Just Behaving: An Evolving Philosophy of Canine Companionship

Introduction – Rethinking the Canine Conversation: For millennia, humans have lived alongside dogs, training them to sit, stay, and heed our commands. But what does it truly mean to *raise* a dog well? Is a perfectly obedient dog – one that responds robotically to every cue – the pinnacle of success, or is there a deeper measure of a dog's flourishing? These questions lie at the heart of *Just Behaving*, a developing philosophy that challenges conventional dog training orthodoxies and invites us to reconsider the nature of dogs and our role in their development. Just Behaving represents the culmination of decades of observation and relentless questioning in pursuit of understanding canine behavior. It is not a static method or a closed system of techniques, but an evolving framework – one that *thrives on inquiry and refinement*. Like any robust philosophy, it welcomes skepticism and demands continuous improvement through experience and evidence. In this foundational exploration, we articulate an argument for Just Behaving as more than a training methodology: it is a way of thinking about dogs as our companions, *not* as subjects to control or objects to manipulate. We will critique mainstream training's assumptions about control, reinforcement, and obedience, and probe the very *essence* of dogs – what they are beyond behavioral checklists, what they can become under our guidance, and how we ought to shape our interactions with them. Specifically, we clarify structured companionship as explicitly inclusive of play and natural behaviors, provided they occur within contexts that support emotional stability. This helps avoid the misconception that structured companionship restricts natural canine enjoyment. Drawing on multiple philosophical lenses – from pragmatism and virtue ethics to behaviorism and phenomenology – and integrating insights from behavioral science, psychology, and ethics, we aim to present a thought-provoking treatise. This is a continuous, open-ended argument intended to stimulate intellectual engagement among experienced trainers, science-minded individuals, and academic professionals alike. What if we conceived of dog rearing not as a linear training protocol, but as a mutual journey of development? And what if in raising a dog, we also find ourselves transformed in the process? These are the kinds of questions Just Behaving raises, and we will grapple with them herein, maintaining an authoritative yet inquisitive tone throughout.

Challenging the Mainstream: Control, Obedience, and the Limits of Conditioning

Modern dog training, in its most popular form, often rests on a foundation of *behaviorist* assumptions: that a dog's behavior can be fully explained – and engineered – by external stimuli, reinforcements, and punishments. In the mainstream view, to train a dog is to *control* it. The emphasis is on obtaining obedience and compliance, usually through techniques like treat rewards, clickers, or correction-based discipline. While such methods can yield results (a dog that sits on command, walks without pulling, etc.), Just Behaving urges us to ask: what do these results really signify for the dog's development and well-being? A dog might obey because it craves a treat or fears a leash correction, but does it *understand* what behavior is expected, or has it simply been conditioned to respond? Mainstream techniques, whether "positive-only" or "balanced," share a common assumption that manipulating consequences – carrots or sticks – is the primary way to shape behavior. *Just Behaving* questions this assumption at its core.

From a critical perspective, mainstream training's focus on obedience can be myopic. It often treats behavior in isolation, disconnected from the context of everyday life and the dog's emotional state. For example, in many training classes, dogs drill commands in structured

sessions and sterile environments, then struggle to generalize those behaviors to the home, the park, or the presence of distractions. This is unsurprising – dogs do not automatically generalize behaviors across contexts. A dog may sit perfectly in the kitchen when a treat is visible, yet be unable to "hear" the same cue at the busy doorstep when guests arrive. Such scenarios expose a limitation of training that relies on explicit commands and constant reinforcement: the dog's actions are often contingent on the trainer's direct input or the immediate presence of rewards. In effect, many conventionally trained dogs become *dependent on external cues and reinforcements* to behave appropriately. They await the treat pouch or the stern voice for guidance, having learned *what to do* only in response to our prompts, rather than *how to be* in a general sense.

Mainstream training methodologies also tend to oscillate between two poles: the "carrot" and the "stick." On one end, we have the heavily reward-based approaches – clicker training, treat training, praise and petting for every correct response. On the other, the traditional coercive approaches – leash corrections, alpha rolls, electronic collars, and dominance-based compulsion. While these schools of thought bitterly oppose each other in the dog training world, Just Behaving finds that they share an underlying similarity: *both are extrinsic*, focusing on controlling the dog's behavior through external stimuli. Both can miss a crucial element – the dog's intrinsic motivation and understanding. Purely aversive techniques are now widely recognized as harmful; studies show that dogs trained with aversive (punishment-based) methods exhibit more stress behaviors, higher cortisol levels, and even a more "pessimistic" mindset compared to dogs trained with reward-based methods. In other words, harsh control may "work" to suppress unwanted behaviors, but often at the cost of the dog's welfare and trust. No serious modern trainer would dispute that fear-based training risks fallout: anxiety, aggression, and a damaged human-canine bond.

However, the critique cannot stop at the demise of the "stick." Even the *carrot* approach, when overemphasized or misapplied, has pitfalls. A dog persistently lured and bribed with treats may never internalize good behavior as its own choice – it may simply perform for the paycheck. As one trainer insightfully observes, reward-centric training can backfire such that *"no treat = no performance."* The dog conditioned in this way learns to do the task only if a cookie is forthcoming. This phenomenon is not just anecdotal; it aligns with psychological research on extrinsic motivation undermining intrinsic motivation. Decades of studies in humans have shown that when an activity is always extrinsically rewarded, the subject's inherent interest or self-driven commitment to that activity can diminish. We can reasonably ask: might a similar effect occur in dogs? If Fido has been taught to obey *only* to get a treat, has he ever learned to *want* to behave politely or listen to his human for the sake of the relationship itself? Just Behaving posits that an over-reliance on treats and constant praise can inadvertently produce a transactional relationship. The dog comes to see the human as a simple dispenser of rewards – a merchant of treats – rather than a trusted leader or companion. In philosophical terms, we risk treating the dog as a means to an end (compliance in exchange for a reward), rather than cultivating the dog's own qualities and understanding – treating it as an end in itself.

Mainstream training also often assumes that the *peak* of canine behavior is immediate obedience: a dog that responds instantaneously to every command, who is "under control" at all times. But this vision of control can be illusory. A dog might heel perfectly when on leash and under watchful eye, yet have no self-control when the leash is off. Many owners know the frustration of a dog who behaves beautifully in a formal class but is unruly at home. Traditional

training may focus on teaching commands ("sit," "down," "stay") and stopping specific "bad" behaviors, yet it may neglect the underlying emotional regulation of the dog. A dog can execute a "down-stay" while internally quivering with anxiety or excitement – a ticking time bomb of suppressed energy that, without the leash or continuous commands, will explode into chaos. Indeed, dogs trained under mainstream methods have been observed to *struggle with emotional regulation*, showing inconsistent manners when the rigid structure or the reward isn't present. The apparent control is then more like a brittle shell, maintained only by active handler input. This raises an intriguing question: what if, instead of aiming for control in the moment, we aimed to cultivate the dog's own capacity for self-control and understanding? Such a shift moves from a paradigm of *training for obedience* to *raising for character*. It is this shift that Just Behaving advocates.

Before outlining the tenets of Just Behaving, it is worth summarizing the critical view of mainstream techniques: They *presume* that we must constantly shape behavior through external means – either by *imposing consequences* (in the case of punishment-based training) or by *managing incentives* (in the case of reward-based training). In either case, the dog's behavior is seen as something to be molded from outside, with the trainer as the controlling agent. This presumption overlooks the possibility that dogs, as intelligent and social creatures, could learn and behave appropriately through more natural, intrinsic processes if given the right guidance early on. Conventional training often overlooks the dog's perspective and agency; it is about making the dog do what we want, often ignoring *why* the dog does anything in the first place. Just Behaving steps back and asks: What if we set up the dog's life in such a way that *wanted behaviors are the natural outcome*? What if we focus on the dog's *development* rather than minute-by-minute control? By examining these questions, we begin to peel back the layers of assumption in mainstream dog training and prepare the ground for a new approach.

The Essence of Dogs: Beyond Behaviorism to Character and Relationship

To craft a better way of raising dogs, we must start by appreciating what a dog *is*. Behaviorist training paradigms, as pioneered by B.F. Skinner and others, famously treat the animal as a black box – a being whose inner states can be disregarded, so long as we can manipulate observable behavior through reinforcement histories. Skinner himself argued that "the inside of the organism is irrelevant" and that thoughts or feelings need not be considered in a scientific account of behavior. While this strict stance helped behaviorism produce measurable results in lab settings, it falls short of capturing the full essence of a dog living in a human family. Dogs are not unthinking automatons; they are sentient, emotional, and social individuals with whom we share our homes and lives. Any philosophy of raising dogs must account for the dog's nature: its evolutionary history, its social instincts, its capacity for learning through experience, and yes, its subjective experience of the world.

What is the nature of the dog? Biologically, dogs evolved from wolves through a process of domestication and natural selection in close contact with humans. Over tens of thousands of years, dogs became attuned to human social cues and routines. They are perhaps unique among animals in their ability to read our communicative gestures (such as pointing) and to form deep bonds across species. Studies in canine cognition suggest that even young puppies, with minimal training, will follow a human pointing gesture to find food – something even hand-raised wolf pups struggle to do, indicating an innate social orientation toward humans in dogs. Evolutionarily, then, a dog is not *meant* to be a solitary automaton taking orders; a dog is a

partner species, evolved to cooperate and coexist with humans. The essence of a dog includes its role as a social learner and companion.

