

The Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov: A Study in Control

Ivan D. London

Russian Research Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

EVEN IN THE SOVIET UNION it is one thing to decree the ideological line for the several sciences, and another thing to implement, interpret, and enforce it. Falling into the Party line is not an automatic affair and poses, moreover, difficulties even for the scientist who wants to conform: He is never quite sure whether he is following the line as intended or as *will be* intended—whether he is underadhering or overadhering. The many publicized instances of displeasure feed and justify his apprehensions. But he continues to try to operate within the limitations imposed from above and to salvage what he can—that is, unless he has abased himself to the equivalent of a Party hack. There are very, very many of these.¹

The scientific council, which the presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences set up to act as a watchdog over physiological and related research, provides through its published decrees some insight into the manner of holding scientists to adopted lines. From these decrees, with their sometimes inquisitorial language, one surmises also the private drama of those persons unfortunate enough to have been singled out as symbols for public ire, as well as the drabber problems of the routine, pedestrian researcher.

This council, known in full as the Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov (Affiliated with the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences), was established in 1950 under charge by the joint assemblage of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences to facilitate and guarantee the Pavlovianization of physiology and related disciplines. Its chairman is the same Bykov who, along with Ivanov-Smolenskii, had come to head the newly formed Pavlovian front (1).

Since its inception, according to the available literature, the Scientific Council has been called into session at least six times. Its activities, although little publicized, are nevertheless clearly reflected in its decrees, some of which are documents of considerable human interest.

The first meeting of the Scientific Council took place in Moscow, October 13–14, 1950. A variety of questions was taken up for discussion: Bykov spoke

¹Two sources contribute to this interpretation: the literature of the Soviet scientific and public press itself, and the interviews conducted both here and in Germany by the Harvard Refugee Interview Project (now termed Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System), of which the writer is a member.

of the “principal tasks of the Council;” a second edition of the complete works of Pavlov was proposed; and so forth. But the chief items on the council’s agenda were the research plans submitted by Airapet’iants, Asratian, and others for the year 1951. Although these plans were the subject of detailed discussion, there was never really much doubt that the official seal of approval would be theirs—Airapet’iants and Asratian had long been playing pro-Pavlovian roles of some prominence, and Airapet’iants was, moreover, secretary of the Scientific Council (2).

The second meeting took place December 25–27, 1950. Bykov detailed the progress that had been made toward “realization of the decrees of the joint session of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences.” Kupalov presented his plans for the organization of a “scientific session” to commemorate the anniversary of Pavlov’s death. Ivanov-Smolenskii discussed what went into readying for publication the new journal—*Zhurnal Vyssheĭ Nervnoi Deiatel’nosti Imeni I. P. Pavlova* (The Pavlov Journal of Higher Nervous Activity)—decreed to be established by the “joint session” of six months before, and scheduled for first issue in January 1951. The research plans of Speranskii, Kupalov, and others were presented and discussed. Finally, Asratian was unanimously voted honorary lecturer for the “Pavlovian Readings” of 1951, with Kiev designated as the place of the next lecture (3, 4).

The calm and matter-of-fact reporting of the first two meetings of the Scientific Council creates an impression of harmonious concurrence among Pavlovians—the old and the new—which the third and fourth meetings sharply belie. On keeping to slogans and verbal stereotypes, it is true, all manage to be properly Pavlovian. On getting down to the real business of theory and experiment, however, the oneness of scientific faith may be seen for the false façade that it is. Orbeli and Beritov, for example, may affirm day after day their Pavlovian orthodoxy, but they seem always somehow to stay out of step, no matter how hard they try to go along (5, 6). As a matter of fact, just this discrepancy between actual practice and outer appearance is the *raison d’être* of the Scientific Council itself. The council is an agency of control both to give direction and to correct any erroneous course.

On April 10-12, 1951, the Scientific Council was again called into session, for the third time since its constitution. This session was indeed dramatic. Beritashvili (Beritov), the lone hold-out over the years against a Pavlovian physiology of higher nervous activity, was called to Moscow from Tbilisi (Tiflis) in Georgia to explain his stubborn deviationism. His attempts at defense were a foredoomed futility. His audience was "properly" hostile. It remained only to cap this man-sullyng business with the inevitable recantation, and this Beritashvili did.²

The human story breaks through the cold censoring words of the "Decree of the Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov, April 12, 1951" (8, 9), the translation of which is here given:

DECREE

In its session of April 10-12, the Scientific Council listened to Academician I. S. Beritashvili's paper, "On the Factual and Methodological Bases of Reflex and Behavior Theory," and to his elucidation of views [contained therein]. The Scientific Council considered the questions posed in the paper and in the [following] discussions.

