

## [Column 1 Set 2] Exploring More Mysteries of Living: Welcome Back



by **Stephen F. Ledoux**

**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 that these columns describe. See the 72 columns of the first set, in the *Explaining Mysteries of Living* book or on **BehaviorInfo.com**, for the *basics* of this science.

Welcome to more columns scientifically exploring some of the mysteries of life and living, especially the behavior-related mysteries. Welcome to “more” columns, because this new set of columns follows an earlier set that was titled simply “Exploring Mysteries of Living.”

Behaviorology, a little known but more than 100-year-old, natural science of behavior supplies the informing science. This status of being “little known” provides one of the main reasons for these columns. Some length and stand-alone constraints led the earlier set to stop after 72 columns, because these constraints seemed too tough for tackling the deeper, more involved topics of the science.

Yet that earlier set only covered the scientific fundamentals that enable readers to appreciate these deeper topics. Those fundamental topics included a range of the principles, concepts, and practices needed to understand the basic applications of the science for solving individual, local, and global problems.

Interested readers of the earlier set, however, have demanded more. So here begins “the rest of the story” (with thanks to Paul Harvey). And it *needs* to be told. So in this second set, the columns are “back by popular *necessity*.” Where those earlier constraints got in the way, this set puts them aside in favor of meeting the interest in these deeper scientific topics.

In this second set of columns those deeper topics concern the methodology, extensions, elaborations, implications, and interpretations of behaviorological science. More specifically, these topics address some of the research methods of this science along with its initial answers to some of humanity’s ancient but as yet inadequately answered questions.

Those long-standing questions concern values, rights, ethics, morals, language, consciousness, personhood, life, death, reality, and even the more recent topics of robotics and evolution. Throughout this effort the columns also remain concerned to help humanity deal with individual, local, and global problems. Such a list offers something for everyone.

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 of the natural science of behavior to behaviorology. As in the earlier columns, in these columns the words “science” and “scientist” always mean “natural science” and “natural scientist.”

After growing up in California, several decades of college teaching and research experience led to retirement in 2015 in New Mexico. While some of that experience accrued in Australia and China, most occurred as a professor of behaviorology at the State University of New York at Canton.

Many people have at least some intuitive (that is, not instructed) knowledge about a science of behavior, particularly if they have pets, and train their pets. However, these columns emphasize scientifically discussing human behavior.

As such, these columns tread a thin line between pushy coverage that leaves readers behind, and shallow coverage that leaves readers bored. To keep me treading this line successfully, send your feedback to the Editor (or through the [www.BehaviorInfo.com](http://www.BehaviorInfo.com) website, which is otherwise seldom mentioned in these columns or in the standardized closing paragraph of each column).

Still, why *should* anyone bother about a science of human behavior? After all, many traditional cultural perspectives say “don’t bother.” These perspectives get conditioned through what we all experience in our seldom questioned childhood upbringing. Conveying pre-scientific, non-scientific, or even anti-scientific notions, these perspectives generally say that the science of behavior does not exist, that it could not exist, even that it should not exist, because it could contradict various traditional cultural views.

So, why bother with a natural science of human behavior? And why bother here and now? One reason concerns the large number of non-scientific books about human behavior on the self-help, new-age, and psychology shelves in bookstores and online lists. These tell us that interest in human behavior runs high.

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, concepts, and methods needed to work the applications. Only a small handful of books thoroughly include but go beyond those topics by also covering the extensions, elaborations, implications, and interpretations of the science. These deeper topics constitute the areas of the current 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, ever since Rachel Carson’s 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, and the MIT group’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 called for a natural science of human behavior, because its contributions are needed in the team efforts to help humanity solve its problems, and survive. Yet, while many traditional natural scientists have as yet taken too little notice of it, such a science is already over 100 years old.

Today the need is for everyone, including more scientists, to make 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. And knowing more *now* is better than later, given the shrinking time frame for solving global problems that the problems themselves give us. *That is why we should bother with a science of human behavior. That is why we should bother here and now.*

Furthermore, as implied in the column on “recombination of repertoires” (one of the columns in the earlier set; see Column 55 in the *Explaining Mysteries of Living* book listed in the reference) some familiarity with the methods, extensions, elaborations, implications, and interpretations of the science (i.e., its deeper topics) substantially improves one’s understanding, appreciation, and application of the science itself.

Both the fundamentals of the science *and* the deeper topics comprise the parts of the science. Together they make impossible any tendency to see the science as merely a cook–book approach to contingency management or contingency engineering for designing and implementing interventions to solve problems.

People’s comprehension of all those topics also provides perhaps the best means to deal with, and even prevent, misuses of this science, because people familiar with the science would be less likely to be susceptible to or fooled by misuses.

Such a subtopic appears in several previous and current columns. This typically occurs when a column topic concerns applications of some principle or concept of the science for which certain variations are *harmful to people’s well being*.

In many cases those variations were in use (i.e., in misuse) long before, even thousands of years before, the science existed and discovered its principles and concepts. One such example involves variations that contingencies induce purveyors of games of chance to apply in ways that compel their victims into more losing behavior.

You can find the mentioned column 55, and any columns from the first set, on the web pages of the newspapers that ran the set, or in the 2020 book, *Explaining Mysteries of Living*. The first set of columns, in that 2020 book, also provide a vital foundation for the current columns, which presume that readers have read the first set. The BOOKS page at [www.behaviorology.org](http://www.behaviorology.org) has a full description.

*Writing these columns occurs separately from membership in The International Behaviorology Institute (TIBI, at [www.behaviorology.org](http://www.behaviorology.org) where you can always find more information and resources). The author is not speaking for TIBI, and the author and TIBI need not be in agreement. TIBI welcomes feedback, members, and donations (501.c.3). Write the author through this paper's Editor. This is column 1 of the second set of 72. Copyright © 2020 by Stephen F. Ledoux*