Behaviorally, dogs are creatures of habit and context. They thrive on predictable structures but also on social interaction. A dog left to its own devices will develop behaviors to adapt to its environment – digging if bored, barking if aroused by stimuli, chewing if teething or anxious. Traditional behaviorism sees these as just outputs to modify, but Just Behaving views them as *expressions of underlying needs or of the dog's current understanding of its world*. Thus, rather than simply trying to extinguish an "undesirable" behavior after it appears, we ask what *void* or *misunderstanding* led to it, and how we might have guided the dog differently *before* it ever became an issue. This approach aligns with a core insight of modern behavioral science: early experiences actively program future behavior. In puppies, especially, learning is happening constantly, *not just during formal training*. Neuroscience and developmental psychology have shown that there are critical periods in a young mammal's development when the brain is exceptionally malleable and absorbing information (for dogs, roughly the first 3–4 months of life are key). During these periods, every interaction – every touch, every meeting with a stranger, every moment of play or calm – is shaping the puppy's adult personality and habits. As one Just Behaving principle states: *"early experiences aren't neutral; they actively program future behaviors."*

A puppy who is allowed (even unintentionally) to practice jumping on people for attention, or who is constantly hyped up with frenetic play, is laying down neural pathways that will be hard to rewrite later. Conversely, a puppy that learns from day one that calm greetings are normal and that gentle play is satisfying is wiring its brain to default to those behaviors.

The essence of a dog, then, is partly *potential*. Dogs come into our world with vast potential to become secure, well-mannered companions – or, if mishandled, to become anxious, unruly, or aggressive. Traditional training often only starts addressing behavior at 4-6 months of age or later, when problems are already manifest. By this time, the puppy's formative period is waning and one must retrofit good behavior onto a foundation that may be shaky. Just Behaving argues that we should reframe our role: we are not merely trainers of behaviors, but *shapers of development* and *mentors* to a young social being. Our job is to bring out the best in the dog by understanding its nature and nurturing its inherent capacities.

At the heart of a dog's nature is its social being. In natural settings (e.g. a pack or a group of free-living dogs), young dogs learn how to behave through interaction with older, more experienced dogs. They are not explicitly "trained" with treats to, say, respect the signals of adult dogs – they *learn* through feedback and consequences within social play. If a puppy bites too hard, the other dog yelps or disengages; the puppy learns to soften its bite. If the puppy is too boisterous, a mature dog might gently but firmly correct it with a growl or a nip, teaching it boundaries. In essence, dogs have been training *each other* for a long time. This points to a powerful mechanism largely underused in mainstream human-led training: social learning and mentorship. Research confirms that even very young puppies possess social learning abilities. In one study, 8-week-old puppies learned to open a puzzle box by watching an adult dog or a human demonstrate the action, and they retained that knowledge at least for an hour after observation. Puppies in that experiment were just as capable of learning by observation as they were through direct interaction, highlighting that they come pre-equipped to *observe and imitate*.

This resonates with psychologist Albert Bandura's social learning theory (developed with humans in mind) – the idea that we can learn not only from direct reinforcement, but by watching others model behavior. Dogs, living in our homes, watch us all the time; they are learning patterns (for better or worse) from every routine and interaction.

If we accept that dogs are social learners with rich inner lives and a developmental trajectory shaped by experience, then the task of raising a dog becomes far broader than "train this dog to obey commands." It becomes akin to *raising a child* – cultivating a being's character, guiding its growth, and teaching it how to live in a family and society. This is not anthropomorphism or an overestimation of dogs' abilities; it is a recognition that the human-canine relationship is profound and that dogs, like children, require both structure and affection, freedom and guidance. The essence of dogs is that they are our partners, not our servants. They are capable of virtues – we might poetically say a dog can develop the "virtue" of calmness, of loyalty, of patience – just as they can fall into vices like impulsiveness or aggression. The role of the human, then, is to *foster the virtues and preempt the vices.* This perspective draws heavily on virtue ethics, which we will explore in depth later, but we can already see its shadow here: raising a good dog is about habituating good behaviors (virtues) from an early age, so that they become second nature.

Crucially, respecting the essence of dogs also means considering the dog's *point of view*. We humans often impose our own worldview onto animals, assuming they perceive situations as we do. But philosophy and science caution us here. The phenomenological perspective – which asks us to consider the subjective experience of another being – reminds us that a dog's world (what biologist Jakob von Uexküll called the dog's *Umwelt*) is not the same as our world. *"Every living creature inhabits a world of its own,"* Uexküll wrote, determined by its species-specific senses, needs, and instincts. The dog's reality is rich in scent and movement; it is full of signals and meanings we might overlook. When a trainer yanks a leash or a handler offers a treat, those carry meanings that intertwine with the dog's perspective: the leash-yank might be confusing or frightening ("why did my trusted friend just hurt me?"), the treat might be enticing but also distracting ("I smell food, I can't think of anything else!"). A phenomenological approach to dog-rearing would have us strive to *see the world through the dog's eyes* as much as possible. Rather than simply asking "how do I get the dog to do what I want," we also ask "what is the dog experiencing, and how can I guide it within *its* reality to make the right choices?" This might involve something as simple as understanding that a puppy jumping up is not trying to "dominate" you (as outdated dominance theory might claim), but rather often just trying to reach your face to greet you – an instinctive canine greeting behavior. Knowing this, we don't mislabel the pup as misbehaving in a moral sense; we calmly teach it an alternative greeting that works for both human and dog (like sitting for petting), guiding it in a way that respects its social intent but channels it appropriately. Adopting the dog's perspective is not only empathetic; it's effective. It allows us to design our training (or better, our upbringing strategy) in ways that the dog naturally *gets*. It also guards us ethically: it reminds us that the dog is a subject of experience, not an object, and thus any method we use must be justifiable not only in terms of outcomes but in terms of the dog's well-being and dignity.

In summary, a richer understanding of the dog – its nature and essence – lays the groundwork for Just Behaving's principles. We come to see a dog not as a creature to be controlled, but as a young learner to be educated, a friend to be guided, a member of the household whose personality will be largely shaped by how we raise it. We see that dogs have innate aptitudes

(social learning, bonding, play, exploration) that can be harnessed in lieu of excessive artificial reinforcement. And we acknowledge that each dog has its own mind and experience, which we must consider if we aim to foster not just obedience, but a harmonious partnership. With this understanding, we can turn to what Just Behaving proposes as a path to raising a well-rounded canine companion.

Just Behaving – From Training to Raising: Principles of a Canine Philosophy

Just Behaving is best described as a *philosophy of raising dogs*, as opposed to a mere training method. It emerged from real-world experience and a deep dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of conventional training. The founders of this approach – seasoned observers of canine behavior – noted that *"traditional training techniques, though widely used, consistently fell short in producing genuinely balanced, emotionally stable companions."* Dogs trained by standard methods often remained reliant on external cues, as we noted, and could be emotionally inconsistent. This led to a period of extensive reflection and observation: instead of doubling down on the usual techniques, they stepped back to watch naturally balanced dogs (for instance, multi-generational groups of dogs, where puppies interact with calm adult dogs). What they found was illuminating: in a stable social environment, young dogs learned manners and self-control *without* formal training, through a kind of osmosis of behavior. There were *patterns of interaction* that fostered harmony – subtle cues, corrections, and boundaries enforced gently but consistently by older dogs and by the rhythms of daily life. This insight became the seed of Just Behaving: the idea that we could raise dogs by *mimicking the conditions that produce well-behaved dogs naturally*. In other words, rather than focusing on drilling commands into a dog, we focus on creating an environment and relationship in which the desired behaviors emerge organically. The philosophy thus centers on *"nurturing intrinsic understanding rather than conditioned responses."*

What does this mean in practice? Several key pillars or principles define the Just Behaving approach (though as a philosophy in evolution, these are continually examined and refined). We can articulate them as follows, keeping in mind that they are interconnected aspects of a single comprehensive approach:

- **Dual Mentorship (Canine and Human):** Just Behaving posits that the optimal learning scenario for a puppy is mentorship by both humans and calm adult dogs. In natural settings, puppies learn from older dogs; in our homes, many puppies lack an appropriate canine role model. Therefore, Just Behaving encourages providing puppies with exposure to well-socialized adult dogs (when possible) who can teach them dog etiquette, and simultaneously having humans act as consistent mentors. The human's role is likened to a parent or a teacher rather than a drill sergeant – an approach of calm leadership and guidance. The mentor sets clear boundaries and models desired behaviors. For example, if we want a puppy to be calm when someone is working at a desk, we don't merely issue a "down" command repeatedly – we incorporate the puppy into quiet office time, perhaps tethering it nearby with a chew toy, so it learns by routine and environment that this is a time for calm. If another mature dog is present and lying quietly, the puppy will often emulate that behavior. Through this dual mentorship, puppies receive immediate feedback in a naturalistic way: an adult dog's mild correction or a human's gentle prevention of undesirable behavior (like blocking a jump) gives the puppy information about what is not socially acceptable, while calm praise or inclusion in an activity rewards the desirable choices. Over time, the puppy internalizes "how to

behave" as if it were second nature, not merely "how to comply when told." They learn through living, not just through training sessions. This approach contrasts sharply with conventional methods that rely on formal structured sessions and explicit reinforcement. In the conventional approach, learning is compartmentalized – the dog learns *when a treat is present and the trainer is in front of me, I do X*. In mentorship-based raising, learning is diffuse and continuous – the dog is *always* learning, soaking up norms from daily interactions. *Learning is seamlessly integrated into everyday life*, making the lessons broad and generalized. One result is that dogs raised this way tend to exhibit *outcome independence* – their good behavior doesn't evaporate when the cookie jar is empty or when a guest arrives unexpectedly, because it's rooted in an intrinsic understanding of social expectations. A Just Behaving dog "just behaves," without needing constant management, which is precisely the goal. The mentorship model relies heavily on effective communication—not just what is communicated, but how. In natural canine groups, adult dogs rarely "lecture" puppies with constant vocalizations. Instead, they use subtle body language, momentary disengagement, and occasional clear corrections that occur within seconds of the behavior being addressed. Just Behaving adapts this natural communication style to the human-dog relationship. Communication within the mentorship framework evolves as dogs mature, mirroring the developmental progression seen in natural canine interactions. Initially, more explicit, often physical guidance is required as puppies don't yet understand verbal or subtle cues. As dogs internalize expectations, communication becomes increasingly refined, eventually requiring only minimal signals to convey meaning. This progressive refinement extends beyond commands to encompass the entire communication spectrum. Tone, volume, timing, and even silence become powerful tools in the mentorship relationship. A mentor knows when a quiet moment of patience will allow a puppy to process and learn more effectively than verbal direction, just as they understand when a clear, firm (but not frightening) command is necessary for safety. The nuanced understanding of communication timing—recognizing the 1-3 second window within which dogs connect actions and consequences—forms a crucial element of effective mentorship. This principle shapes how guidance is provided, ensuring puppies clearly understand which behaviors are being acknowledged or redirected. Equally important is the mentor's emotional regulation. Dogs are extraordinarily sensitive to human emotional states, often responding more to our feelings than our words. A mentor who maintains calm, stable emotions creates a learning environment where puppies can absorb lessons without the confusion of emotional static or inconsistency. Through this sophisticated approach to communication—evolving from explicit to subtle, emphasizing timing and emotional clarity—the mentorship model creates a deep, intuitive understanding between human and dog that transcends traditional command-based training.

