

DRAFT: NOT FOR CITATION WITHOUT
PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR

NUMBER 136

CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE FORTRESS MENTALITY

David Joravsky

Conference on

THE ORIGINS OF SOVIET CULTURE

Sponsored by

Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies
The Wilson Center

May 18-19, 1981

Cultural Revolution and the Fortress Mentality

From the start cultural revolution was an ambivalent torment, occasionally eased by utopian fantasies. Political and social revolution joined the Bolshevik Party with the masses in opposition to the favorite parties of the intelligentsia and the privileged classes, and the Bolshevik leaders were acutely aware that the political enemy had a monopoly of "culture." The masses were nekul'turnye, uncultured—uncivilized would be the nearest English term. They could seize farms and factories, but did not know how to run them efficiently, in the modern way. The culture they lacked was much more than technical knowledge or refined manners. In the vocabulary that the Bolshevik leaders shared with the intelligentsia at large culture meant all such elements fused in samodeiatel'nost', the intelligent self-activation of modern people. Culture meant striving for emancipation from the realm of darkness (tëmnoe tsarstvo), as Dobroliubov had named the vicious circle of samodurstvo and obezlichenie, self-assertive pigheadedness and self-effacing irresponsibility--the mutual stultification of the foot-stamping master and the grovelling slave. Educated chinovniki (government functionaries) and merchants could be in that dark realm along with illiterate peasants and alcoholic workers. Independent, critically thinking individuals were supposed to win emancipation from it, along with wrathful peasants and workers, whose liberating anger was supposed to light the way out of the darkness.¹

Such were the terms, such was the mode of analysis that attended the emergence of the self-conscious intelligentsia in the mid-19th century. Those terms, that mode of analysis, were still keenly alive in the minds of the Bolshevik leaders and their "cultured" adversaries,

as the sudden disintegration of the tsarist state transformed opposed strategies of liberation into the life-and-death politics of civil war. The Bolsheviks lunged for power on behalf of "uncultured" masses, hoping for postrevolutionary help from the "cultured" adversary—the intelligentsia—who might be angrily uncooperative after political defeat. And in fact, two days after the Soviet regime was decreed, Lunacharsky, the first Commissar of Enlightenment, warned that "functionaries without ideas (bezideinye chinovniki) are rather likely to come to our side, while all the officials with ideas (ideinye rabotniki) stubbornly defend their opinion that our regime is a usurpation."² The Bolsheviks themselves seemed to be entering the realm of darkness, the vicious circle of samodurstvo and obezlichenie.

Lenin sometimes issued such warnings, but other times he swung about and claimed that revolting workers and peasants were turning themselves into cultured agents of modernization. At a terrible lowpoint in the Civil War he angrily denied any need for the hostile intelligentsia; they were "lackeys of capital who fancy themselves the nation's brain. In fact they are not the brain but the shit."³ That outburst was a momentary extreme, but it vividly revealed the potentially violent ambivalence that attended the Bolshevik efforts to enlist the intelligentsia in the cultural revolution. At the point of a gun the intelligentsia were asked to teach the masses samodeiatel'nost', the intelligent self-activation of culturally modern people. Under duress they were to draw the masses away from the heritage of duress, from samotëk, planless drift, and from stikhiinost', the ancient "elementalism" that knows only inertial torpor or anarchic chaos. (The Greek root is still alive in Russian as stikhiia, the elements or chaos. We should stop translating stikhiinost' as spontaneity, which means freely willed activity. That is samoproizvol'nost'.)

Leninist fear of stikhiinost' and samotëk, elementalism and drift, was one of many signs that Bolshevik leaders shared the widespread misgivings among educated Russians concerning "the people" (narod), in particular, ^{concerning} their capacity to rule before they had absorbed modern culture. Such fears were at the center of Bogdanov's insistence that cultural revolution, the achievement of cultural hegemony by the lower classes, must accompany their rise to political hegemony, lest the lower-class democracy of the soviets become a hollow pretense.⁴ Such fears were also widely expressed in warnings that even with the discipline of the Bolshevik Party the hegemony of the lower classes might lead to a barbarization of culture. The Bolshevik replies to those warnings were sometimes confession as much as rebuttal. President Kalinin, for example, wondered whether a barbarization of culture might not serve progress in the long run, as it had in the downfall of the Roman Empire.⁵ Commissar of Enlightenment Lunacharsky was less apocalyptic and more typical, when he assured the Academy of Sciences that the political triumph of the lower classes was not a threat to culture, because the masses had created a dictatorial regime that was a friend of modern culture. Genuine self-government, he promised, would not come until the masses were enlightened.⁶ In the meantime he expected the old "bourgeois" intelligentsia to help raise a new, red, Soviet intelligentsia out of the lower classes, in other words, to transmit their knowledge, their culture, without the non-Marxist ideologies that saturated it.

