

Defining the Behaviorology Movement: Critical Distinctions from 1990

Lawrence E. Fraley

West Virginia University

[In this article, which was originally a long letter to many of the leaders of TIBA (The International Behaviorology Association), the author visits some of the disciplinary concerns affecting the direction of the behaviorology movement early in its organized history, for some of these concerns continue to affect our directions today. While I agreed then, and agree now, with the contents of this letter, during the 1990–1991 academic year, when the letter was circulated in the USA, I was teaching in China and preparing, as TIBA president, the foundation for many of our successes since then. As a result, I had not received this letter, so I was pleased when it was submitted for publication.—Ed.]

Introduction

The early years of the emerging behaviorology discipline were characterized by the halting and sometimes faltering extraction of behaviorology from the subcultural matrix in which its roots were deeply imbedded. As the decade of the 1990s opened, the definition of the behaviorology mission and the characteristics of the discipline—even its degree of organizational independence—were still in flux. The leaders of the movement struggled under a cloud of often conflicting ideas about how best to de-

fine both the movement and the essence of that which it was being organized to foster. It was a time in which strategic alternatives were much in debate. At issue were the kinds of actions that would insure the effective emergence and endurance of an independently organized natural science discipline of behavior–environment relations.

The Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA) had recently conducted a survey of its members. One item had instructed each ABA member to indicate a personal professional identity from a given list of choices. Among the disciplinary options was *behaviorology*. Most of the ABA members who had opted for the *behaviorology* label had had no previous formal affiliation or known contacts with the small emergent behaviorology movement and were apparently reacting only to the name. In 1990, the organized behaviorology movement was still encapsulated within a single small organizational entity under the name *The International Behaviorology Association* [TIBA]. Late in 1990 I obtained a list of the ABA members whose responses had implied that they preferred to be identified as behaviorologists. I was preparing a mailing to those individuals that would contain an announcement of the upcoming 1991 TIBA convention along with some factual information about the organized behaviorology movement, with which most of those people were unfamiliar.

This appeal to behavior analysts who preferred the name behaviorology provided an occasion for me to write a comprehensive analytical position statement to the other members of the small contingent that shared the leadership of the organized behaviorology movement. That essay dealt with several fundamental issues that, at the time, were much in contention—so much so that they produced rents in the leadership of the behaviorology movement that mend only with the passage of years. Today, some of those contentious issues are well settled, and most are much more clearly resolved under the unrelenting hammer of more than a decade of reality testing.

What follows is the text of that 1990 essay presented with some editing to assist the transition from what was originally a letter to what is now an article:

Contentious Issues in the Critical Year 1990

November 20, 1990

Dear [Fellow Leaders of the Behaviorology Movement],

Enclosed is the list of ABA members who specified *behaviorology* in response to the options offered in the ABA survey. Many were complete strangers to me. Some of the geographic clustering suggests that subsets of them share common sources of influence. I have spent the last two days working to get out a TIBA convention announce-

ment and information sheet to 124 of those people whom we can assume have not yet been reached with behaviorology convention information.

Some recent conversations have underscored that I differ with one or more highly ranked TIBA members on aspects of the fundamental mission of TIBA and on the basic purposes of the behaviorology movement. This has led me to engage in a lot of critical reconsideration of the nature of our movement and what it should mean. Let me share some of this thinking with you.

While the point of this movement is to preserve, protect, and nurture the constructive evolution of our particular science and philosophy, the behaviorology *movement*, manifesting in TIBA, is a movement to organize, in a particular way, this science in relation to the ambient culture. The science and philosophy already existed *before* the behaviorology movement began. This movement is about how to *organize* it, how to *deal* with it, how to *focus and direct* its effects on the culture, . . . that is, how to manage it (and coordinate the professional activities its advocates) for its greatest cultural impact.

Therefore, our movement is largely a political one, because those objectives fall in the class generally defined as political. I see our movement as one in the politics of science, and I think that that view is accurate. We entertain an important agenda of scientific objectives, but our movement is about the political, governmental, and organizational arrangements by which, ultimately, those objectives can best be realized.