- **Calmness as Default:** A central tenet of Just Behaving is that *calmness is the foundation* for a balanced dog. In many mainstream narratives, a "happy dog" is often misidentified as one that is constantly excited – jumping, barking in joy, racing around at the drop of a hat. While enthusiasm and playfulness are wonderful in the right context, constant arousal is not a healthy default state. High arousal often tips into stress or loss of control; the over-excited puppy quickly becomes the adolescent dog who can't settle or the adult dog that reacts frantically to every stimulus. Thus, Just Behaving deliberately

redefines what healthy engagement looks like, emphasizing *tranquility and self-regulation*. From the earliest days, puppies in this program are raised in an environment where *excitement is not reinforced and calm behavior is richly rewarded* (with attention, access to things they want, inclusion in activities). Over time, the pups learn that being calm and polite is what opens doors – literally and figuratively – to what they seek. For instance, a puppy that jumps and barks when it wants to greet someone will simply be gently ignored or have the greeting delayed; when it sits or shows a moment of calm, *that* is when attention and affection flow. In this way, calmness becomes a habit. Why calmness? Because a dog that can control its impulses and remain composed can be given far more freedom and trust. Imagine two dogs at a picnic: one is well-exercised but overstimulated, constantly trying to jump on people or chase squirrels, requiring its owner to keep a short leash and issue repeated commands. The other lies down quietly, watching the world, rising to greet new people with a wag and then settling again – that dog can be allowed off-leash for fetch or to mingle, because it's not constantly teetering on chaos. Just Behaving argues that by teaching calmness, we actually expand the dog's freedom and quality of life. This is not about suppressing a dog's joy; it's about preventing *misguided excitement* from curdling that joy. A calm dog still plays, runs, and has fun – but it has an "off switch" and can relax, which is crucial for life in a human household. In effect, calmness is treated as a *virtue* to instill. The methodology for this is consistent modeling (humans staying calm and not inadvertently firing the dog up), managing the environment to avoid constant overstimulation, and reinforcing the dog's calm behaviors with positive outcomes (for example, *only a calm dog gets petting or treats or the door opened for a walk*). Over time, calmness becomes the dog's default emotional state – a kind of *second nature*, as Aristotle might appreciate, since *"we are what we repeatedly do"* and if we repeatedly practice calm behavior, it becomes ingrained.

- **Prevention Over Correction:** One of the most distinctive aspects of Just Behaving is its prevention-first philosophy. Traditional training often operates on a reactive model: wait for the dog to do something wrong (have an accident on the carpet, start nuisance barking, pull on leash, etc.) and then correct or train the dog to stop doing that. In contrast, Just Behaving strives to *anticipate and prevent misbehaviors before they ever become habits*. This requires foresight and management in a puppy's early life. It means structuring the puppy's environment in such a way that it has little or no chance to *rehearse* undesirable behaviors. For example, instead of leaving shoes around for a teething pup to inevitably chew (and then scolding it), a prevention approach puppy-proofs the home and provides plenty of appropriate chew toys, supervising the pup so that chewing shoes never becomes a learned habit. Instead of allowing a pup freedom to dash out the front door and then trying to train a recall amidst high distraction, prevention would involve using gates or leashes to ensure the pup cannot bolt, and teaching it from day one that doors only open when one is calm and waiting (thus the dog never learns the fun of door-darting). This approach aligns with a simple adage: *an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure*. By not allowing bad habits to form, we save the dog from confusion and ourselves from the arduous task of un-training a behavior that has become self-rewarding. Some critics might say "life happens, you can't prevent everything," and that's true – no system is perfect. But Just Behaving attempts to come as close as possible. It treats every unwanted behavior as *a failure of the human*

environment or guidance, rather than willful naughtiness in the dog. Importantly, prevention in Just Behaving is not passive avoidance; it is *active teaching of alternatives*. For instance, to prevent jumping on guests, one anticipates the excitement of greetings and actively guides the puppy during those moments – perhaps holding the puppy or using a leash at first to discourage jumping, rewarding four paws on the ground, even training family and visitors on how to calmly greet the dog. By intervening early and consistently, the puppy grows up simply *never having learned* that jumping enthusiastically is how to say hello. Instead, from its perspective, sitting or staying grounded is the only strategy that has ever worked to get attention – so that is what the dog does. The power of prevention is that it makes good behavior *look "automatic."* As the Just Behaving team notes, when prevention is done right, the absence of problems can seem almost unremarkable – owners might not realize what *didn't* happen because the dog never developed the issues in the first place. There is a humility in this approach: the human takes on the responsibility to manage and guide, rather than putting the burden on the puppy to "behave and then be corrected if not." It's reminiscent of good parenting of toddlers – we don't wait for a toddler to repeatedly draw on the walls and then punish them each time; we put the crayons away when unsupervised, we show them paper as the place to draw, and we keep an eye out. Through prevention, the need for harsh correction nearly vanishes. Of course, gentle correction or redirection has its place (and we'll discuss the idea of indirect correction next), but the heavy-handed punitive techniques of old-school training are largely unnecessary if one has prevented the major misbehaviors from ever becoming enjoyable to the dog. The final pillar of Just Behaving is explicitly *"Prevention: addressing behaviors before they start,"* considered perhaps the most powerful strategy of all. It is easier to build a habit than to break one – so we build good habits from scratch.

Central to our pillar of Prevention is explicitly never requesting or initiating behaviors we later wish to avoid. Families adhering to Just Behaving never intentionally encourage puppies to jump, mouth, or play tug-of-war - even playfully - because these early interactions become ingrained habits that must later be reversed. By proactively avoiding these common pitfalls from the start, puppies naturally develop into calm, respectful adults, significantly reducing the need for future corrections.

In summary, Just Behaving's approach to prevention is not merely about correcting or redirecting behaviors that arise; it is fundamentally about proactive avoidance. This means explicitly refraining from ever asking for behaviors - such as jumping, tugging, or mouthy play - that we ultimately find problematic. By maintaining this proactive stance, we foster emotional stability, clear communication, and genuine understanding, setting the stage for lifelong harmonious companionship rather than a cycle of continuous training and correction.

- **Indirect Correction and Natural Consequences:** In those cases where correction is needed – after all, no one can foresee every scenario with a puppy – Just Behaving advocates for *indirect and proportional corrections that resemble the natural feedback a dog might get in a social group*. This means avoiding heavy punishment or anything that instills fear, and instead using mild aversive signals or consequences that teach a lesson without drama. For example, if a puppy is biting your hand too hard during play, instead of smacking the pup (which would be inappropriate and riskful), you might yelp softly or

say “ouch” and immediately withdraw attention, mimicking how a littermate would end play when bitten too hard. The pup learns that biting too hard makes the fun stop – a natural consequence. If a dog is jumping on the counter, an indirect correction might be simply making sure that behavior *never pays off* (no food is ever accessible, perhaps using a noisy but safe deterrent like a can on the edge that falls and startles the dog the moment it tries – the counter “bites back” on its own, not you administering some punishment). The idea is that the correction is never about anger or domination, but about providing feedback. In training terms, this often manifests as negative punishment (removing something the dog wants when it misbehaves, such as attention or freedom) or certain gentle positive punishments that are more like nuisances than true pain (like a quick “Eh-eh” sound to interrupt, or a leash block to prevent pulling). Just Behaving emphasizes *“subtle guidance, not punishment,”* aligning corrections with what a puppy would intuitively understand. We might call this a form of discipline through consequence: much like how in life touching a hot stove once teaches a child not to do it again, we let certain minor discomforts teach the dog. But importantly, we set these up so they are safe and controlled – and often the human remains as neutral as possible, so the dog doesn’t begin to fear the human. An example might be if a puppy persistently chews a furniture leg – one might apply a harmless bitter-tasting spray on the wood. The pup tries, finds it gross, and decides on its own that chewing that object is not fun. In this way, the environment “corrects” the dog, not an angry owner. The advantage of indirect corrections is they preserve trust while still discouraging unwanted behavior. The puppy doesn’t see the human as the source of constant scolding; instead, the world just works a certain way (jumping leads to no payoff, gentle behavior leads to good things). This approach also forces us as humans to be thoughtful: to devise consequences that make sense to the dog. Yelling “No!” repeatedly is neither particularly informative to the dog (other than maybe causing intimidation) nor aligned with any natural consequence the dog understands. By contrast, a momentary timeout (removing the dog calmly from a situation as soon as it misbehaves) mirrors how a dog might be socially isolated for rude behavior – it’s something a dog *can* understand after a few repetitions. It also invites the question: must the dog be commanded out of every misdeed, or can it learn to regulate itself because misdeeds simply never work out? The goal is the latter. If pulling on leash consistently gets a dog nowhere (we stop in our tracks the instant the leash goes taut), while walking politely makes the walk continue, the dog infers over time that pulling is pointless and stops doing it. The correction (leash going nowhere) was immediate and directly tied to the action; no yelling or harsh yank needed. This is deeply rooted in learning theory – specifically the idea of *extinction* in operant conditioning (a behavior that is never rewarded will fade away) and the idea of negative punishment (taking away something desirable to reduce a behavior). But by framing it as “natural consequence,” Just Behaving keeps us focused on letting the dog figure things out rather than relying on us to play bad cop. Interestingly, this approach also means the dog can learn behaviors without needing explicit “commands” for everything. They learn a kind of general rule: calm gets you what you want, crazy behavior does not. Thus they may start offering calmness proactively when they want something, even without being told. That indicates they have internalized a lesson rather than just waiting for a cue.

