

*Dignified Dying—  
A Behaviorological  
Thanatology*

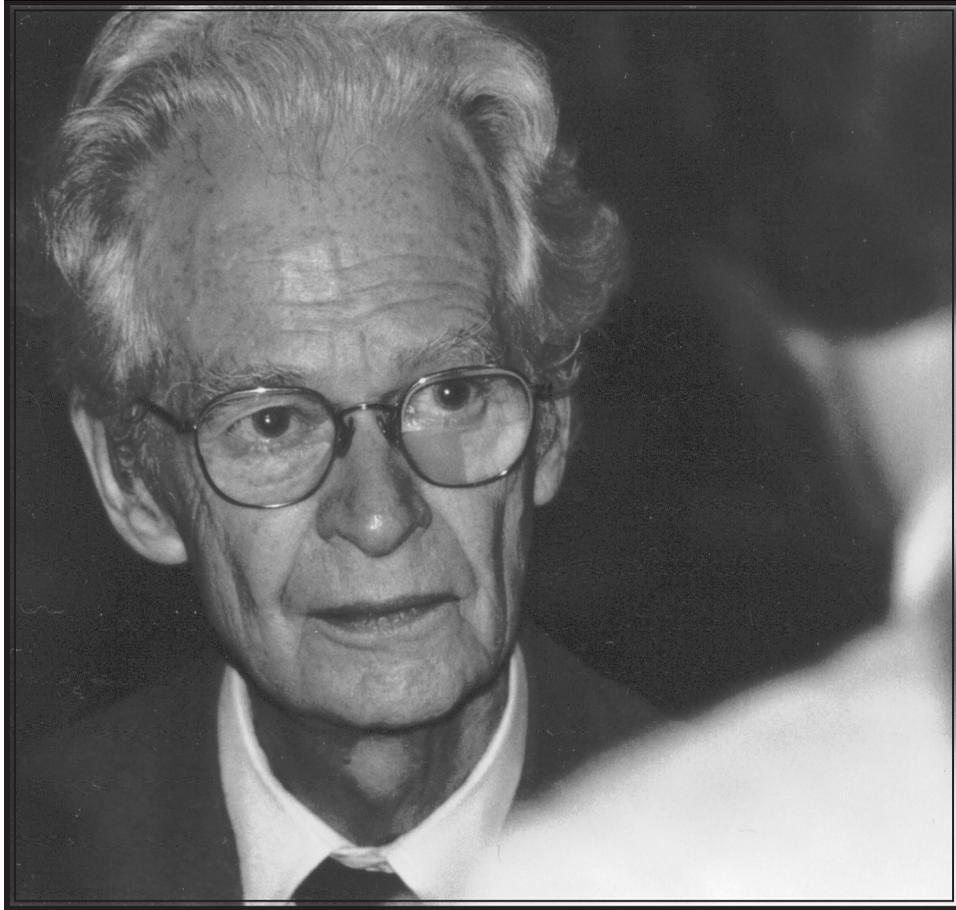


Photo by Stephen F. Ledoux

## Burrhus Frederic Skinner

(1904–1990) conversing at a convention in 1982.

Upon his foundational contributions behaviorology is established.

*Dignified Dying—  
A Behaviorological  
Thanatology*

**Lawrence E. Fraley**

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# Dignified Dying— A Behaviorological Thanatology

Lawrence E. Fraley, Ed.D.

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Occasional blank pages provide space for

*Reader's Notes*

## ***On Typography & Author Contact***

This book is set in the Adobe Garamond, Adobe Garamond Expert, and Tekton collections of typefaces. In addition, a valuable basis for the typographic decisions followed in this work (for which the publisher takes full responsibility) deserves acknowledgment. As much as possible, this book follows the practices described in two highly recommended volumes by Ms. Robin Williams (both published in Berkeley, CA, USA, by Peachpit Press). One is the 1990 edition of *The Mac is Not a Typewriter*. The other is the 1996 edition of *Beyond the Mac is Not a Typewriter*. (For example, on page 16 of the 1990 book, Williams specifies practices regarding the placement of punctuation used with quotation marks, an area in which some ambiguity has existed with respect to what is “proper.”)

