful, which is one reason for the name change to behaviorology. Well over 35 years of college teaching and research experience led the author to retire in 2015 as emeritus professor of behaviorology at the State University of New York at Canton. Having grown up in California, I now make New Mexico my home.

To start, consider the problem of talking about a science with which people feel little familiarity compared to their familiarity with such traditional sciences as physics, chemistry, or biology. People have some knowledge, especially intuitive, that is, not instructed, knowledge, about a natural science of behavior, particularly if they have pets, and train their pets. Yet the emphasis in these columns will be on scientifically discussing human behavior.

People’s knowledge of human behavior often comes from a wide range of traditional cultural perspectives taught to us early in life. Some of these are pre–scientific and others simply non–scientific plus a few that are actually anti–scientific. If you were giving a scientific talk (or writing a scientific column) you would prefer that your audience had

more than these kinds of knowledge.

You would probably prefer audience members to have at least the equivalent of a high school course in the science being discussed. In this country, most people have at least that amount of familiar knowledge for the basic sciences of physics or chemistry or biology (or all of these).

But what if the topic involves the basic science of behaviorology? How many people have at least the equivalent of a high school course in this science? Not many. It is not any part or kind of psychology, and it is only rarely taught in high school today. That is a reality I would happily help change, because my first paid teaching job, back in 1972, was to teach this science, under another name, to high school sophomores and seniors.

That means columns like these must tread a thin line between deep coverage that leaves the audience behind, and shallow coverage that leaves the audience bored. To keep me successfully treading this thin line, I invite your feedback. Send comments to the Editor.

Meanwhile, really, why *should* anyone bother about a science of human behavior? After all, our traditional cultural perspectives say don't bother. These perspectives get conditioned through what we all experience in our seldom questioned childhood upbringing. They generally say that there isn't any such science, that there couldn't be any such science, even that there shouldn't be any such science, because it could contradict all manner of traditional cultural views.

Besides, we already have plenty of other kinds of accounts for human behavior. We have not only those pre-scientific or anti-scientific explanations, but also we have some more modern, non-scientific accounts that mimic them. Only when people think those are inadequate do natural science explanations gain traction and value.

So, why bother with a natural science of human behavior? And why bother, here, and now? Are people that interested in human behavior? Apparently, people are. Witness the large number of non-scientific books about human behavior on the self-help, new-age, and psychology shelves in bookstores and online lists.

A smaller number of scientific books about human behavior appears on the science shelves and lists. You will find, however, that most of these books emphasize various engineering applications of the science of behavior. This is no surprise. Society usually needs more engineers than scientists. And the application areas that they cover concern mostly normal human behaviors.

Those application areas cover a wide range. They include parenting, regular and special education, behavioral medicine, green contingency engineering, dignified dying, companion animal training, behavioral safety, business and organizational management, penal rehabilitation, and autism and developmental disabilities interventions, among others.

Those engineering books, however, cover the science itself only minimally, only the principles, methods, or concepts needed to work the applications. Only a small handful of books thoroughly cover the science, including not only its principles, methods, and concepts, but also its extensions, implications, interpretations, and basic practices. These topics constitute the areas of these columns, with various books mentioned when they are

relevant.

Regarding “why bother with a science of human behavior *here and now*,” consider the biggest, baddest, best reason, which involves the solving of global problems and human civilized survival. For decades, since Rachel Carson’s 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, and MIT’s 1972 book, *Limits to Growth*, traditional natural scientists (like physicists, chemists, and biologists) have noted that human behavior is a major cause of global problems, and that changes in human behavior are required to solve these problems. So they have repeatedly issued calls, some of book length, for a natural science of human behavior, because it is needed to help humanity solve its problems, and survive.

Without such a science, solving global problems that have human behavior components becomes much more difficult. Some suggest that without such a science, solving these problems becomes impossible within the time frame that the problems themselves allow us.

Yet, while many traditional natural scientists have not taken much notice of it, such a science is already over 100 years old, and now is called behaviorology. So now what’s needed is more people making more effort to become more familiar with this science, and take it into account in their work to solve global, or even individual and local, problems. That is why we should bother with a science of human behavior. That is why we should bother here and now. These columns aim to help fulfill these needs.

After 45 years of teaching this science to individuals, mostly in college classrooms, I have moved on in retirement. Now, I teach anyone prepared to gain some greater familiarity with this science. Now, I teach through “short courses” or, better, through columns like these, or through books. These constitute some of my contributions to helping solve global problems. And perhaps they can become part of your contributions.

Some topics for future columns include these: recombination of repertoires; fictional explanations of behavior; genes and behavior; memory and forgetting; music performance; concept formation; quitting smoking; dignified dying; parenting; nutrition; love; ghosts; boredom; superstition; bribery; language.

Such a list offers something for everyone.

For a book-length call for a science of behavior, see Lee McIntyre’s 2006 book, *Dark Ages—The Case for a Science of Behavior*, published in Cambridge, MA, by MIT Press.

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