- **Structured Freedom through Leadership:** Another pillar is the notion of *structured leadership*. The term “leadership” in dog training has been contentious because of its

misuse by dominance-based models. Just Behaving carefully redefines leadership not as dominance or intimidation, but as the human taking on a parental role: one of benevolent authority, consistency, and wisdom. The human establishes household rules (like a parent sets rules for a child) and adheres to them calmly and confidently. This leadership is "structured" in that the dog is not left to guess its role; the human guides the dog's day-to-day routine and responses in a consistent way. However, unlike authoritarian old-school training, this leadership evolves into a partnership as the dog matures. Early on, the human might be more directive (much as a parent manages a toddler closely), but as the dog demonstrates understanding, the leash can figuratively and literally loosen, and the relationship becomes more like a mentor-mentee than boss-subordinate. The key insight is that dogs *benefit from clarity* in social hierarchy and expectations. This is not about being a "alpha" in the crude sense, but dogs are social animals who can become anxious or pushy if no one clearly guides them. Many behavior problems stem from owners being inconsistent or overly permissive – not in the sense of spoiling with affection (affection is great) – but in failing to provide any structure or boundaries. Dogs in such situations can become confused about their place, sometimes leading to insecurity (an anxious dog who feels it must fend for itself) or brattiness (a dog that has learned it can demand whatever it wants). Just Behaving's structured leadership means the owner is proactive in setting rules (for example, "the dog sleeps in its bed, not on our pillows" or "we go through doors first and the dog follows calmly" or "meal times are at certain hours and the dog sits before the bowl is given"). These little structures add up to a dog that sees the human as a reliable leader. Crucially, this leadership is exercised with *calm firmness and empathy*, not with force or shouting. It often requires the human to show self-discipline: one must resist indulging the dog's every whim in the moment (no matter how cute) for the sake of the dog's long-term benefit. For instance, if one has decided that begging at the table is not allowed, a strong leader sticks to never feeding scraps from the table, even if those puppy eyes are heart-melting. This might seem tough, but it prevents a larger problem and actually is kinder in the long run – the dog will learn to lie down during human meal times peacefully, rather than experience constant frustration being teased with occasional handouts. Structured leadership also encapsulates the idea that *the human makes decisions in the dog's best interest*. Just as a virtuous leader of a community acts for the good of the group, a good dog owner-leader sometimes must make choices the dog wouldn't make for itself, for its own good (e.g., insisting on a rest when the dog is over-tired and overstimulated from play, even if the dog seems to want to keep going). Over time, through consistent leadership, the dog develops trust and respect towards the human. It doesn't see the human as merely a treat dispenser or a random roommate, but as a guide and protector. In psychological terms, this fosters a *secure attachment*. A securely attached dog is more confident to explore, knowing it has a safety net (much like a child with a secure base). Indeed, studies of dogs have shown that they exhibit a "secure base effect" with their owners similar to that of children with parents – a dog with a trustworthy leader is more resilient and bold in new situations. Just Behaving's leadership principle is about providing that secure base through structure. Far from limiting the dog's freedom, this *enables* freedom: a dog that reliably looks to its owner for guidance and respects boundaries can be allowed to romp off-leash, greet new people, and participate in family activities with minimal risk, because it stays attuned to the leader even amidst distractions. In contrast, a dog with no guidance often ends up on a tight leash or isolated when company comes,

ironically having *less* freedom due to its unruly behavior. Thus, leadership and freedom are presented not as opposites, but as cause and effect: structured leadership yields earned freedom. The dog's "rights" to various freedoms (roaming the house unsupervised, playing off-leash, meeting guests) expand in proportion to its demonstration of responsibility and respect for rules – exactly as it would for a growing child in a well-run household.

These five facets – Mentorship, Calmness, Prevention, Indirect Correction, and Structured Leadership – form the core of the Just Behaving philosophy. They overlap considerably with one another and work synergistically. For instance, good leadership facilitates prevention (because you're supervising and structuring proactively), and emphasis on calmness supports better social learning (a calm pup can pay attention to mentors and cues). It's not a menu of independent tips, but a holistic worldview of how to raise a dog.

It's also crucial to frame these principles as *evolving and subject to continuous questioning*. Just Behaving does not claim to have invented the "one true way" of raising dogs – indeed, much of its wisdom is drawn from what dogs have been doing amongst themselves and what good owners have intuitively done for ages. What makes it a developing philosophy is the commitment to keep interrogating these ideas with both philosophical reasoning and scientific evidence. Each pillar, each practice is open to refinement. For example, one might ask: are there times when too much prevention could stunt a dog's learning to cope with frustration? Perhaps a bit of calculated exposure to minor frustration (e.g., briefly being left alone to learn to self-soothe) is healthy – and indeed, Just Behaving would incorporate such nuance, adjusting the approach as we learn more about canine psychology. The philosophy thrives on such dialogue. It does not reject mainstream knowledge outright either; it builds upon it, integrating classical and operant conditioning principles but placing them in a broader context of ethology (natural behavior) and human-animal relationship ethics. In the next sections, we will analyze Just Behaving through several philosophical and scientific lenses to further validate and also challenge its foundations, in the very spirit of refinement that the philosophy espouses.

Pragmatism: Measuring Success by Real Life Outcomes

One useful lens is pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that evaluates theories or beliefs based on their practical consequences and usefulness. A pragmatist might ask of any dog training philosophy: does it *work* in producing the kind of human-dog relationship we desire? And "work" here means not just in a training hall or in theory, but in the messy reality of daily life with a dog. From a pragmatic standpoint, Just Behaving recommends itself by the *real-world results* it aims to achieve: a calm, trustworthy family dog who can integrate seamlessly into one's life without constant management. The ultimate test of this approach is the life it produces for both dog and owner. Are families who raise dogs this way finding that their dogs mature into reliable companions? Are those dogs less stressed, less likely to be surrendered to shelters for behavior issues, more likely to be taken on family outings and given rich lives? These outcomes are the pragmatic measure of success.

Mainstream training often measures success in terms of obedience titles, trick performance, or compliance rates to commands. Just Behaving shifts the metric to something more qualitative: the *overall harmony and mutual satisfaction of the human-dog relationship*. It's more about virtues (as we'll discuss in the next section) than rules – more about *habits of good behavior* than *counts of correct responses*. In pragmatic terms, a dog that will not steal food from the

coffee table even when no one is watching is far more useful in a home than a dog who can win an obedience competition but will snatch a sandwich the second you turn your back. The former indicates ingrained understanding, the latter mere drill. As William James, a founder of pragmatism, might put it – the "cash value" of an idea is what it yields in experiential terms. Just Behaving yields a dog that one can trust loose in the house, with guests, around children and other dogs, because it was raised to have self-control and social sense. This is an immensely practical benefit – it makes the difference between a dog who is a joy and one who is a constant challenge.

Pragmatism also emphasizes *experiment* and *experience* – trying ideas and learning from outcomes. Just Behaving is experimental in spirit: it arose from observing what worked and what didn't in raising countless puppies. It was not invented in an armchair; it was *discovered* through trial and error and careful noting of results. For instance, the emphasis on calmness came from seeing again and again that excitable play and overindulgence led to hyperactive, anxious dogs, whereas promoting calm engagement led to easier dogs. If future evidence finds a better way to achieve the same outcome, a true pragmatist would incorporate it. Thus, as an evolving philosophy, Just Behaving remains open to change if it improves the practical results. This also means it encourages owners and trainers to be pragmatic themselves: to observe their own dog and see what is effective. Instead of rigidly following a doctrine ("never do X" or "always do Y"), the idea is to understand the principles and apply them flexibly, watching the dog's response. If, say, a particular dog is not responding to a certain approach (perhaps some dogs need a little more structured training in certain commands if they're to perform a specific job, for example), a pragmatist doesn't call that dog "bad" or the philosophy "wrong" – they adapt the approach to that individual while staying true to the core goal (a well-adjusted dog). This flexibility is explicitly highlighted in Just Behaving, which describes itself not as one-size-fits-all but as a *flexible framework that accommodates individual differences while maintaining core principles*. The *principle* (e.g., encourage calm) stays, but the *methods* might adjust per situation (maybe one dog calms down with gentle music and massage, another with a food puzzle to engage its mind – the end goal of calm is achieved by different means).

In pragmatic evaluation, an important question is: does this philosophy hold up under various real-world scenarios? Just Behaving asserts that it does, precisely because it was forged in real household environments, not just controlled settings. It addresses not only typical obedience matters but practical dilemmas: *How do I exercise my dog sufficiently without winding him up into a frenzy? How do I handle it when the dog faces an unexpected stressor or setback?* The philosophy has answers rooted in its pillars. For exercise, for example, instead of encouraging endless fetch (which can send some high-drive dogs into over-arousal), it suggests structured play and mental stimulation that tire the dog out while reinforcing calm – like a long sniffy walk or a play session that begins and ends with a calm ritual. For setbacks (say a fear period or a reactive outburst), it has one return to mentorship and calm leadership, showing the dog stability. The practical payoff of this is seen in anecdotal and observational evidence: dogs raised in this manner often appear to outsiders as "just good dogs" by nature. People might say, *"What a polite dog, you're lucky – mine could never sit calmly like that,"* not realizing that it wasn't luck but an intentional upbringing.