There took part in the work of the session leading specialists in the fields of physiology, psychology, and philosophy who unanimously censured Academician Beritashvili's [whole] conception.

The essence of I. S. Beritashvili's [theoretical orientation and] set is reducible to a series of vicious affirmations:

1) There exists a special "psychonervous activity," so-called by him, which [represents] a stage higher than that of higher nervous activity;

2) The reflex principle is not extensible to this "psychonervous activity;"

3) Animals that possess a cerebral cortex are directed in their behavior by "ideas" (analogous to those of man);

4) In [real] fact, the attempt to create on this vicious foundation a special science of behavior is being continued;

5) In I. S. Beritashvili's [whole] conception there is being repeated his former [attempted] revision of the basic lawful regularities of higher nervous activity which were established by I. P. Pavlov.

The Scientific Council states that Academician I. S. Beritashvili to this very day holds on to anti-Pavlovian positions and that his [present] inclination to make use of Pavlovian terminology does not put aright the essence of his [fundamental] conception but, contrariwise, is a form of veiling the reactionary and pseudoscientific theses of Academician Beritashvili. By means of his erroneous views Academician Beritashvili tries to throw back native physiology to pre-Pavlovian times.

[Viewed] fundamentally, in Academician I. S. Beritashvili's paper there is expounded the dualist and idealist conception of his so-called "psychonervous activity," which was [already] contained in his brochure, "Bases of Nervous and Psychonervous Activity" (1947).

The Scientific Council holds:

1. Academician I. S. Beritashvili's [whole] conception

² The date of Beritashvili's official recantation was erroneously given as May 23, 1951, in an earlier paper (?).

is a frank dualism and contradicts in principle I. P. Pavlov's consistently materialist theory of higher nervous activity.

2. Academician I. S. Beritashvili is in manifest contradiction with the resolutions of the Joint Session of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences.

3. Academician I. S. Beritashvili, in his argumentation about spontaneous activity of nervous elements, forsakes in the field of physiology the strictly deterministic position, on which I. P. Pavlov's entire materialist theory is based.

4. Academician I. S. Beritashvili has taken to the road of scientific speculation, creating utterly unfounded hypotheses about cortical processes and replacing the objective analysis of higher nervous activity in animals with divinations of their subjective states.

5. The facts with which Academician I. S. Beritashvili operates are, in a number of instances, [of] doubtful [character] and demand a careful objective analysis from the standpoint of Pavlovian physiology.

6. Since the time of the Joint Session there has been effected in the views of Academician I. S. Beritashvili no essential changes whatsoever [which may be thought of as] drawing them nearer to Pavlovian physiology.

The Scientific Council regards as improper [the fact] that the resolutions of the Joint Session were not only not put into force by the leadership of the Georgian Physiological Institute, but also that no broad discussion of the resolutions was organized in the Institute.

Academician I. S. Beritashvili's anti-Pavlovian views are a serious ideological obstacle to the development of physiological research in Georgia along Pavlovian lines.

The Scientific Council considers that in a number of Georgian physiological institutions, an intolerable Arakcheevian regime [with its favoritism, toadyism, and aridity] has entrenched itself—a regime in which criticism of I. S. Beritashvili's views was forbidden and where those scientific workers who did express [well]-founded objections against his anti-Pavlovian [orientation and] tendencies were persecuted [and run out]. Arakcheevian methods were especially widely practiced by Prof. Narikashvili, deputy director of the Georgian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Physiology.

The Scientific Council also censures I. S. Beritashvili's contemptuous attitude toward the accomplishments of native physiology and censures his cosmopolitan worship of foreign science.

The Scientific Council considers it necessary that, in one of its sessions in the near future, it discuss the plan of scientific work of the Georgian Academy of Sciences' Physiological Institute.

The Scientific Council considers it necessary to dispatch to Tbilisi an authoritative commission of physiologists in order to organize and conduct a broad discussion of Academician I. S. Beritashvili's errors.³

The Scientific Council takes notice of Academician I. S. Beritashvili's declaration that the criticism directed his way is correct, that he recognizes the idealist essence

³ On May 23, 1951, a repeat performance on a smaller scale took place as ordered. Narikashvili first rendered an account of the April proceedings of the Scientific Council in Moscow. Then Beritashvili's fateful paper was discussed and heckled. A resolution was passed condemning his views. Narikashvili announced that the "collective of the Institute of Physiology of the Georgian Academy of Sciences would draw the necessary conclusions from the just criticisms of the erroneous conceptions of Academician Beritashvili." Finally, Beritashvili again "acknowledged as correct the criticism of his scientific views" (10, 11).

of his "conceptions," and that he desires to rectify his anti-Pavlovian, idealist errors.