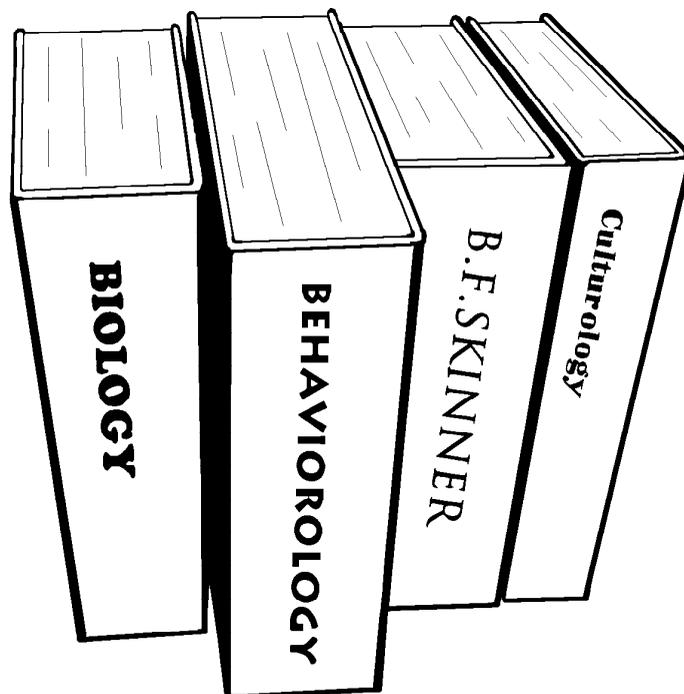
**Author contact.** Address correspondence regarding this book to the author at 5754 Kingwood Pike, Reedsville WV 26547 USA (phone: 304-864-6888). Also, see the pages of the journal of TIBI (The International Behaviorology Institute) *Journal of Behaviorology* (ISSN 2331-0774; previously *Behaviorology Today*) on the TIBI website ([www.behaviorology.org](http://www.behaviorology.org)). These resources contain additional material and works by this author.☺

## *Further Reading*

The books listed here can extend your behaviorological repertoire both into the basic natural science of behavior and, beyond *Dignified Dying*, into other contingency–engineering areas. You can find more complete descriptions of all of these books, and many other behaviorology books, on the website of The International Behaviorology Institute (TIBI, at [www,behaviorology.org](http://www.behaviorology.org)). Each of the general science books listed here covers the principles, methods, and concepts of the *basic* natural science of human behavior, including its extensions, implications, interpretations, and applications, along with some scientific answers to several of humanity’s ancient questions about, for example, values, rights, ethics, morals, language, consciousness, life, personhood, death, and reality. In this annotated list, general science books of increasing depth precede contingency–engineering books (of which you can find dozens more through the websites of the B. F. Skinner Foundation [[www.bfskinner.org](http://www.bfskinner.org)] and the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies [[www,behavior.org](http://www.behavior.org)]):