From a pragmatist's view, the proof is in the pudding: a methodology that consistently yields dogs who can be taken anywhere, who do not develop severe behavior issues, and who deepen the human-canine bond by virtue of being pleasant to live with – that methodology is

vindicated by its outcomes. Of course, rigorous empirical studies would further bolster this (and one hopes that as Just Behaving grows, its practitioners will gather data to compare, for instance, the incidence of common behavior problems in Just Behaving-raised dogs versus others). But even without formal studies yet, the approach is deeply informed by what has *worked* across many dogs. It aligns with a pragmatic attitude of *"by their fruits ye shall know them"*: if the fruits are good – happier dogs, happier owners, fewer relinquishments, better public behavior – then the tree is good.

However, pragmatism also means not getting attached to *why* something works, only that it works. Here's an interesting intersection: Just Behaving draws from diverse sources (ethology, learning theory, etc.) to justify its practices, but if a certain justification turned out to be wrong yet the practice still worked, pragmatism would say keep the practice. For example, perhaps we justify calmness training by saying it lowers cortisol and stress in the dog (which is likely true). If, hypothetically, a study found that a bit of excitement doesn't raise long-term cortisol in some dogs, we'd still observe that overly excited dogs often misbehave – so we'd keep focusing on calmness because it yields good behavior, regardless of cortisol theory. This attitude ensures the philosophy stays outcome-oriented and not dogmatic about its theoretical rationales.

Finally, a pragmatist framework encourages continuous refinement through feedback. Just Behaving, if truly following this, would actively seek feedback from practitioners and even critics to adapt. For instance, if an experienced trainer says, "I like your mentorship idea, but I find some dogs don't have an older dog to emulate – what then?", the philosophy should pragmatically respond by emphasizing the human's role or suggesting surrogate experiences (perhaps controlled meet-ups with stable adult dogs). Indeed, the concept of *dual mentorship* already anticipates the scenario of a single-dog household by describing how humans can fulfill much of the mentorship role. It's an example of adapting the method to practical circumstances (not everyone has multiple dogs).

In sum, pragmatism validates Just Behaving by highlighting its *successful real-life outcomes and adaptability*. It challenges the philosophy to remain focused on what truly matters: dogs that are well-behaved in a deep sense, and owners who find joy rather than frustration in their company. If mainstream training sometimes creates *technically* obedient dogs that are nonetheless a handful in ordinary life, then pragmatically, mainstream training fails the life-quality test. Just Behaving aims to pass that test by prioritizing integrated development over narrow obedience.

Virtue Ethics: Cultivating Canine (and Human) Character

Turning to virtue ethics, we approach Just Behaving from a moral-philosophical angle that emphasizes character, habits, and the development of virtue. Virtue ethics, drawing from Aristotle and other philosophers, is concerned with *the kind of being we become* through our actions and habits, rather than strictly with rule-following or consequence-calculation.

How does this apply to dog rearing? Surprisingly closely. One could frame the Just Behaving philosophy as an exercise in *virtue ethics for dogs (and their owners).*

Consider: Aristotle wrote that *"we are adapted by nature to receive [virtues], and made perfect by habit"* and *"good habits formed at youth make all the difference."*

In classical terms, virtues are excellences of character – traits like temperance, courage, patience, friendliness – cultivated through practice. Now, dogs are not moral agents in the human sense; we don't hold them morally responsible for their actions. Yet, in a looser sense, dogs do have what we might call "character traits." A dog can be calm or excitable, confident or fearful, attentive or impulsive. These traits parallel virtues or vices. A calm dog has a form of *temperance* – an ability to moderate its own impulses. A confident but non-aggressive dog might be seen as having a form of *courage* (not in a moral valor sense, but in being unafraid to face new things calmly). An affectionate, well-socialized dog has something like *friendliness or love*. These are arguably the animal analogues of virtues, and they certainly make a dog "good" in the eyes of humans and arguably in terms of the dog's own flourishing (a calm, confident dog likely experiences less stress and more freedom, which is a good life for a dog).

Just Behaving's program can be viewed as *inculcating canine virtues through habituation*. By consistently reinforcing calmness, we inculcate the "virtue" of self-control. By exposing the puppy to many experiences in a controlled way (socialization), we inculcate the "virtue" of courage or confidence – the dog learns to take new things in stride. By structuring interactions to reward gentleness and respect (say, the puppy is never allowed to bully people for attention, but gets attention for sitting nicely), we foster the "virtue" of politeness or respectfulness in canine terms. These parallels are more than metaphorical: modern animal behaviorists often talk about "traits" and "temperament," which can be shaped. A virtue ethicist would say we are *shaping the dog's character* to be a certain kind of dog – the kind that naturally does the right thing. This is exactly the goal of Just Behaving, as evidenced by statements like *"The result? Dogs who understand what's expected of them intrinsically, without requiring constant reinforcement or management."*. An intrinsically well-behaved dog is akin to a virtuous person who does good out of internalized goodness, not out of fear of punishment or hope of reward.

Why is this morally or philosophically significant? For one, it treats the dog with a sort of respect for its potential as an agent of its own behavior. Rather than reducing the dog to a puppet (where we hold all the strings of reinforcement), we *elevate* the dog to a creature that can *learn to govern itself* within our shared life. This resonates with a virtue ethics approach that values the development of good character. It's better for a child to *become honest* than to just obey the rule "don't lie" out of fear. Likewise, it's better for a dog to *become well-behaved* (through habit and understanding) than to just follow commands because it must. In both cases, there is a kind of dignity and wholeness in having a good character. The dog that "just behaves" has a kind of dignity; we admire it not as a trick pony, but as a genuinely good dog.

There's also an ethical dimension in terms of the human's character. How we train or raise our dogs reflects and shapes our own virtues. If one takes a domination approach – forcing a dog through fear – one might cultivate in oneself callousness or impatience. If one takes a bribery approach – constantly cajoling – perhaps one cultivates a form of indulgence and inconsistency. The Just Behaving approach, by contrast, asks something of the human: *patience, consistency, self-discipline, empathy*. These are virtues in a trainer or owner. For instance, the virtue of patience is exercised when you calmly prevent a puppy's misbehavior for the twentieth time instead of snapping at it; patience grows with practice. The virtue of temperance or self-control in the owner is invoked when you resist yelling or getting frustrated, and instead maintain that calm leadership demeanor. There is even humility involved: you must be willing to look at your own behavior and environment as possible causes of the dog's missteps (rather than blaming

the dog's "stubbornness" or "dominance"), which requires modesty and willingness to improve oneself. Virtue ethics often emphasizes that by doing good actions, we become good. Here, by practicing good dog-raising habits, we might become better people – more attentive, compassionate, and steadfast. Many trainers and owners report that training dogs taught them about themselves – about consistency, empathy, and creative problem solving. In this way, Just Behaving not only aims to develop a virtuous dog, but also a virtuous human-animal relationship, one grounded in mutual respect and good habits on both sides.

Another aspect of virtue ethics is the idea of *telos* – the purpose or end of a being. Philosopher Bernard Rollin, for example, speaks of respecting the "telos" of an animal in ethical treatment – meaning respecting the animal's nature and needs (a pig likes to root, a chicken to roost, etc.). In raising a dog, virtue ethics would ask: are we allowing the dog to fulfill its nature in a positive way? Just Behaving seems to answer strongly yes. It is very much about letting a dog be a dog – *"A Just Behaving dog is still very much 'a dog' with all the natural behaviors and joy that entails, simply expressed within a framework of mutual understanding and respect."*. This statement acknowledges the dog's telos (to play, sniff, run, express joy) and claims that the philosophy doesn't suppress those, but provides a framework (virtue, habit, structure) so they are expressed appropriately. It's akin to raising a child to be a good adult: you don't eliminate the child's personality or stop them from ever having fun; you guide them to channel their energy in constructive ways, so they can flourish within society. For a dog, flourishing might mean being able to run off-leash safely, to play gently with kids, to explore new places without fear – all things that a well-brought-up dog can do. Thus, Just Behaving is in line with the virtue ethics notion of *eudaimonia*, or flourishing. A dog that has learned manners and self-control arguably enjoys *more* freedom and a richer life (more trips, more inclusion, more trust) than a dog that hasn't – which often ends up confined or scolded or in conflict. So by nurturing good habits (virtues), we actually enable the dog to live its best life – fulfilling its nature as a social, curious, active being in a safe and respectful way.

One could even anthropomorphically say a Just Behaving dog is "a good dog" in a moral compliment sense, not just a trained dog. People often use that language – *"He's a good dog"* – meaning the dog has a good disposition and behaves well. That is exactly what the philosophy strives for: not a dog that just does tricks but one that has a good disposition. Achieving that is an ethical endeavor because it concerns the well-being of the dog and the harmony of the household. Virtue ethics reminds us that ethics isn't only rules about right or wrong acts; it's about creating a good life. Here we see the intersection: creating a good life for a dog and its family by cultivating virtue-like qualities.

To critically examine this through virtue ethics, one might question: Are we perhaps imposing *our* vision of virtue onto the dog too strongly? For example, is it fair to expect a dog to be calm most of the time – is that in the dog's nature or are we suppressing its spirit? This is a valid concern if misapplied. But Just Behaving would counter that a *balanced* calm (not a depressed or fearful shutdown, but a contented tranquility) is very much in line with a dog's well-being. Dogs do not enjoy being in frenzied states of arousal constantly; that often comes from stress or overstimulation. A dog that can relax is a dog that can also genuinely play and have fun when appropriate, without tipping into meltdown. It's the same as saying a person who is virtuous isn't someone who never laughs or parties; it's someone who knows when and how to do so in

moderation and with propriety. So calmness as default doesn't eliminate play, it just contextualizes it.

