

Supporting Both Our Science and the Other Components of Our Discipline

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Along with many others, Ernie Vargas and I share a fondness for the poetry of Robert Frost. I had occasion to write this offshoot while answering some local folks who wanted to insist that our discipline was a myth (and punish my involvement):

*I took the road less travelled by,
Allowing me—
Though perhaps at prices steep—
To make a difference.*

Curiously, it seems appropriate at the moment [1997] as well.

Discovering appropriate directions for our efforts to build the science, discipline, community, and organizations of behaviorologists is no easy task. We could focus just on experimental science, but I think that would ultimately be a disservice not only to ourselves but also to those our science would benefit.

Yet I must confess to wanting to be involved in a scientific society—involved as a contributor doing science. I want all behaviorologists to be involved this way. But I do not see that all behaviorologists can be involved this way, nor am I convinced that this is the way all should be involved. Behaviorologists have more to do than just conduct and report experiments, as vital as that is, if behaviorology is to make a contribution beyond our own enjoyment of experimental discovery.

Behaviorology, after all, is a comprehensive discipline that not only includes an experimental component but also philosophical, conceptual, analytical, and technological components (see Ledoux, 2002). In one or more ways, the community of behaviorologists must assure development of all of the discipline's components. As a community we need to provide support for all behaviorologists, including those whose histories prepare them to make their best contributions in these other areas, areas other than that of performing scientific experiments. In addition, a certain interdependence obtains among these areas. Those working in each of these areas need the contributions of those working in the other areas if together they are to move the discipline forward in a balanced manner. After all, where would physics be if the theoreticians were not around to tell experimenters what to look for, and if experimenters were not around to tell theoreticians

when they were losing contact with reality? And both groups not only have fun but make contributions to their discipline and the culture.

Perhaps our current (1997) organization (The International Behaviorology Association [TIBA]) should focus rather exclusively on experimental science. But if that is the full extent of our efforts, we may not be able to maintain them for very long due to other variables, current and historical, affecting our existence (for details, see Fraley & Ledoux, 2002). We must arrange now, even as we organize a basic science-focused society, to maintain some sort of organized involvement in our other disciplinary components.

In addition, I remain unconvinced that a handful—even a handful as large as 150 [a proposed membership cap] plus students—of behaviorologists, all doing basic experimental science and not much else, are going to succeed in having the kind of impact on the wider culture needed even for their own survival as behaviorologists, let alone the kind of impact that the comprehensive discipline of behaviorology can have, and should have, on that culture in so many currently needed ways. And are we also to ignore other radical behaviorists, that is, other behaviorological scientists and practitioners, who share this natural science though not the behaviorology label? I believe that it behooves us and our survival—in the sense of an obligation—to maintain some sort of organizational acknowledgment of their existence, and the reality of their work and contributions, and some sort of organizational effort to coordinate these for mutual benefit and the benefit of the wider culture. This kind of effort may even engender a growing acknowledgment, and perhaps adoption, of the behaviorology label and independence, a development I think we should welcome and encourage for the part it could play both in the survival of behaviorology and in the timely delivery of behaviorological solutions to cultural problems.

We do not need to try to become big, certainly not for reasons of political clout (as we probably derive adequate political clout from our concurrent memberships in the Association for Behavior Analysis [ABA]); besides, political influence is not necessarily proportional to size. But we do need to be open to becoming big, if that is the result of our other disciplinary efforts. If we do get bigger than our organizational preferences, we will deal with that situation. While circumstances differ today, with a lot more actual and potential scientists and several ways to meet (e.g., electronically), we can still take a lesson from early scientific societies. They tried to include all scientists in a particular geographic area who could attend the meetings, which in some cases were monthly. If we get “too big” we can organize on multiple levels that meet at different frequencies. A large national-level organization can meet once every couple of years, while state or regional organizations might meet annually, and small

(perhaps up to 150 members) local organizations may meet every couple of months, if not monthly.

So, in some organized way, we as a community of behaviorologists must protect and extend all of our disciplinary components, not just our experimental science component. We must respect and support our independent disciplinary status. We need not do this through our current organization, although that was in essence the original purpose of our current organization (see the history of TIBA, and its statement of purpose, in Fraley & Ledoux, 2002). If we do change the focus of our current organization, we must concurrently address these other concerns organizationally. (One suggestion I heard at our recent convention concerned forming a group in ABA to serve the more general concerns of our other disciplinary components. Other solutions are also possible. Several might be tried at the same time—variation and selection. Some might even beneficially coexist.)

Meanwhile, although I am inclined against changing the focus of our current organization, I could live with doing so, especially if organizational solutions are found for the concerns of our other disciplinary components as well. And if the focus is changed, I believe the adoption of a different name should be part of the change, so as to reflect honestly the new focus. (Such changes—see Vargas, 1997—have been completed; TIBA's name is now the International Society for Behaviorology [ISB].)

In summary, the natural science of behavior needs to be completely organized, formally and independently, if it is to emerge fully to take its place at the natural science roundtable and meet the urgent demands of its cultural mission (see Fraley & Ledoux, 2002). Behaviorological professionals around the world need organizational structures that support *all* the components of their formal independent discipline. These structures could carry out programs of support for the world's increasingly numerous behaviorological scientists and practitioners. Organizational support is needed to consolidate the independent, natural science status of their discipline and thus to promote vigorously their professional activities (also, see Appendix 5 of Ledoux, 2002).✻

First of Three Related Quotes

...Skinner and his followers never had a chance of making over psychology by demonstrating that practices informed by their natural science were more effective. ...Should accumulating evidence force a traditional psychologist to the brink of either abandoning mysticism or discounting valid and reliable evidence, the typical traditional psychologist treats the dilemma as a Hobson's choice—there is no real option. Any science that contradicts the fundamental mystical assumptions is abandoned. People who got into science in the first place in order to shed some scholarly light on the details of their

deepest philosophical assumptions... are not going to abandon those foundations if that science starts causing trouble. Instead, they abandon the science, which at that point is merely an intellectual tool that initially looked helpful, but has proven to cause more difficulties than it is worth. (L.E. Fraley. From Ch. 5, p. 128, of Fraley & Ledoux, 2002.)

Second of Three Related Quotes

...Cultural survival appeared to be at stake during the emergence of modern biological science and on other occasions in human history. And so again today. However, the technologies capable of destruction that characterize the present era (whether actively, as with nuclear weapons, or passively, as with unchecked population or pollution) are qualitatively greater than those of previous times. This puts not just cultural survival but the survival of life in general on this planet at risk (e.g., from a nuclear winter). The early behaviorologists believed... that that was what was at stake, and so they incurred the costs of organizing the behaviorology movement and discipline. (From Appendix 2, Ch. 7 section, p. 313, of Ledoux, 2002.)

Third of Three Related Quotes

...Future readers, should their lives have unfolded within the context of a culture pervaded by behaviorology, might have difficulty appreciating a past era of antithesis to behaviorological science. That people would not have readily invested in a repertoire that effective—one that obvious and well demonstrated in its validity and implications, one that elegant in its parsimonious reduction of false complexities—could tax the comprehension of those who live in such a future... (From Ch. 7, p. 158, of Fraley & Ledoux, 2002.)

Endnotes

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References

- Fraley, L.E. & Ledoux, S.F. (2002). Origins, status, and mission of behaviorology. In S.F. Ledoux. *Origins and Components of Behaviorology—Second Edition* (pp. 33-169). Canton, NY: ABCs.
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- Vargas, E.A. (1997). Building the scientific community. *Selections*, 8 (3), 1-3.✻