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Preface

When I came to psychology over fifty years ago, the field appeared to be moving toward coherence. There was general agreement that psychology is a natural science (Kimble 1953), and the accepted doctrine of the unity of science promised unity for psychology. The big remaining question was about the shape a unified psychology would take: Would it be physiological, behavioristic, field theoretic, or something else? None of those complete psychologies ever materialized, however. Psychologists went their diverse ways, and now the discipline is so splintered that specialists in separate areas of psychology cannot communicate with one another. And some of psychology's most thoughtful scholars (Koch 1993) believe that a single science of psychology is impossible.

This book revives the hope of unity and suggests the form that psychology might have if that dream were to come true. It portrays psychology as a natural science and offers a set of axioms, fashioned after Newton's laws of motion, as the fundamental principles that hold the field together.

The argument begins with a reminder that a science of psychology must obey the rules of science: it must be deterministic, empirical, and analytic. To honor those criteria, it must be some form of behaviorism, based on stimuli and responses, because the sciences are about observable reality.

Some people in psychology react negatively to this thesis. Say "behaviorism" to a psychologist in a word association test, and the responses that you get from some of them will be words like "mindless," "heartless," "atomistic," "reductionistic," "mechanistic," "trivial," and "amoral." Exploring this attitude in depth, you will discover that these psychologists regard behaviorism as laboratory bound, committed to the concept of nomothetic lawfulness, opposed to clinical practice, and incapable of dealing with the warmth, richness, and resourcefulness of human lives (see the table on p. xi).

Although in actuality that evaluation is erroneous, a small survey of my colleagues revealed that most psychologists subscribe to some of