We expect that, as a result of how we organize, manage, and operate this discipline, the science and philosophy that it features will not only prosper but will undergo constructive change. However, our movement is not focused narrowly just on that evolution of the science, but rather on the special organizational arrangements that are intended to better *support* and facilitate the progress of such change. Specifically, in addition to its special (perhaps novel) intrinsic constitutional features, we are organizing this discipline to be independent of all others. That is why, viewed in that context, I conclude that this movement is not adequately described merely as a *scientific* movement (although, construed thematically, that can be said), but rather as a political movement pursuant to certain long term objectives, namely (a) the attainment of a mature and well-evolved science, and (b) a maximized cultural impact by that science. We seem to share a belief, some more tentatively than others, that the radical behaviorist philosophy that informs our science can best be preserved to play its important quality-controlling role if the whole discipline (in which the philosophy, science, and spawned behavioral technologies are encapsulated) is organized independently.

This brings us to the threshold of issues about which there seems to be much contention. How shall our move-

ment be presented to the world, and especially to the broadly construed "behavioral" community? This is our version of an age-old marketing question. I think that an important and practical way to put it is this: "What is the term *behaviorology* to connote?" . . . Or, "what shall be our public image?" Shall the term behaviorology, when it arises among the members of the behavioral community at large, connote radical behaviorism (the philosophy of our science); shall it imply the experimental analysis of behavior, perhaps limited to the Skinnerian variety; shall it connote a strictly *natural* science of behavior (especially human behavior)? In my view, none of those connotations of the name "behaviorology" are sufficient, because none of them relate to the critical essence of the behaviorology movement, which is the *independent* organization of this discipline. The bottom line is that I believe that we should represent our behaviorology movement to the public (that is, we should *educate* the public) in such a way that, when the term subsequently arises among the people, it first of all means *independent discipline* . . . and only then, those other things as well.

We can explore the implications both with and without that independence connotation in place: To begin, we can each name several important behavioral people who believe that an independent discipline is a bad idea and who, instead, are working to change psychology into the same kind of science that we respect, informed by the philosophy of radical-behaviorism. The people in that group pursue a natural science that we would agree represents a kind of behavior analysis that is quality-controlled by Skinner's radical-behaviorist philosophy—in short, they share with us all or most of the other qualities of our behaviorology movement—except for the commitment to disciplinary independence. If the adjective "behaviorologist" does not connote the political quality of support for disciplinary independence and instead connotes *only* the scientific and philosophical qualities of the movement, then those people *are all behaviorologists too*. Our name will have been reduced to a synonym for "*radical-behavioristic behavioral scientist*." My own position has long been that those who are like us in all ways expect commitment to the independence of the discipline should keep their traditional designators—phrases such as *behavioral psychologist*, or the all-encompassing *behavior analyst*—and that *behaviorology* and its various grammatical forms be reserved for persons and events associated with disciplinary independence. Only organizational independence portends avoidance of the politically enforced compromises of our philosophical and scientific integrity that are inevitable when we operate as a minority within a community that favors other ways of thinking.

If behaviorology is *not* about independence, then what *is* it about that would justify the special effort that we have all made on behalf of it? Have we engaged in all

of this effort simply to provide a new name for the Skinner-inspired movement to change psychology? (The psychologists who are trying to change psychology into a natural science, including many “behavior analysts,” *have* been looking for a new name lately, and my guess is that “behaviorology” would suit many of them.) One concept of TIBA (and the behaviorology “thing”) has it cast as an enclave of final retreat for pressured radical behaviorists who seek philosophical and scientific asylum there, and from that haven make forays back into the *existing organizational arrangements* extant in the culture to wage battle. This does not have us developing a new discipline, but rather has us providing a kind of scientific rest, recreation, and refurbishing operation for those who are fighting to change other people’s disciplines—the China Beach of the traditional behavioral movement. We cannot do both (they are not compatible missions), so which is it going to be?

