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Editorial 10: "100% Natural"

David Feeney suggested this title phrase as part of a continuing improvement and expansion effort for the Institute's web site. The opening paragraphs that visitors to the site would see first should echo that theme; they might say something like this: "*Behaviorology* is the independent natural science of behavior that studies the functional relations between behavior and independent variables (for instance, those found in one's species history, one's personal history, one's current situation, and one's cultural setting). By studying these relations, behaviorologists discover the natural laws governing behavior. These laws then support behavior engineering technologies applicable to a wide range of human concerns (such as in child care, education, and the world of work). As the discipline of strictly naturalistic explanations of behavior, behaviorology should not be confused with those disciplines that are based on, or accept, fundamentally mystical explanations of behavior (e.g., psychology, which is a discipline that accepts a fundamentally non-natural agency of behavior origins, as typically represented by the "mind," "psyche," or "self")."

Students are often unclear about the difference between natural science and mysticism. Dr. Jim des Lauriers, a biologist, provided some insight into this problem. In response to his letter in *Skeptical Inquirer* (March/April 2001, p. 65) I had written him: The sentiments you expressed in your letter... struck a very sympathetic chord. I too struggle every semester to "disabuse my students of their unconsciously teleological thinking," which they demonstrate even as we are discussing the scientific analysis of verbal behavior. This is ironic as part of that discussion is about the variables that cause teleological phrasings in English. It is nearly impossible in English to speak or write in ways both that can be understood and that avoid the "ghosts in the language" (like teleology, or internal, uncaused, self-agents of human action—including normal English phrasings). (Personal Communication from Ledoux to des Lauriers, 2002 January 19.)

His reply was encouraging: "A teacher in the natural sciences could hardly fail to identify with the perspective

[you] expressed. I'm an evolutionary ecologist and have been endlessly confronted by exactly the student sentiment that Fraley described [see "Quoted" after this editorial.—Ed.]. They don't lose the sentiment as they progress through an education in the sciences... They do learn when to be abstemious about expressing their views. So then we encounter young graduate students and those doing their teacher training who are still as muddled as they were when they were freshmen. So we get people with degrees in biology happily teaching creationism in their classrooms. Since you guys evidently also have advanced students suffering from the same syndrome, I guess that the problem extends far and wide in academia... Actually, I think that, as you suggest, the problem lies in the language and in the culture's general values. We have a way to go in trying to produce a scientifically literate electorate." (Personal Communication from des Lauriers to Ledoux, 2002 January 31.)

Meanwhile, this is the second issue of the first volume under the new name, *Behaviorology Today*. As described in the editorial in the last issue, we have reprinted most of the past featured articles and organizational information items (such as by-laws) in the two issues of volume 5. In this issue (volume 5, number 2) we include both data based articles and book-related articles as well as our principle organizational documents. Some of these articles received some minor editing before being reprinted.

This issue also contains the Tables of Contents from each of the eight issues of the first four volumes. These contents identify the original pages for each of the articles reprinted in each of the two issues of volume 5.

This issue also includes two new articles. The first article is a short quote from an article by Lawrence E. Fraley. It is included for its relevance to the themes of this editorial. The second article continues the series in which the syllabus for one of TIBI's courses (available online) is printed in *Behaviorology Today*. This issue features the syllabus for TIBI's course on the basics of parenting, BEHG 201: The Behaviorology of Child Care Practices.

Lastly, after the featured and reprinted articles in this issue, you will find the minutes of the May 2002 Board of Directors meeting and the usual organizational materials. (These include information on TIBI's web site and membership considerations, as well as how to subscribe and how to obtain back issues.)✻

Quoted

Lawrence E. Fraley

West Virginia University

[This is the first of a series of quotes. One or another will appear in these pages when they are particularly relevant to one or another theme in an issue. This particular quote is presented independently even though it was originally to be a part of Editorial 10...—Ed.]

Many students want to cling to the old comfortable superstitious mysticism and may punish an instructor who presses them to move beyond that immature intellectual level, yet they want the practical effective power of behavior engineering practices that only a strict natural science perspective will support. It is an intellectual dilemma with which few people deal effectively and even fewer deal logically. Many behavior-analytic teachers, especially those who teach in applied areas, have quit asking students to adopt or even understand their philosophy, and they teach only practices that yield useful outcomes to which they can point. As a teacher of conceptual foundations in a department devoted largely to a science foundation curriculum, I have not had the luxury of entertaining that particular abdication. Besides, doing so results in the training of behavioral technicians, which is inappropriate in training programs that purport to train behavioral engineers, scientists, or technologists, all of whom need the functional quality control that philosophy imparts to practice. (pp. 300-301)✻

References

- Fraley, L.E. (1968). Adverse implications for university teaching concealed in economically driven policies. *The Behavior Analyst*, 21 (2), 289-305.✻