Another virtue ethics angle: the golden mean. Aristotle talked about virtues being a mean between extremes (e.g., courage is between cowardice and recklessness). Perhaps the Just Behaving philosophy finds a "golden mean" between the extremes of training regimes: it is neither permissive chaos (no guidance, which would be akin to negligence) nor overbearing control (micromanaging the dog's every move). It seeks a middle path where the dog is guided yet allowed to be itself. For example, between the extreme of never socializing a puppy (leading to fear) and over-socializing in uncontrolled ways (leading to hyperactivity or overstimulation), Just Behaving strikes a mean with *"carefully managed socialization experiences"* – enough exposure to make the dog confident, but not so much wild exposure that it picks up bad habits or trauma. Virtue ethics prizes balance, and we can see Just Behaving's emphasis on structure *and* freedom, discipline *and* empathy, work *and* play as seeking that balance.

In conclusion, through virtue ethics we appreciate that Just Behaving isn't just training tricks; it's *character education*. It treats a dog somewhat analogously to how one might raise a child with good habits and virtues, albeit adjusted to canine nature. It calls on owners to embody virtues in their leadership. It respects the dog's nature (telos) and aims for a flourishing life. This moral grounding elevates the approach from being merely about effective training to being about doing right by the dog. It challenges owners: *are we cultivating a "good dog" in a moral sense – patient, gentle, brave – and are we being good stewards in the process?* Those are ethical questions that go beyond "did the dog sit when told." Just Behaving's answer is that by focusing on these deeper qualities, we not only get better behavior, but we fulfill our ethical duty to our canine companions by helping them become the best versions of themselves.

Science and Behaviorism: The Psychology Behind "Just Behaving"

Having philosophically examined Just Behaving, we should also place it in the context of behavioral science and psychology, since it indeed builds on and diverges from classical behaviorist principles. In many ways, Just Behaving could be seen as *an expansion and humanization of behaviorism*. It accepts the core insight of behaviorism – that environment and reinforcement shape behavior – but it integrates that with ethology (natural behavior patterns) and cognitive psychology (intrinsic motivation, social learning).

At its core, the approach is very much consistent with learning theory. For instance, the emphasis on not reinforcing excitement or unwanted behaviors is straight from operant conditioning: if a behavior is not reinforced, it should decrease. When family members are instructed to *only reward calm behavior and ignore excitement*, they are applying negative punishment (withholding attention, a desired stimulus, when the dog is over-excited) and positive reinforcement for calm. Over time, the dog learns that calm yields rewards (treats, praise, play) and excitement yields nothing or even temporary social isolation. This is a textbook application of operant conditioning, just with a keen sense of timing and consistency. The prevention approach relies on managing antecedents – a concept from behavior analysis where you control the triggers and environment to set the dog up for success, rather than constantly testing the dog's self-control in tempting scenarios. It's easier to prevent a habit than to break one, because every time a dog successfully carries out a behavior (like stealing food or jumping up), that behavior is self-reinforcing; the dog gets a jackpot of fun or food, making it more likely to do it again (that's reward history). So preventing rehearsal of bad behaviors is essentially

preventing the dog from rewarding itself for those behaviors – again, a sound behaviorist strategy (no reinforcement, no repetition).

However, where Just Behaving goes *beyond traditional behaviorism* is in its recognition of intrinsic factors and social context. Skinnerian behaviorism focused on reinforcement schedules and external control, often using contrived rewards (like food) disconnected from the natural context. Just Behaving instead tries to use natural reinforcers and contextual learning. For example, rather than always using a treat to reward a sit, it might use the opening of a door as the reward for sitting (the door opens only when the dog sits calmly). The dog learns that *its own behavior can control its access to what it wants*, which is powerful. That's still operant conditioning, but it ties the consequence to the dog's real-life desire (to go outside), not an arbitrary biscuit. This can create more robust learning because it's context-specific and meaningful. Similarly, a puppy learns that *only when it keeps four paws on the ground does it get petted by guests*

; the reward for not jumping is attention (what the pup wanted), and the removal of attention is the consequence for jumping. This is very much an application of behavioral economics in a sense – the dog has to "pay" appropriate behavior to get what it values.

Just Behaving also implicitly leverages classical conditioning for emotional associations. By maintaining a calm environment and using gentle corrections, it strives to ensure that people, other dogs, and various stimuli are not associated with fear or extreme frustration. For instance, if every greeting is calm and pleasant, the puppy classically associates people coming through the door with calm, positive feelings, not over-excitement or anxiety. If the vacuum cleaner is introduced in a slow, non-threatening way during a critical period, the dog grows up unafraid of it, having positive or neutral associations. These are subtle aspects, but they adhere to behavioral science by shaping the dog's emotional responses, not just its observable behavior.

One key scientific insight integrated into Just Behaving is the concept of social learning, as we discussed. Behaviorism for a long time focused on individual learning, but social learning (learning by observing others) is a powerful force in animals and humans. Psychologist Albert Bandura's work in the mid-20th century expanded learning theory beyond behaviorism by showing that children learn aggressive behaviors by watching adults (the famous Bobo doll experiment). Canine science has caught up, showing that dogs too can learn by observation. Just Behaving makes use of this: having puppies around stable adult dogs is essentially providing live demonstrations of desired behaviors in various contexts. Even if not consciously imitating, puppies pick up cues – e.g., seeing older dogs not reacting to a loud noise may give the pup confidence that it's nothing concerning. The presence of a calm elder "tutor" dog can have a steadying effect that no amount of human instruction can replicate, because it taps into the dog's natural modes of learning. If a puppy doesn't have an adult dog at home, puppy classes or arranged play-dates with well-behaved adult dogs can serve a similar purpose. This is supported by evidence that puppies can learn tasks by watching unfamiliar adult dogs, not just their mother – meaning they have a broad capacity for social learning early in life.

Another scientific facet is attachment theory. Although originally about human infants, attachment theory has been studied in dogs, confirming that dogs form attachment bonds with humans and look to them as a secure base in unfamiliar situations. Just Behaving's emphasis on calm leadership and trust could be seen through this lens: a secure attachment is formed

when the “caregiver” (owner) is responsive, consistent, and provides security. A dog with a secure attachment is less prone to separation anxiety and more resilient. Conversely, an owner who is erratic (sometimes indulgent, sometimes angry) or overly absent might foster insecure attachment, leading to behavioral issues. The stable mentor role advocated by Just Behaving lines up with what attachment science would suggest: a dog that trusts its person deeply will feel less need to act out or panic, since it has confidence in that bond. This is indirectly an outcome of the leadership and calmness pillars – providing the dog a steady, reassuring presence.

Moreover, Just Behaving’s discouragement of heavy use of aversives is in line with the overwhelming scientific consensus in animal behavior. As we cited, strong aversive training correlates with stress and potential fallout. The method favors *minimal aversive control*, using more negative punishment and management which are generally less harmful. This doesn’t mean the dog experiences no frustration – some frustration is inevitable and even part of learning self-control – but it’s kept at mild levels that are instructive rather than traumatic. The science of stress (measured via cortisol or behavior) supports training methods that rely on positive reinforcement and gentle corrections for better welfare, and Just Behaving falls firmly on that humane side.

Where behavioral science might challenge Just Behaving is the need for quantification and evidence of long-term effects. The philosophy sounds sensible, but we should ask: can its claims be empirically verified? For instance, does raising a puppy with this method statistically result in fewer behavior problems than other methods? Are there any risks or unintended consequences (maybe a possibility that too much management early on could lead to a dog that struggles when finally faced with an unsupervised situation)? To adhere to scientific rigor, proponents of Just Behaving would need to collect data and potentially run comparative studies. Perhaps one day a study could follow litters raised under different protocols and measure outcomes like trainability, anxiety, obedience, social interaction quality, etc. The document itself is aware that prevention can make results “invisible” (because a problem prevented is a problem unseen). So scientifically demonstrating the efficacy might require careful design (you’d measure not just presence of problems, but maybe ease of transition to new homes, owner satisfaction, etc., as proxies).

From a *behaviorist* purist viewpoint, one might also question if Just Behaving relies too much on unstructured learning and if that could sometimes lead to gaps. Traditional trainers might worry: without explicit training, will the dog truly learn all it needs? Just Behaving would answer that it *does* involve explicit teaching, just not in the form of command drills. The “explicit” part is in how the environment is structured – which is deliberately designed by the human (so not exactly laissez-faire). For example, you are explicitly teaching a puppy to sit and wait at doors, just not by saying “sit” and “stay” and drilling it, but by making door-opening contingent on calm waiting. The puppy effectively learns to “stay” without ever hearing the word, by pattern and consequence. Now, if one wants a formal command, one can add it later once the behavior is natural (attaching a cue to an already understood behavior). That’s actually often an easier way to train a cue – behaviorists call it “capturing” a behavior and then putting a cue on it. So the science of learning supports that approach too.

One could also discuss self-determination theory from psychology – which distinguishes controlled motivation vs intrinsic motivation (something we touched on with intrinsic vs extrinsic). *Just Behaving fosters intrinsic motivation in dogs to behave well,* which could be framed as the

dog internalizing the “why” of good behavior. Psychology suggests that intrinsic motivation leads to more persistent and flexible behavior than extrinsic motivation. In dog terms, if the dog is intrinsically calm and polite, it will behave even when no one is watching or no treat is forthcoming. That’s the analog of a person doing the right thing even if no reward/punishment is at stake – considered a mark of moral development in humans. While we can’t ascribe moral reasoning to dogs, we can at least aim for the functional analog: a dog whose behavior is not solely dependent on immediate external control. Modern training often emphasizes *getting the behavior* through lure or prompt; Just Behaving emphasizes *shaping the mindset* so the behavior flows naturally. It’s a subtle difference but scientifically akin to moving from a controlled operant conditioning paradigm to a more cognitive/relationship paradigm.

To ensure the scientific robustness of Just Behaving, its proponents integrate these psychological concepts to back their approach. For example, they highlight how extrinsic-only training can create a “what’s in it for me” attitude in the dog, whereas their approach builds a cooperative relationship. They also point out that command-based training can create a transactional dynamic (dog works only if rewarded) whereas mentorship-based creates compliance based on trust. These claims are testable. Trust-based compliance is something one could measure perhaps by seeing if a dog will obey a request even without a history of explicit reinforcement for that exact act – presumably a dog raised in this philosophy might, out of the bond or general habit of deference, whereas a purely treat-trained dog might not unless shown the treat. Such experiments could be illuminating.