A number of radical-behavioristic people see themselves in the role of what might be called a centrist. They support the general purposes of the grand behavioral movement as a whole and appreciate the kind of group-arranged contingencies that only a coalition of that overall size can arrange. They tend to be reinforced by big-group power and by the kinds of big effects that it can produce. For many such consolidators, the appeal is a matter of simple practicality: Only that level of activity can have an immediate impact on the culture, and it is with those kinds of immediate (and, at that level of analysis, important) interventions that they remain preoccupied. They see their personal role as holding together a far-flung movement whose factions are prone to drift away. Tactically, these persons operate by public expressions of respect for *all* such factions and for the respective principles important to those factions. They keep tabs on all or many of those *behavioral* subgroups. Typically they join some of them. Such centrists will usually focus on the good that a given faction can do for the general behavioral cause, and, if they are a part of that group, they will work sincerely to accomplish those things. If necessary to their acceptance within a given faction, centrists will display enthusiasm for acceptable faction causes, while working to undermine or diminish competitive aspects of the faction’s relations with other facets of the overall “behavioral” community. Such people compromise philosophical and scientific integrity to create the powers of political consolidation.

But regardless of the personal support that a centrist can muster for the activities of a straying subgroup, the centrist’s allegiance is not anchored to the causes of that subgroup, but is merely aligned with *some* of them. Above all, the centrist will work to keep the mission of that faction defined in accordance with the interests and course of *the larger coalition* and will not accept defini-

tions of the mission or the objectives of the faction that fail to respect those of the larger movement. In our case, that manifests in the form of demands that our faction respect the continuing efforts of some radical behaviorists to change psychology. At one level of consideration such respect is easy. They have committed their lives to one course of action, and we, ours to another. We and they can peer respectfully at one another across the widening gap without directing campaigns of personal denigration at one another. Time will tell who best spent their professional lives. But a more serious difficulty threatens us when centrist colleagues insist that we must respect those people through a careful avoidance of any member qualifications or organizational imperatives for our movement that would preclude those psychologists being construed, by themselves and by others, as “behaviorologists.” *Such a compromise amounts to nothing less than the abandonment of our mission to attain disciplinary independence.*

It has taken me some time to understand the special strength with which certain colleagues have been critical of my activities on behalf of this discipline. The high energy with which they have targeted my style seems more related to their disturbance about the basic essence of the behaviorology movement. It is just that I have been more explicit than some others about the issue of disciplinary independence, including how people must behave in certain situations to insure its attainment. In doing so, I have become something of an easy target for those who are ambivalent about disciplinary independence or opposed to it—especially because my style has often been frank and thus created the occasions. Indeed, I may need, . . . perhaps benefit from, and possibly even appreciate the charm school lessons that those critics seem anxious to prescribe. However, increasingly, their motives are becoming more clear as their own political styles become more transparent.

At a more macro-level of analysis, in a retrospective view, we see that some who wanted to change psychology had to step outside of psychology in order to maximize their effect upon the psychology establishment. They adopted the affectations that characterize the quasi-independent Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA). Although they have never constituted all of the ABA membership, from their satellite ABA platform orbiting the psychology planet, their fundamental concern has remained about psychology, and they have focused the impact of their ABA-based activities upon the discipline of psychology. Today there may even be a subset of dissatisfied behavior analysts who seek a similar independent platform from which to maximize the effects of their change efforts upon ABA *per se* (and in some cases back through ABA to psychology). If they were to operate from within the behaviorology ranks, or in positions of leadership, they would steer the course of TIBA and the behaviorology movement, not according to its *own* proclaimed cultural mission objectives,

but according to its controlling effects on ABA and, indirectly, on organized psychology, in which they retain a substantial if covert nurturing interest. This goes to the fundamental issue of why we exist and to the matter of exploring the motives of our leaders before we choose them. Are we to be a peripheral ploy of some sort, or even an insulated archive of ideological purity that is really meant to have its ultimate effect merely on other disciplinary establishments, or are we dedicated to our constitutional purpose of an independent natural science discipline of behavior–environment relations for its own sake?

