

# *The Discipline of Behaviorology*

**Lawrence E. Fraley**

*West Virginia University*

The courses offered by TIBI afford students a substantial opportunity to explore the discipline of behaviorology. Like physics, chemistry, and biology, behaviorology is one of the basic natural science disciplines.

## ***A Natural Science Discipline***

A natural science has no explanatory reliance on mystical, metaphysical, or supernatural variables. Thus, behaviorology is a discipline of behavior/environment functional relations in which superstition has no place. Behaving organisms are regarded as natural products of evolutionary biological processes. Within the behaviorology paradigm, the behaviors that organisms exhibit are not assumed to be driven by a fundamentally supernatural and autonomous mystical self-agent operating from a hypothetical construct called a mind. Instead, behaviors occur naturally and are environment driven. From the perspective of this natural science discipline, a behavior is construed to occur inevitably as the dependent variable in functional relations between that behavior and properties of the environment. That is, the environment controls behavior in a natural and functional way, and a behavior is not a product of some mysterious spirit-like force that is presumed to inhabit a body.

Behavior *per se* consists not only of the familiar mechanical movements of body parts, but also includes all emotional reactions, and all verbal behaviors (“verbal behavior” being a large class that incorporates speaking, thinking, consciousness, awareness, visualizations, knowing about, and similar phenomena). With all of these recognized as kinds of behaviors, each occurring in accordance with basic principles of nature, behavioral outcomes—including the behaviors of affect and intellect—are brought within reach of an appropriate behavioral technology for any applied field. As a basic discipline of human behavior, behaviorology provides scientific support for the behavioral engineer addressing behavior-related challenges in any applied area.

Behaviorology is a comprehensive discipline featuring an experimentally based natural science which also usually goes by the name behaviorology. The discipline also includes the philosophy of that science, which is sometimes now called “selectionism” (others have suggested “behavioral materialism”), although the traditional name

has been “radical behaviorism.” (Radical means fundamental or root, in the algebraic sense.) In addition to its philosophy and science, the broadly construed comprehensive discipline of behaviorology also includes various applied behavioral technologies under different names taken from the fields in which they are practiced (e.g., educational behaviorology).

## ***Subject Matter***

When we say that behaviorology is the natural life science of the functional relations between environments and behaviors, we mean that changes in the behavior-controlling environment produce changes in the behavior of individuals. Because behaviorology focuses on the behavior-controlling relations between behavior and the environment in which it occurs, it emphasizes behavior change as a function of the events that occur during the life of the individual ...events that can be of either a socio-cultural or non-cultural nature. But behaviorology also takes into account determinants of behavior that stem from the selection of organisms for survival in the biological history of the species. The current effects of such evolutionary factors appear in the form of genetically determined body structures. The nature of the body that behaves obviously contributes to the nature of the behavior in question.

While studying the behavior of all organisms, many behaviorologists have focused heavily on human behavior. Scientific answers have been provided for such ancient questions as: What is behavior? What can cause it? How can analyzing the processes by which behavior occurs help us behave effectively in all facets of life? What is knowing? What does it mean to say that something is important? Behaviorology encompasses what psychologists call “learning” (although behaviorologists construe it differently). Behaviorology includes the study of various processes by which behavior is changed. Under the rubric of this discipline, behavioral events are described, probed and studied, predicted, and subsequently controlled.

Gaining control of behavior is always the point. Very few people are paid merely to understand behavior, and not many make their living by passively describing it. For example, educators (and most other kinds of professionals) are paid only for changing it. From the behaviorological perspective, behavior of any kind (motor, verbal, and emotional), whether produced through operant or respondent processes, is viewed as a producible product. Behaviorologists do not try to cajole or persuade mystical inner selves to direct their host bodies to behave in certain ways. Instead, behaviorologists produce those behavioral effects through direct applications of their scientific principles, and that production is the professional responsibility of the parent, teacher, lawyer, social worker, human factors engineer, politician, nurse, or...whatever.

That is why, from the behaviorological perspective, all these people are behavior engineers.

Behaviorology is a basic discipline supporting any field in which human behavior is important. It provides the science with which to study such phenomena as how a nurse comes to care, how parents produce new forms of behavior in their children, how a leader comes to have followers, how an artist appeals to an audience, how a friendship is strengthened, or how a sense of duty is instilled. Behaviorology is the science that affords us the capacity to produce a feeling of freedom, a new kind of "wanting," a sense of guilt, sin, or shame, or a feeling of pride or of love. It is not only the discipline for the study of values and ethics, but of how to produce them. None of these outcomes are of mysterious origin. They occur naturally. They can and do occur by accident. But with a science of behaviorology, these kinds of effects or outcomes can all be prescribed as objectives, and they can be produced to specification. Practitioners in any field, whose work includes the challenge to produce behavioral effects of any kind, if properly and adequately trained in behaviorology as the basis of their operations, can be held accountable for producing those results. Behaviorologically trained people are engineers whose products are behaviors and behavioral effects. ☺