- Ledoux, S. F. (2020). *Exploring Mysteries of Living*. Canton, NY: ABCs. This 400–page book contains 72 newspaper columns describing the natural science of behavior, along with half a dozen papers supporting the column topics. (A second volume, *Science is Lovable...*, is in press for 2021.)
- Ledoux, S. F. (2017). *What Causes Human Behavior—Stars, Selves, or Contingencies?* Ottawa, Canada: BehaveTech Publishing. This is a 27–chapter, 450–page general–audience primer about behaviorology. While it is less comprehensive than the next two books, it is also less technical, and more fun to read.
- Ledoux, S. F. (2014). *Running Out of Time—Introducing Behaviorology to Help Solve Global Problems*. Ottawa, Canada: BehaveTech Publishing. This is a 24–chapter, 600–page, textbook for behaviorology majors and master’s degree students.
- Fraley, L. E. (2008). *General Behaviorology—The Natural Science of Human Behavior*. Canton, NY: ABCs. This is a 30–chapter, 1,600–page, three–course graduate (doctoral level) textbook by the author of the present book.
- Fraley, L. E. (2019). *Behaviorological Rehabilitation and the Criminal Justice System*. Ottawa, Canada: BehaveTech Publishing. This is another contingency–engineering book by the author of the present book. (ABCs, of Canton, NY, published the hardcover edition of this book in 2013.)
- Ledoux, S. F. (2015). *Origins and Components of Behaviorology—Third Edition*. Ottawa, Canada: BehaveTech Publishing. This is a book of readings on many basic and applied topics.
- Ledoux, S. F. (2018). *Science Works on Human Behavior*. Ottawa, Canada: BehaveTech Publishing. This is another book of readings on some basic and applied topics.☺☺

*Dignified Dying—  
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Thanatology*



Behaviorology in its immediate  
scientific neighborhood

## Chapter 1

# ***Behaviorology and its Cultural Mission***

*I*n this book the topic of thanatology, and its practical applications in support of dignified dying, are approached from the perspective of a basic natural science—specifically, the natural science of human behavior that we know as *behaviorology*. Accordingly, the book begins this address of thanatology with a brief review of the origins, status, and mission of behaviorology, as well as its interrelations with other disciplines.

### **Understanding Cross–Disciplinary Issues**

The members of organized scientific fields promulgate scientific verbal behavior and generate scientific products of various kinds. Nevertheless, although scientific fields are organized on behalf of science, those organizations also function socially and politically along with their scientific operations. Within those organizational structures, individuals or teams may do good science, but considered from a more fundamental perspective, scientists, in protection of their interests, organize to cope sociopolitically at the cultural level. Typically those organizations exist to foster and protect a particular discipline or way of thinking, but they also serve to protect the career interests of their members.

Understanding those concerns is easier after distinguishing between *field* and *discipline*. Basically, a field is a broad but interrelated set of interests in which one applies a basic science discipline. That is, “field” is a term of thematic reference and pertains to the subject matter under study in all its facets. Chemistry is the *field* in which chemicals are studied. On the other hand, “discipline” is a term of intellectual approach and pertains to the nature and organization of the thinking about the subject matter being addressed in a field. Cultural respect for the organized field of chemistry is attributable to the extent that chemists hew to the natural–science *discipline*. The natural–science discipline of most chemists qualifies chemistry as one of the basic fields of natural science along with physics, biology, and behaviorology. The practitioners in those subject–matter *fields* generally adhere to the respective natural–science *discipline* in the conduct of their studies. Because of the relation of those fields to the natural–science discipline of most of their constituent practitioners, people refer to those fields as *natural sciences*.

Organized fields, defined largely by networks of political, economic, and social contingencies, control the professional lives of member practitioners especially at their interface with the culture at large. Jonathan Turner (1985)

took authors of books about the field of sociology and the discipline of its practitioners to task for ignoring the fact that academic scholarship is also a political process... “Such processes need not be conspicuously implemented or particularly Machiavellian, but to ignore them is to miss much of what makes science a sociologically interesting phenomenon” (p. 151). Those who seek to bring internal change to their fields through the introduction of more powerful scientific and philosophical ideas often gain quick introductions to the realities of that political aspect, because colleagues who might suffer unfavorable comparisons during such upheavals may interfere preemptively with the promulgation of those threatening new ideas. Usually such countermeasures are mounted politically, because in most cases resisting politically is easier than mounting objective scientific resistance. The political nature of organized disciplines creates abundant political opportunities to thwart the installation of threatening new ideas, especially if those ideas bring new and unfamiliar disciplinary features to the field.