In summary, Just Behaving aligns strongly with scientific principles of learning, while also pushing the envelope by incorporating the *softer* aspects of learning – context, relationship, emotion, and intrinsic motivation – that behaviorism in its narrow form tended to ignore. It’s like an enriched form of behaviorism, one that acknowledges what Skinner did not: the inside of the organism may not be so irrelevant after all, especially when that organism is living in a human family. By blending solid reinforcement strategy with an understanding of canine ethology (instincts, social structure) and cognition, Just Behaving attempts to be scientifically sound and complete. It treats dogs as *learners* in a full sense, not just as responders to stimuli.

Phenomenology: The Dog’s Perspective and Our Shared World

Another fascinating lens is phenomenology, the philosophical approach that explores experience and consciousness. We touched on this in discussing the dog’s *Umwelt*. Let’s delve a bit deeper: phenomenology asks, *what is it like to be a dog being raised and trained?* It encourages us to consider the subjective world of the dog and how meaning is created in the dog’s life through interactions with us. Just Behaving implicitly respects the dog’s perspective by advocating gentle, communicative methods and by trying to align training with the dog’s natural understanding.

Imagine a typical scenario from a dog’s-eye view: A puppy bounces into a room and jumps up on a person because it’s happy and wants to greet. In a traditional training household, perhaps the person reacts with a stern “No!” or even a knee lift to push the pup off, then commands “Sit!” The puppy might be startled or confused – *I’m just trying to say hello, why am I being punished?* It sits, maybe, and then gets a treat. The puppy’s subjective experience might be a mix of frustration (my joyful urge was thwarted) and confusion (I got yelled at but then got a treat? Or I got a treat but only after a random behavior?). Over time, it might learn “Okay, I guess I shouldn’t jump, but I don’t really know why – I just know sometimes I get yelled at or sometimes

I get a treat if I sit." The *meaning* for the dog is muddled: greeting is a complicated, fraught event.

Now consider the Just Behaving approach to the same situation. The puppy runs to greet, the person, having anticipated this, calmly steps back or turns away when the pup jumps (no yelling, just removing attention). The puppy's jump doesn't achieve its aim (contact and greeting). Perhaps a calm older dog is nearby also greeting the person on all fours, modeling the right behavior. The puppy drops back down. The person then immediately kneels and gives a gentle pet and warm hello (the reward) *at the puppy's level*, so the pup doesn't feel the need to jump. Maybe the person even gently holds the pup to soothe it during the greeting. The *subjective experience* of the puppy here: *I tried to greet by jumping, it didn't work; when I stayed down, I got love. Also, everyone remained calm, so I don't feel overexcited.* The meaning the puppy might construct is: *"Oh, I get affection when I'm calm with feet on the ground. I guess that's how we say hello here."* There's less confusion, less emotional whiplash. Over time, the puppy doesn't see greetings as chaotic or frustrating; it sees them as calm, pleasant interactions.

This little phenomenological analysis shows how a training method can drastically alter the dog's lived experience of common events. Just Behaving strives to make those experiences *make sense* to the dog. By using communication the dog naturally gets (like withdrawing attention, which is exactly what mother dogs and littermates do when a pup is too much), it speaks in the dog's language. It's almost a *hermeneutics of canine behavior* – interpreting what the dog's actions mean and responding in kind with signals the dog can interpret. Phenomenologically, the dog is not treated as an object being conditioned, but as a subject being guided. This aligns with the concept that *"all living beings must be understood as subjects"* with their own viewpoint.

Another aspect is the relationship itself as an experienced reality. In phenomenology, the relationship between self and other is crucial. Just Behaving fosters a relationship of *attunement*: the human is attentive to the dog's body language and emotions, and the dog in turn becomes very attuned to the human's cues (many of which are not explicit commands but subtle body language or routines). There is a constant two-way communication. For example, a Just Behaving owner might notice the dog is getting antsy, and realize it needs a calm break or a potty outing, preempting an accident or freak-out. The dog learns that the human is responsive and can be trusted. Compare this to an owner who is oblivious to the dog's signals until the dog is practically screaming (barking or misbehaving). The lived experience of the former dog is that it's understood; of the latter dog, that it's often frustrated or ignored until it "shouts" in dog terms.

The phenomenological richness of the Just Behaving approach is that it values the dog's *subjective well-being*. Terms like "emotional stability" and "trustworthiness" point to an interest in the dog's inner state and mutual rapport, not just its outward behavior. The fact that it says this approach allows dogs to enjoy more freedom *"precisely because they are trustworthy"* also implies the dogs have a sense of security and confidence – an inner state of calm – which is part of their subjective world. A dog that is trustworthy likely feels *trusting* as well; trust is a two-way street.

Phenomenology also deals with the concept of the lifeworld – the world as experienced in the everyday life of a being. For a dog, the lifeworld of a pet dog includes the home, the yard, the

neighborhood walks, the family members, other pets, etc. Just Behaving's continuous, integrated approach means the *training is embedded in the dog's lifeworld,* not separate from it. There is no sharp distinction "now I'm training, now I'm just living" for the dog. This likely makes the learning more real and lasting, because it's tied to contexts the dog encounters regularly (the kitchen, the living room, the park). From the dog's perspective, it's all one seamless experience of life – and that's exactly how the training is delivered. In contrast, a dog whose training is mostly at a weekly class or in 10-minute drills in the backyard might not connect that to the rest of life (hence dogs that perform in class but not in the home – their lifeworld segregated those experiences).

From a phenomenological perspective, communication between humans and dogs creates a shared experiential space where mutual understanding develops despite species differences. This communication isn't merely about conveying commands or correcting behaviors; it's about establishing a common language through which two different beings can navigate a shared world.

The Just Behaving approach to communication recognizes that dogs experience language differently than humans. Where humans find meaning primarily in words, dogs perceive a rich tapestry of non-verbal signals - body language, energy, tone, timing, and environmental context. By adapting our communication to align with canine perception, we bridge the gap between human and dog experience.

This alignment manifests through several key practices: modulating tone and volume to convey meaning without triggering overarousal; using purposeful silence to create space for processing and independent decision-making; maintaining awareness of our body language and its impact on the dog's emotional state; and most crucially, regulating our own emotions to ensure clarity in our communication.

The timing element of communication - the 1-3 second window of association - reflects a fundamental aspect of canine temporal experience. Dogs live predominantly in the immediate present, connecting actions and consequences only when they occur in close temporal proximity. By honoring this aspect of canine phenomenology, we create communication that makes intuitive sense from the dog's perspective.

As dogs mature, the evolution of communication from explicit to subtle mirrors their developing understanding of the human-dog relationship. This progression isn't simply about efficiency; it reflects a deepening intersubjectivity - a more nuanced shared understanding that allows for increasingly subtle and sophisticated interaction.

Through this phenomenologically informed approach to communication, Just Behaving creates a bridge between human and canine experience, fostering a relationship characterized by mutual understanding rather than mere compliance.

An interesting phenomenological question: Does Just Behaving consider what it's like for the dog to have more autonomy? We've noted that one goal is a dog that behaves well without constant commands. In effect, that dog has more *agency* in its own behavior. It is choosing its actions based on an internalized sense of what works and what doesn't, rather than always waiting for a command. One could argue this gives the dog a greater sense of *control* over its life (in a good way). For example, a dog that has learned loose leash walking through natural consequences (pulling never works, slack leash does) is essentially controlling its own pace by

keeping the leash slack – it has learned how to manage the situation to keep moving. Versus a dog that is told "heel" every second and corrected for forging is basically under the handler's direct control with little personal agency. Which dog likely feels calmer and more confident? Probably the one that feels it has understood the "rules of the game" and can navigate on its own (within reason).

Ethically and experientially, giving a dog appropriate agency can reduce stress. Animals (including humans) get frustrated when they feel they have no control over outcomes (learned helplessness is a known effect of uncontrollable punishment). Just Behaving avoids putting the dog in that helpless spot; it always gives the dog a clue of how to succeed (through environment and mentor feedback), so the dog can discover how to get what it wants by good behavior. This is empowering from the dog's perspective. The dog "learns how to learn" and how to navigate the human world.

Finally, phenomenology often talks about *intersubjectivity* – how two consciousnesses relate. The human-dog bond is an intersubjective relationship of two different species bridging a communicative gap. By adopting somewhat of a dog's perspective and also gently acculturating the dog to ours, Just Behaving creates a rich intersubjective space where understanding grows. One might even say it creates a *shared lifeworld* where human and dog have mutual expectations and cues. Over time, an experienced owner and a well-raised dog might understand each other with hardly any explicit signals – the owner can tell a glance that the dog needs a potty break; the dog notices the owner's posture that indicates it's time to settle down. This sort of near-wordless communication is often reported by people with deep bonds to their dogs, and it's something Just Behaving explicitly cultivates by reducing reliance on formal commands and instead using natural communication (body language, energy, routine). As one of the guidelines suggests: *"reduce verbal direction; communicate more through body language, energy, and natural consequences"*. Doing so not only helps the dog understand (since dogs are masters of reading our body language, often more than our words), but it also creates a more *authentic* connection. The human becomes fluent in "dog," and the dog becomes fluent in the human's subtle signals. The phenomenological outcome is a harmonious coexistence where both are attuned, rather than a top-down issuance of commands that the dog may or may not internalize.

In conclusion, phenomenology illuminates how Just Behaving respects the *being* of the dog. It's not training at a dog, it's educating with a dog. By prioritizing the dog's comfort, understanding, and natural modes of learning, the philosophy ensures that the dog's experience is one of guidance rather than confusion or intimidation. It invites us to imagine the dog's viewpoint at each step: *If I do this, what will the dog likely feel or think?* That question seems to be constantly in the background of the approach, leading to a humane and effective system. It also underscores why the methodology avoids harshness – not just because it's ineffective, but because it's poor from the dog's perspective. Instead, it tries to create as much of a *meeting of minds* as possible between human and canine.