That tangle of ambivalent hopes and anxieties dragged the Bolsheviks into offensives on two ever widening sectors of the cultural front: against the "uncultured" tendencies of the masses, and against the subversive tendencies of the intelligentsia. Shouting

hollow claims of victory, the Bolsheviki staked out fortified outposts in alien territories. They called themselves comrades of the natives on both fronts, while they knew that they were a tiny army of occupation, struggling to avoid assimilation by the "uncultured" masses on the one hand, by the subversive intelligentsia on the other. My military metaphors are drawn from the Bolshevik vocabulary of the time, but I am obviously twisting their words to expose an underlying hysteria, a self-deceiving response to intolerable realities, which expressed itself in overcompensating boasts of a new culture created by campaigns against the old. The most striking evidence of that hysterical self-deception is to be found in the utopian fantasies that proliferated in the early years of the Revolution. The "T-N-B-ers," to take an extreme little example, preached the Theory of the New Biology: culture consists of mental phenomena, which are reducible to conditioned reflexes, and thus all the paraphernalia of past and present culture have been an upper-class mystification, to be replaced as expeditiously as possible by efficient proletarian gestures and grunts.⁷

But utopian fantasies rapidly withered away while the cultural revolution continued. The strongest evidence of continuing self-deception in it is the long-term pattern of thought control, which was largely restricted to political thoughts in 1917-21 but expanded thereafter into every field of learning and art. Of course I am taking advantage of hindsight; the study of history would be impossible without hindsight. The significance of a brief period of upheaval is revealed in its long-term consequences. They show something in the cultural revolution far deeper than the initial political differences between the intelligentsia and the Bolshevik regime; or the early dreams of an instant leap into some streamlined future. Political

opposition withered away even more quickly than utopian fantasies, but proliferating delusions about learning and art were thrust upon the intelligentsia by squads of ideologists who were themselves ultimately absorbed and chastised by a rapidly growing apparatus of bureaucratized ideology.

Let us set aside the conventional handwringing, the sanctimonious sermonizing, and confront with puzzled whys and wherefores the most persistent and the most baffling feature of the cultural revolution. (Also the most universal: this feature appears even more fiercely in the Chinese than in the Russian revolution, and it persists in gentler forms even in liberalized Yugoslavia.) Let us see if historical analysis can explain the Communists' conflict with modern high culture, which has erupted at one time or another in virtually every field of learning and art.

The conflict has followed a long historical curve. It rises from faint signs of incipient tension in the prerevolutionary era, through steeply climbing outbursts of controversy after the victory of political revolution, reaches a tormented plateau of protracted warfare in the era of high Stalinism (or Maoism, or Castroism, or...), and then declines slowly toward sullen toleration of autonomous thinkers and artists after the Great Leader has taken down to the tomb the magic of exorcising contrary spirits with the disciplined cheering of masses, the rhythmic waving of some little red book. The particular social and political circumstances of individual countries shape the variable slope of that long curve, but some ineluctable conflict of ideas must be its essential driving force. Inherent in modern high culture, in the works and thoughts of intellectuals and artists, there must be some qualities that provoke Communists

to blind rage, and what is worse, to insistent shouting that blind rage constitutes a great new vision. The problem is to discover what those qualities may be, to see if historical analysis can explain the intense, persistent conflict between the beliefs of Communist revolutionaries and the inherent tendencies of high culture in the twentieth century.

Do not fear another extravagant sermon on the monstrous historical consequences of "the Communist idea," in the style of Berdiaev or Solzhenitsyn. With humble arrogance the empirical historian accepts such extravagant prophesying, as evidence of the conflict of beliefs that is to be explained. The empirical historian is a bully of humility. He defers to all the contentious prophets of a bygone age of faith, and thus depreciates them all. He grubs for essential qualities in contingencies, in correlations between evolving mentalities and other social processes. First and foremost in the study of cultural revolution he notes the most obvious correlation: The Bolshevik and all other indigenous Communist revolutions (repeat indigenous; exclude revolutions imposed by foreign armies) have occurred in backward provinces of modern culture, not in metropolitan centers. That correlation is as striking in cultural as in socio-economic development. It must have some deeper significance than the occasion it provides for superficial derision of Karl Marx's pioneering effort to correlate cultural patterns with socio-economic formations.