Consider traditional psychologists being confronted with scientific challenges that inhere in the work of modern behaviorologists. The behaviorologists bring a strictly natural–science perspective to the behavioral subject matter that both disciplines address, and no real phenomena exist beyond the reach of natural science. But to the traditional psychologists, this represents a new and different approach relative to the perspective from which they were trained and from which most continue to operate. Transposition to a behaviorological context typically becomes quite difficult for them to manage. Furthermore, should they be superficially successful in glimpsing the new natural–science approach, they are usually ill prepared to appreciate it. An extensive foray into the unfamiliar domain of naturalism would be required.

Without the cohesive logic of naturalism to inform the assumptions of traditional psychologists, varieties of superstition intrude easily to fill that gap. Among the superstitiously informed traditionalists, a convenient though entirely wrong defensive assumption holds that certain real and important behavioral phenomena exist that can be explicated only via their superstition–based approaches.

That argument, having arisen early and often with respect to *non*behavioral phenomena, has been well settled in the arena of practicality where it has suffered a nearly unanimous refutation. Today, when a threatening problem arises that seems unrelated to behavior, few reputable persons would ignore the relevant natural scientists and call instead for mystically informed persons to step forward and solve that problem. Modern curricula in nonbehavioral fields seldom include serious training in such topics as water dowsing, the preparation of potions, ritualistic offerings, and other mystically informed intervention strategies. But with respect to behavioral phenomena, reliance on mystically informed interventions prevails throughout the culture, the only concession being that such mysticism is rendered with a contemporary varnish. Trainees in behavior–related fields continue to get their higher education

degrees in programs informed by mystical philosophies such as those that rely on body-controlling self-agents. Those agents putatively make decisions and spontaneously initiate the body-moving directives to act on those decisions. Thus, self-agents are mini-deities, each of which controls its host body with mysterious powers much like a major deity putatively controls the whole world. Given the increasingly desperate cultural need for a natural scientific approach to behavior, why, we may ask, do the faculty members in those training programs hew so tenaciously to their respect for such traditional mysticism? Why can't they change?

But such a change is huge and its implications far reaching. As is characteristic of any major professional change, setbacks in economic and professional status can be anticipated as a result of a philosophical shift of that magnitude. The traditionalists in behavior-related fields have operated since the outset of their careers using scientific methods that are informed by superstition-based assumptions pertinent to the agential self, an internal ghost that tells the body how to behave. Rather than outright dismissal of the possibility that an agential self exists, they have tended to invest it with legitimacy by insisting that it has a real physiological basis. They mine the physiological literature for findings that they can interpret as evidence of a self-agent at work. Such persons, with accumulated credentials in their respective behavior-related fields, would have to begin again on their career tracks to emerge with equal status as *natural* scientists of their subject matter. Many would have to dispel and reconstruct almost their entire arsenal of fundamental principles. This raises a question of economics: Can they *afford* to do so?

I once sat through an example that erupted during a faculty meeting in one of those motley departments in which natural scientists of behavior are housed with superstition-based traditionalists. During the last of several departmental meetings to delineate requirements for a new doctoral program, a cognitive colleague addressed his own resistance to proposed program arrangements that could render his students relatively well trained in the basics of the natural-science approach. His students would have become sufficiently trained in the natural science of behavior to require that he, in order to keep pace with them, master a significant degree of familiarity with the scientific and philosophical repertoires of behaviorology. In a moment of rare honesty he simply blurted, "Look, I don't know that stuff. I'm not comfortable working with it. We're all going to teach what we know, and we're going to direct our students in activities that reflect *what* we know."

To maintain the comfortable and familiar science that prevails in one's profession, reliance upon the powerful political contingencies of an established, organized discipline is easier and less threatening than the risky adaptation of a new perspective. Valid though that new perspective may be, such change requires a fundamental and extensive alteration of repertoire. As predictable, on the occasion of that faculty meeting, a scholarly academic debate featuring qualitative comparisons of potentially relevant philosophy did not then ensue.