(Confirmed by the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences, April 13, 1951)

The Scientific Council was convened for the fourth time early in June 1951. One of its decrees, dated June 6, 1951, considers the research plans of Fol'bert and Protopopov, both from the Ukraine (12, 13); another deals with Orbeli (14-16).

Fol'bert and Protopopov are congratulated for presenting "[research] plans [that] are directed toward further development of the ideas of I. P. Pavlov in the field of physiology and medicine." However, their tendency, along with others, to skirt the central problems of Pavlovian theory in favor of peripheral or "associated problems" is condemned. These researchers are therefore advised in the future to direct their attention to the key issues of research on higher nervous activity. In addition, certain conceptual formulations by Fol'bert and Protopopov undergo criticism. The decree notes and affirms that "the requisite clarity in the formulation of such concepts as fatigue, exhaustion, and inhibition is wanting in both the [research] plan and statements of Prof. I. U. V. Fol'bert," and that "similarly there is a noticeable lack of clarity in the formulations [to be found both in the research] plan and in the statements of Prof. V. P. Protopopov concerning the problem of habit and symbols in the study of higher nervous activity in animals." These two researchers are also admonished to bring their investigations into line with practical needs, even as they engage in fundamental research. Thus, "the Council recommends to Prof. I. U. V. Fol'bert that he tie his investigations more closely to the tasks of medicine and physical education." How he is to do this and not skirt the central problems of Pavlovian theory in favor of "associated problems" is not indicated. The decree finally approves with reservations the submitted plans of research.

Orbeli, once a figure of importance and power in the Soviet scientific world, is confirmed in the ignominy of his present low state by the decree of the Scientific Council of June 6, 1951. Unseated and discredited by Lysenko and undermined further during the Pavlovian sessions by Bykov (17), Orbeli is here treated almost like a little boy who hasn't done his homework right. Orbeli's degradation cannot be better revealed than in the words of this decree.

DECREE

The fourth session of the Scientific Council listened to and discussed the plan of scientific research work of the physiological laboratory of the Lesgaft Natural Science Institute, affiliated with the RSFSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and of the physiological groups headed by L. A. Orbeli in 1951. The Scientific Council listened to and discussed the declaration to it of Academician L. A. Orbeli concerning his attitude toward criticism of his theoretical errors, reflected in the decree of the Joint Session of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences in 1950.

The declaration, presented by Academician L. A. Orbeli

to the Scientific Council, as well as his explanations and answers to questions arising in the course of the discussion, cannot be deemed satisfactory.

The Scientific Council observes that Academician L. A. Orbeli only formally acknowledges the criticism directed against his views in the Joint Session, all the while essentially holding on to his former anti-Pavlovian positions.

In trying to excuse the errors committed by him, Academician L. A. Orbeli has turned to [traveling] the inadmissible road of discreditation of the views of the founders of [our] native materialist physiology, I. M. Sechenov and I. P. Pavlov. Academician L. A. Orbeli has distorted generally known facts; has denied the presence of a consistent materialist system of views in the works of I. M. Sechenov and I. P. Pavlov; has tried to represent I. P. Pavlov as an empiricist, standing aside from the struggle of materialism with idealism and ostensibly supporting idealist subjective method in the physiology of higher nervous activity. Academician L. A. Orbeli, in trying to explain away [those] errors of his [which reveal a pro-Morganist bias in behalf of] formal genetics, has striven to soft-pedal the implacable struggle of I. P. Pavlov with Morganism.

On questions of principle Academician L. A. Orbeli steered away from direct replies and tried, essentially, to shed from himself responsibility for the ideological and organizational errors committed by him.

The plan [of research] which has been presented is devoted to exploration of the second signal system⁴ without [any] indication of the physiological methods [to be employed], and his [proposed] investigation of the sympathetic nervous system is limited to [only] one theme. The absence of [any] concrete [indication of the] physiological means [to be employed in the] experimental investigation of the most difficult problem of the second signal system in its interaction with the first [signal system], along with the limited character of the experiment itself in this area, and the presence of methodological errors, unextirpated by Academician L. A. Orbeli, cannot guarantee a successful conclusion to such a plan [of research].