Right now [1990] the behaviorology movement, as a result of declaring a commitment to an independent discipline, remains unattractive to large numbers of important behavior analysts and behavioral psychologists. Many of them are doing high quality science. This creates the interesting spectacle of much of the best science of our discipline being done outside of what we have defined that discipline to be. The image–enhancing benefits of their scientific work continue to accrue mainly to organized psychology rather than to behaviorology. Can we live without those people, or must we have them? The price of wooing those people is to downplay the independence aspect of our mission. I think that at least some of them could become persuaded to talk the independence line, but few would mean it.

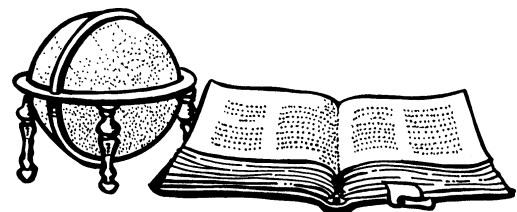
At the outset, I did not anticipate how fundamentally unpopular a *seriously* independent disciplinary movement would be (as opposed to the lip–service variety of independence that some ABA folks like to toss around). It now seems obvious that to attract the many behavioral psychologists, behavior analysts, and others who remain essentially focused on changing traditional disciplines, organizations, and operations, we would have to redefine TIBA and the behaviorology movement as merely the locus of a scientist–credentialing operation. We would have to ignore the fact that some people, whom we would be recognizing as eligible to call themselves behaviorologists, would be working *against* the interests of disciplinary independence. Under that approach, it would have to be acceptable to us that we certify that Dr. So–&–So is a bona fide *behaviorologist* even while Dr. So–&–So himself denounced the idea of disciplinary independence. Such certified *behaviorologists* would go back to their psychology departments and not only spend their lives futilely trying to influence their cognitive colleagues, but would take the explicit position that behaviorology *was* psychology (or what psychology should become) and would teach behaviorology *as psychology* in the same way that psychologists every place now teach behavior analysis *as psychology* (with all of the requisite curricular compromises). Because there are now far more individuals so inclined than those who favor disciplinary independence, if the behaviorology movement became attractive to all of those

people because it afforded them some sort of de facto license to behave as described above, their numbers (and collective voice) in TIBA could soon overwhelm any *serious* disciplinary independence drive within our movement.

The notion, entertained by some leaders within our behaviorology movement, that a small right–thinking elite can indefinitely maintain control of a movement and thus prevent the drift away from commitment to ultimate independence is, I believe, a dangerously flawed concept that, to at least some extent, has already been put to a failed experimental test within ABA. There, the issue was radical behaviorist philosophy perhaps more than disciplinary independence, and as I see it, the original radical behaviorist leaders have not succeeded in holding ABA together as a bastion of radical behaviorism.

A distinction must be made between (a) a behaviorologist who (were we to tolerate it) would work within organized psychology, not as a behaviorologist, but as a behaviorological *psychologist* there to change psychology into a natural science discipline—and (b) a person who would work within organized psychology as a behaviorologist, not *for* the integrity of psychology, but for the emergence of an independent behaviorology. The former is, and remains, a psychologist; the latter is, and remains, a behaviorologist. The latter type uses the resources and opportunities afforded by that person's current entrapment in organized psychology to teach about the differences between psychology and behaviorology, to emphasize their basic incompatibility, and to press, not for change in psychology, but for conceptual conservatism within *psychology* coupled with the divorce and emergence of the very different *behaviorology*.