Inviting Questions – An Open-Ended Journey

Having analyzed Just Behaving through various lenses – pragmatic results, virtue ethics, behaviorist science, phenomenological experience – we see that it stands as a rich, multifaceted philosophy. But in the spirit of the philosophy itself, we must acknowledge it is

developing and not infallible. It thrives on questioning, so let us pose some challenging questions that both test and extend the philosophy:

- **What are the limits of "natural" learning?** Dogs are domesticated animals living in very unnatural settings (houses, cities). Are there cases where the Just Behaving approach might need supplementation? For instance, could a very high-drive working-line dog require more structured outlets (like formal training in a sport) to stay fulfilled? Just Behaving is aimed at family dogs, especially Golden Retrievers in its origin. How does it generalize to a vastly different breed or a rescue dog with a troubled past? The philosophy likely can adapt, but exploring its application across diverse cases is important. A pragmatist would say: keep the core, tweak the specifics as needed. A virtue ethicist would say: the virtues might look different for a guard dog than a companion dog, yet core traits like self-control still apply.
- **How do we measure success and improve?** Should proponents gather data, solicit peer review from animal behavior experts, run pilot programs? Being a philosophy does not exempt it from empirical testing – in fact, its credibility would grow with evidence. Questions like: Do Just Behaving puppies have significantly lower incidence of common issues (separation anxiety, leash reactivity, etc.)? Do owners report higher satisfaction? If not, what can be learned and improved? This invites a scientific rigor that will refine the approach further.
- **Can one inadvertently go too far in management?** One criticism might be: if you prevent *every* mistake, does the dog become too dependent on that structure? Life is messy, and at some point the dog will face an unplanned situation. The intent is that by then the dog's good habits prevail. But we might ask: should the dog also learn to recover from mistakes or handle occasional lack of structure? Perhaps controlled exposure to small challenges is also valuable (e.g., see how the dog behaves if a rule is temporarily not enforced, does it maintain self-control? If yes, great – if not, that indicates something to work on). The philosophy already includes resilience building through varied socialization and mentorship, but it's worth considering the balance between prevention and resilience. Sometimes, minor failures can be great learning moments too.
- **What about explicit training for specific tasks?** Just Behaving emphasizes *raising* and implies that formal commands are secondary (or will come naturally once the dog understands context). However, owners still often want to teach specific cues (come, sit, leave it, etc.). The philosophy is not against cues; it just doesn't center on them. But a question: is there any risk that a dog raised largely on context might struggle if a specific command is needed in a novel context? Probably not if the communication is strong, but it's a question of thoroughness. A Just Behaving dog might do a recall because it's used to following you and staying near by habit, rather than because it knows the word "come." Is that distinction important? In day-to-day life, maybe not – but in an emergency, a verbal recall could save a life. Thus, the approach does acknowledge practical commands (the "Beyond the Basics" mention teaching practical commands without treats), and it must integrate those gracefully. The challenge is to do so without losing the intrinsic motivation. Perhaps the answer is to teach commands in the same philosophy: in context, with calm reinforcement, avoiding over-reliance on lures – essentially *blending training into the raising* so the dog still sees it as part of normal life.

- **Ethical questions of autonomy:** Are we doing enough to let the dog *be a dog*? One might ask, does a highly mannered dog lose some spontaneity or doggy joy? Just Behaving argues the opposite, that by having manners the dog gets *more* joy (freedom). But is there a line where we ask the dog to suppress too much natural behavior for our convenience? For example, dogs love to sniff and explore on walks – a strict heel position denies that. Just Behaving likely would encourage a balance (maybe structured walk at times, free sniffing at others). Indeed, they mention "structured companionship" and calm exploration. This question is a reminder to always weigh the dog's natural needs against the desire for order. A virtue ethics approach would seek the mean: enough structure to keep order, enough liberty to keep the dog's spirit alive. It appears Just Behaving leans toward that balance, but vigilance is needed to not become so structure-focused that the dog's simple joys (running, digging occasionally, being silly) are quashed. Thankfully, the text emphasizes not removing a dog's natural joy.
- **Can the average dog owner implement this?** It's intellectually appealing, but does it require a lot of expertise or constant supervision? Mainstream training offers simple recipes (e.g., "to teach sit, do this"). Just Behaving is more comprehensive and continuous – it might overwhelm someone who just expected to attend a class and get a certificate. How do we make this accessible and not intimidating? Perhaps through education, mentorship for owners, and illustrating that it's not extra work so much as a different mindset. In fact, some might find it *easier* since it doesn't rely on practicing drills daily; instead it's woven into life. But it must be communicated well. The philosophy being in development means educating owners is part of the mission.

These questions (and many more) are not criticisms per se but prompts for ongoing dialogue. Just Behaving is built to incorporate such dialogue. It stands on a foundation of *questioning assumptions* – starting with questioning the treat-and-command orthodoxy. It should continue to question *itself* and refine. For example, if a particular dog under this program still develops a fear, the response isn't "our method is perfect, the dog must be flawed," but rather "why did this happen? Was there something we missed in socialization or leadership? How can we adjust to help this dog and prevent it in the future?" That reflective, non-dogmatic stance is the hallmark of a healthy philosophy.

Conclusion – Toward a New Paradigm of Canine Companionship:

In advocating for Just Behaving, we are ultimately advocating for a paradigm shift: from "dog training" to "dog raising," from controlling to guiding, from moment-to-moment obedience to lifelong character development. We have woven an argument that spans practical outcomes, ethical treatment, scientific validity, and experiential richness. The continuous thread is that treating a dog as a being who can learn *how to behave* on its own, given the right environment and mentorship, is not only effective in producing a well-behaved pet – it is fundamentally respectful of the dog's nature and enriching for both dog and human.

By challenging mainstream methodologies, we do not suggest throwing away all they have learned; rather, we re-contextualize their techniques within a broader understanding of canine development. Yes, reinforcement works – but it works best in concert with intrinsic motivation. Yes, boundaries are needed – but they hold best when set through trust and understanding, not fear. *Just Behaving* as a philosophy is young and will evolve. It will learn from new science (for instance, emerging research in dog cognition or affective neuroscience might further inform how

we address dogs' emotions). It will learn from each dog it is applied to – every success story and every setback will shape it. In a sense, the philosophy itself practices what it preaches: it will "behave" better and better as it learns and grows, guided by experience and careful observation.

For the experienced trainer or academic reading this, perhaps the ideas here resonate with approaches you've long intuited – many top trainers say "I train the owner, not the dog" or emphasize lifestyle over drills. Just Behaving attempts to codify and advocate for this intuition with philosophical and scientific backing. For the science-minded reader, we aimed to show that this approach is not in conflict with learning theory but rather extends it into a more life-centric model, one that could be fertile ground for research into long-term behavior patterns and welfare. For the ethicist or philosopher, we connected this practical approach to deeper issues of how we ought to treat fellow creatures and what it means to cultivate goodness.

In the end, perhaps the strongest argument for Just Behaving is an image: picture a home with a dog raised under this philosophy. A friend comes to the door – the dog watches, alert but not frantic, maybe gives a soft bark to alert, then stands or sits calmly as the owner greets the guest. The dog wags and approaches, maybe a bit excited but contained. There is no chaos, no one is knocked over, no treats are being flung, no leash is jerking. The owner says "okay, go say hi" and the dog gently greets the guest, then settles at their feet. Later, the family dinner happens – the dog is not begging at the table but lying on its mat, because it knows that's its place during meals. After dinner, the owner picks up a leash – the dog doesn't go wild, but comes over happily and sits to have the leash clipped, knowing only calm gets the door open. On the walk, the dog mostly trots by the owner's side, sniffing when allowed, coming back when called without fuss – no constant commands, just a mutual easy rhythm. Encounters with other dogs are polite, the dog either walks by or greets briefly without incident. At home, the dog gets playtime in the yard, maybe a game of fetch – when the owner says "enough," the dog panting happily comes in and lies down, content. In short, the dog is a full part of the family routine, a source of joy and companionship, requiring very little special effort to manage because it just *fits in*. That image is what Just Behaving strives to make reality.

Such a dog is not an accident of breeding or a "naturally easy" individual – it is the product of a philosophy in action. And importantly, the dog in that image is not cowed or dispirited; it is cheerful, curious, and confident, because its needs are met and its behavior is guided in ways it understands. It can be *more dog*, not less, because its owners provided the gentle structure to channel its dogness positively.

The journey to that ideal is challenging. It asks for consistency, self-reflection, and knowledge. But it pays dividends in the form of a relationship with one's dog that feels almost *magical* to those who haven't experienced it – yet it's not magic at all, but the result of philosophy manifesting as daily practices.

In closing, Just Behaving invites everyone – trainers, scholars, dog lovers – to engage with these ideas, to try them out, to critique them, and to help refine them. It sits at the intersection of science and art: the science of behavior and the art of living with another species. As our understanding of dogs deepens in the academic world and as society's expectations of humane treatment rise, a philosophy like this can serve as a guidepost toward a future where perhaps we no longer speak of "training dogs" in the old sense, but of *raising canine citizens* in our human world. That is a thought-provoking vision.

To realize it, we must continue to ask tough questions and remain open to answers. What kind of companions do we want our dogs to be, and how can we bring out the best in them while being the best guardians of them? Just Behaving is an attempt to answer that, and as with any philosophical endeavor, it is as much about the journey of seeking answers as it is about the answers themselves. Let this document be not a final word, but a conversation-starter – one that challenges mainstream notions and even challenges itself, all in service of happier dogs, happier owners, and a more harmonious human-dog relationship.

In the words of John Dewey, education (and by extension, raising a pup) “is essentially a social process” and every experience “both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after”. May each of our experiences with dogs build upon the last, ever improving the quality of those to come – for that is the essence of an evolving philosophy, and the promise of Just Behaving.