The Scientific Council considers the plan of scientific work, submitted by Academician L. A. Orbeli, as unsatisfactory and recommends that the plan be subjected to thorough revision.

The Scientific Council recommends that Academician L. A. Orbeli [continue to] pursue his research on the physiology of the sympathetic nervous system on condition that he eliminate his errors, committed in the [long] course of working over this [research] problem and [that he pursue his research] on the basis of the general principles of Pavlovian physiology in close conjunction with the problems of the clinic.⁵

The Scientific Council thinks that investigations of the physiology of higher nervous activity in man can be car-

⁴ Briefly, in Pavlovian theory the second signal system substitutes verbal cues for the physical stimuli that the first signal system employs. The conditionability of both verbal and physical stimuli permits them the role of signals.

⁵ After his exhortation during the Pavlovian sessions of 1950 because of his alleged "preoccupation with the sympathetic nervous system to the exclusion of its subordinate connection with the cerebral cortex," Orbeli evidently felt that the expedient course of action was to quit major study of the sympathetic nervous system. *Pravda*, however, put it as follows: "Not desiring to revise the erroneous principles [employed by him] in [his] conception of the sympathetic nervous system, which he studied without taking into account the predominant role of the cerebral cortex, Academician L. A. Orbeli has hit the road to renunciation of further research on these problems . . ." (18).

ried out [successfully] in the laboratory headed by Academician L. A. Orbeli only on condition that Academician L. A. Orbeli radically revise the methodological principles [applied by him to] these problems and that he select suitable qualified specialists [to make up his laboratory personnel].

The Scientific Council takes notice of Academician L. A. Orbeli's announcement that he is in full agreement with the criticism directed against his views in the Joint Session of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences and in the fourth session of the Scientific Council, and [also] that he promises in his future work to correct committed errors.

(Confirmed by the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences, June 15, 1951)

In view of the responsibilities and scope of the work of the Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov, it is difficult to believe that it has the time to handle its work load and come to decisions in the course of its scheduled meetings: four within nine months. The monitoring of research and browbeating of dissidents such as Beritashvili and Orbeli must, by any realistic view, take place, in the main, between meetings. These meetings are best viewed, it would seem, as primarily of formal character, officially approving prior decisions and not hesitating to stage a simulated freedom of discussion where "education" and example are desired for broader purposes.

Aside from the internal evidence of the decrees already noted, further evidence in support of this conclusion may be adduced from the following:

1) *The 14th Conference on Problems of Higher Nervous Activity, Dedicated to the 15th Anniversary of Academician I. P. Pavlov's Death.* This conference was organized by the Scientific Council and was held in Moscow on April 5-8, 1951, prior to its third session held on April 10-12, 1951. The decree of the 14th Conference, dated April 8, 1951, and confirmed by the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences on April 13, 1951, bears the signatures of Bykov and Airapet'iants, chairman and secretary, respectively, of the Scientific Council (19, 20).

2) *The decree of the Scientific Council, dated September 26, 1951.* This decree was issued during its fifth session and refers to "information [supplied to it] by M. A. Usievich, a council member, concerning the state of affairs as regards the development of the physiological theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov in the city of Rostov-on-the-Don . . . [at the hands of] N. A. Rozhanskii [who is properly criticized by Usievich for his] methodologically erroneous conceptions" (21, 22). The decree also cites with approval the attack on "Rozhanskii's perverted views" published by Usievich on July 8, 1951, in *Meditsinskii Rabotnik* (*The Medical Worker*) (23).

3) *The decree of the Scientific Council, dated November 24, 1951.* This decree, issued during its sixth session, takes Anokhin severely to task for his continued adherence to "anti-Pavlovian positions" despite profuse protestations to the contrary (24) and adamantly affirms that "the Scientific Council considers

it necessary to dispatch a representative of the Scientific Council to Riazan' [where Anokhin heads the Department of Physiology in the Riazan' Medical Institute] in order to conduct discussions on the results of the sixth session of the Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov and in order to render assistance to the directorate in revising the work of the Pavlovian Committee of the Riazan' Medical Institute" (25).

4) *The 15th Conference on Problems of Higher Nervous Activity, Dedicated to the 50th Anniversary of Academician I. P. Pavlov's Theory on Conditioned Reflexes.* This conference was organized by the Scientific Council and was held in Leningrad on April 2-6, 1952. Members of the council contributed papers, several of which were subsequently published (26-28).