I support the latter role for behaviorologists within psychology. It is, of course, the role that *I* play there, because like many others in our movement, the accidents of history have left me employed in a psychology unit with psychologists. However, I do not give them cause to find that circumstance agreeable, nor, to the extent that I can prevent it, do I allow my work there to accrue to the benefit and image–enhancement of organized psychology. To the extent that I can prevent it, I do not allow myself to be used as a living demonstration that organized psychology can operate smoothly and effectively on the backs of such forced labor. This has nothing to do with personal style, ...with politeness, dignity, or propriety. The issue here is simply this: When a behaviorologist allows his or her net professional effect to accrue to the benefit of a



competitive discipline—*especially when it amounts to an invalid demonstration that behaviorology can be made to work well as a functional piece of psychology*—then that person's net effect is more damaging to the behaviorology movement than helpful to it. Colleagues who purport to be behaviorologists, and yet who do that sort of thing, offend me insofar as they are violating my professional discipline—related ethics, which are those of a natural science community.

I find that the continued muddling of the concepts of *applied field* and *basic discipline* (or analytical paradigm) is interfering with the analysis of these issues. Within our culture there are only a few distinctly different *major* approaches to analytical thought *about behavior*. Here is what I mean by that: When I am preparing myself to teach (which is *my* applied area), my culture offers me only a few major ways to think about the relevant behavioral events that I will encounter in the field of teaching. To name the obvious and familiar ones, I can think behaviorologically, essentially relating environmental variables to behavioral events; I can think psychologically, relating behavioral events to cognitive processes which may or may not include appeals to metaphysical influences; and I can think purely metaphysically by relating behavioral events to metaphysical variables in other-world domains. Because, in my field of education, students have long been required to study psychology in order to acquire their basic analytical approach, almost all educators are psychologists as far as their basic analytical philosophy—science paradigms are concerned. But then, so are almost all nurses, lawyers, advertisers, and practitioners in hundreds of other applied fields. The culture offers me hundreds, maybe thousands, of *fields* in which to apply my basic way of thinking about behavior. The basic science of behaviorology is not one of those applied fields; it is a basic science, which can be applied to the problems in *any* of those applied behavior-related fields. So is psychology.

Psychology is our most pervasive and direct competitor in the *way-of-thinking-about-behavior* market. We, of course, entertain the strategy of more accurately defining psychology, which clarifies its distinctions from our own discipline. Our competition with psychology is minimized when the two disciplines are construed to be different and hence not applicable to the same problems. We also encourage psychologists who seem to be doing likewise. For example, most of us in behaviorology probably encourage the trend in psychology toward brain science, because, reduced to physiology, psychology gets out of our way as we focus on behavior–environment relations. We discredit the metaphysical aspects of psychology as unworthy pseudo-science (see Ledoux, 2000, 2001 [In this issue.—Ed.]) in the hope that psychology will lose its undeserved standing among the respectable sciences

(and in our dreams, psychology is even expelled from the academies to be replaced by effective natural science).

Nevertheless, as of today, the psychologists who operate as faculty members in my department, are teaching new educators (a) that psychology provides a way of thinking about behavior that will permit them to solve the problems in teaching that they will encounter as educators, and (b) that psychology is an alternative to behaviorology (which educators need not study beyond the level of a superficial survey that the psychologists themselves will obligingly provide as a brief unit of study under the label of “behavioral psychology”). I compete directly with those psychologists for contact with every student whom I am permitted to teach. In turn, each behaviorology-informed graduate must compete for a job with psychology-informed graduates, usually regardless of the behavior-related field in which that job opening occurs. I see the behaviorology movement locked in direct competition with organized psychology in the cultural marketplace, and I do not foresee that that is likely to change for a very long time.

Implicit in what I've said here is the notion that we need two levels of consideration to deal most effectively with the issue of our relations with psychology. On the one hand, it is reasonable to suggest that we simply *ignore psychology* and go about the business of developing *our* science. Such an approach addresses the intrinsic natures of the two disciplines. According to this argument, we should attend to our own complex and interesting scientific activities and not be distracted from developing our own discipline by an on-going and sometimes emotional preoccupation with what the “other guys” are doing. What *we* are developing is practical ...useful. It directly supports a wide variety of behavioral technologies important in our culture. Let the psychologists continue to pre-occupy themselves in ways that are not equally worthwhile. While psychology continues on its path to no place, we can busy ourselves making sure that behaviorology continues to gain strength and relevance.