5) *The coreports (sodoklady) of the Committee of the Scientific Council.* Volokhov, a member of the editorial board of the *Fiziologicheskii Zhurnal SSSR* (*USSR Physiological Journal*), in rendering an account of the sixth session of the Scientific Council for the *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR* (*Bulletin of the USSR Academy of Sciences*), alludes three times to the coreports of a committee of the Scientific Council—the first public mention of the existence of which the writer has happened upon (29). According to Volokhov, these coreports are given after the presentation of past activities and future plans by those individuals who have been called upon to render an account of themselves as responsible heads of various physiological programs—research, pedagogical, etc. These coreports reflect investigative action between council sessions and, because of their scope and technical nature, must surely have been submitted, prior to public presentation, to the various members of the Scientific Council in a private and more detailed version.

6) *The critical articles appearing in the scientific and public press, written or inspired by members of the Scientific Council* (30-39). The publication dates of these articles and those of the decrees of the Scientific Council bear more than an accidental relationship. There is much evidence of coordinated activity. The membership of Bykov, Airapet'iants, and Usievich—all of the Scientific Council—on the editorial board of the *Journal of Higher Nervous Activity* is certainly not without significance in this connection, as is also the presence, on the Committee of the Scientific Council, of members of the editorial board of the *USSR Physiological Journal* (e.g., Chernigovskii).

The mission of the Scientific Council is to ensure the Pavlovianization of physiology in the spirit of *partiinost'*.⁶ This it is busily doing. This also is, to be sure, an unfortunate development for world science. Whether this retrogression, however, represents a total loss to world science should not be answered in the glib affirmative, at least not for the present. The literature recording developments may be discouraging, but we must wait for fuller reports of the theo-

⁶A difficult term to translate; probably best rendered as "Party partisanship."

retical and experimental efforts instigated by this old-new doctrine that has been adopted as the only basis for a "truly materialist, progressive physiology." In spite of unsophisticated theory, interesting developments sometimes emerge.

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News and Notes

The Radiation Research Society

DURING the past fifty years the complexity of science has increased enormously and has led to greater specialization. This is reflected by the formation of numerous scientific societies and the establishment of subdivisions in the older societies, all of which, in the opinion of the respective members, serve a useful purpose. However, specialization carried too far may well have an adverse effect on the progress of science.

Although specialization cannot be avoided, its harmful consequences may be mitigated by taking advantage of another trend in modern science. The solution of many important problems requires the collective effort of specialists in different fields. Therefore, if a *problem*, instead of a branch of science, is made the common point of interest, it is possible to bring together specialists from different disciplines. Contacts among such specialists would then broaden their views and would be beneficial to all. The study of the biological effects of radiation is an ideal problem of this type, in that it involves the collaboration of physicists, chemists, and biologists. This idea has led to the formation of the Radiation Research Society, which held its first business meeting in New York on April 15, 1952.

The new society is perhaps unique in that it is expressly constituted to bring together scientists of widely different backgrounds in a highly specialized field—on a perfectly equal basis. To this end, its constitution stipulates that: "The Council shall consist of the Officers and 10 elected Councillors. The fields of physics, chemistry, biology and medicine shall be represented on the Council each by two Councillors, elected expressly for this purpose. The remaining two Councillors shall be elected to represent science in general."

The objects of the society are purposely quite broad: "(1) To promote original research in the natural sciences relating to radiation. (2) To facilitate integration of different disciplines in the study of radiation effects. (3) To promote the diffusion of knowledge in these fields."

The interest shown in the society augurs well for its success. Practically all those invited to become members joined, and the initial membership is over 250. The officers for the year 1952-53 are: Raymond E. Zirkle, president; Alexander Hollaender, vice president; Abraham Edelmann, secretary; Harvey Patt, treasurer.

G. FAILLA

Department of Radiology
Columbia University

Scientists in the News

Daniel I. Arnon, professor of plant physiology in the University of California at Berkeley, has been elected President of the American Society of Plant Physiologists.

Brewton Berry, professor of sociology at Ohio State University, has received the \$1000 Anisfield-Wolf Award for his book *Race Relations*, published by Houghton Mifflin Company. The volume is the first textbook to receive one of the awards, which were established 18 years ago by Edith A. Wolf, of Cleveland, in memory of her father and her husband. The awards—two each year—go to the best books dealing with problems of racial and nationality group relations. Members of the Awards Committee were Ralph Linton, of Yale University, Henry Seidel Canby and Amy Loveman, of the editorial staff of *The Saturday*