However, while psychology does not provide the most effective support for behavioral technologies, it nevertheless completely dominates the cultural niche reserved for whichever basic behavioral discipline can do so. Given that reality, the behaviorology movement necessarily faces a long and competitive contest, largely with organized psychology. Here we address the struggle for stall space in the cultural marketplace. After a student takes my beginner's graduate class in education, that student can continue through a traditional psychology-based curriculum or through a different one organized behaviorologically by the small faction of behaviorologists within my academic department. This is a student who, entering the department, cannot even discriminate the separate disciplines, and the psychologists, for their

part (often including the student's advisor), generally deny the validity—even the reality—of the differences. Unless I can persuade that student that the differences are real, and that they are important, and make clear to that student the nature and especially the implications of those differences, that student is going to be led through the psychology-controlled curriculum, become a psychologically informed educator, and add his or her contribution to the continuing failure of American education.

When my behaviorology colleagues insist to me that we are *not* in competition with psychology, and do so in ways that confound these levels of consideration, I stand confused about what they mean. The matter of when, and in what contexts, we should ignore psychology, and when, and in what contexts, we must explicitly and directly compete remains, in my opinion, a critically important issue for our movement. For my part, I do not intend, if I can help it, ever to lose one of my students to psychology simply because, out of some misguided notion, I failed to sharpen that student's discriminations between his or her psychological and behaviorological training and career options.

It strikes me as bad enough to let philosophically misspent science pass unchallenged, but, as scientists, we sell out natural science in general when we go further and pretend that it is scientifically acceptable to flirt with the metaphysical. Historically, psychology had origins rooted in both natural philosophy and mystical superstition, but the emergent modern psychology is laced with assumptions of mind-body dualism and explanatory allowances for ethereal body-directing self-agents. I do not see how behaviorology can claim a place at the round table of the natural sciences if we allow ourselves to appear to be extending public recognition and visible scientific respect to a discipline devoted to the superstitious preservation of autonomous man—which we do when we treat psychology as worthwhile in public.

I would separate, conceptually, this basic issue from that of the *tactics* by which the often isolated members of the behaviorology movement conduct the mission-related activities of that movement. The style and skill with which behaviorologists conduct their respective disciplinary relations with the psychology community requires its own kind of tactical consideration. However, tactics are one thing; confusion about the issues is another. One important function of our collegial verbal community, organized under the rubric of *behaviorology*, is to afford mutual assistance, and engage in mutual shaping, to render those kinds of discipline-related activities optimally effective.

Best regards

Lawrence E. Fraley

Conclusion

The differences of opinion to which this essay pertained extracted a far greater toll from personal social relations than from the emerging behaviorology movement. In historical assessment, the behaviorology movement can be seen to have gained strength in the aftermath of the debates of 1990. Fortunately, the behaviorology movement has continued to avoid the compromises with superstition that have eroded the integrity of so many behaviorists. After 1990, the *International Society for Behaviorology* [ISB, the renamed TIBA.—Ed.] was formed to attend to the maturation of the science and to operate the effective and worthwhile annual behaviorology conventions. On another front, *The International Behaviorology Institute* [TIBI] was soon formed to concentrate on the development of the behaviorological training mission. Across the remainder of the 1990s, those two important operations within the behaviorology movement were preparing to bring an independently organized natural science discipline of behavior-environment relations to an ambient culture that we believe to be in desperate need of the potential contributions of our uncompromised natural science of human behavior.✻

References

- Ledoux, S.F. (2001). Defining natural sciences. *TIBI News Time*, 3 (2), 6-8. [Also 2002: *Behaviorology Today*, 5 (1), 34-36.]
- Ledoux, S.F. (2001). Developing opportunities to disseminate the natural science of behavior. *TIBI News Time*, 4 (1), 9-13. [Also 2002: *Behaviorology Today*, 5 (1), 50-54.]✻