Poring over many conflicts in various fields of learning and art, one discovers a common pattern, endlessly repeated with many variations. In backward or underdeveloped countries modern high culture is the concern of a special class, the intelligentsia, which is pulled in three different directions by its commitment to advanced

culture in the context of backwardness. Faith in modern culture as a worldwide communion of thinkers and artists tends to pull the intelligentsia in a prophetic direction, toward a visionary realm above contemptible praxis, politics included. Faith in modern culture as an organizing ideology in the struggle against backwardness tends to pull the intelligentsia in a practical direction, toward engagement in such mundane or even sordid affairs as politics. Professionalization is a third vector and an extremely attractive one, for it combines the prophetic, the practical--and the comfortable. At least that seems to be the ideal future that beckons in advanced countries, where thinkers and artists have become modern professionals; that is, paid specialists in mental labor, with only a pleasant little aura of the exalted obligations that bind Kulturträgern in backward lands to lives of sacrifice and danger. In revolutionary Russia that aura was not a pleasant little residue but a highly charged field of force, pulling the swelling ranks of professionals in opposed directions and generating repeated thunderbolts with the attendant friction. The most explosive friction, as it turned out, was within the Communist mentality, where all three trends contended with each other as inarticulate self-contradictions, which found expression, as they were brought toward conscious expression, in delusions, anger, even violence.

These generalizations concerning the troubled history of group mentalities have been abstracted from the exemplary troubles of individual minds. Exceptionally articulate cases are especially valuable; by insistent stress on contrasts and matter-of-fact acceptance of similarities they illuminate the background majorities. Consider the intelligent who, in the midst of the Civil War, brought Marxism-Leninism and psychological science into a confrontation that no one

else had ever attempted. He was Pavel Petrovich Blonskii (1881-1941), a psychologist and pedagogue, an avid seeker of truth in speculative philosophy, an ardent devotee of the people's liberation, and--luckily for the historian--a compulsive bearer of witness whose autobiography reveals more than he intended.⁸ He was born to the impoverished gentry, sufficiently *déclassé* to hate the system that nurtured a sense of nobility and simultaneously mocked it, in soul as well as status. His father earned a meager living as a clerk, and deliberately elevated his mind to a stoic dignity, flying out of temper only when his wife asked him to go buy something or talk business with someone. An older brother cultivated important people in hope of juridical positions that conferred status with little or no pay until one was past thirty. His mother approved such dignified careerism, while despising fawning in hope of immediate reward. She grimly pinched pennies to keep the family in respectable clothes and genteel occupations, and passed on to Pavel, as he genially confesses, a penny-wise-pound-foolish way with money. His obsession with small change was imposed by wretched circumstance; he rose above it with his lordly disdain for big money.

As a university student Blonskii joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and suffered repeated jailings during the first revolutionary upheavals in 1904-06. But he also managed to become a professional in the emerging discipline of experimental psychology, with a special interest in educational applications. Thus he hoped, as the revolution seemed to ebb away, that he could serve the people as a scholar and pedagogue, and earn a meager living in the process. He taught at various secondary schools, published many scholarly pieces, and found himself drawn into the faculty of Moscow University

half against his will, full of ambivalence and moral doubt. Like a character from Chekhov--Dr. Astrov perhaps, in Uncle Vanya--Blonskii endowed his mundane career with the aura of a stoic Kulturträger by confessing the failed hope, the absurd struggle to achieve a purpose for struggle, which was especially acute in Russia:

It has long since become a hackneyed phrase to say that our time is one of intensified criticism, or rather, of skepticism. Our favorite writers, our journalism, our literature, the mood of people all about us--all are full of negation, exhaustion, an avid lust for some temple that is still uncreated. We have been moving along a road littered with the ruins of shrines, and our gait is sometimes indecisive and uncertain, sometimes nervously hurried and unnaturally bold, like the gait of people who are tired of wandering and are rushing to rest somewhere, no matter where. And behind us our younger brothers are coming; their negation is even stronger, their exhaustion even more unbearable.⁹

Those were indeed hackneyed phrases when Blonskii published them, in 1908, age twenty-four. He was confessing a fashionable mood that Chekhov captured with exquisite art in, say, "The Duel," a tale of violent tension between a do-nothing humanist, who justifies lethargy by mouthing an ideology of decadence, and a fearfully active scientist, who nearly kills the flaccid humanist in his rage for the progress of the race. The near murder shocks both into disillusion with grand ideology. They are converted to humble faith in useful labor without exalted visions, since "No one knows what's really right." That well-known line of Chekhov's--"Nikto ne znaet nastoiashchei pravdy"¹⁰--could have served as the motto of the

many intelligently who were turning into professionals. It was a motto implicitly at odds with the Communist claim to know real pravda, the fusion of factual and moral truth, of science and humanism. The humble realism of professionals was also at odds with another part of the Communist mentality, the defiant romanticism that finds human value in revolt against brutish reality.¹¹ Blonskii's talk of the "younger brothers" with their "unbearable exhaustion" and terrible "negation" revealed his sympathy with such wild romanticism, his self-critical revulsion against the professional's life of small deeds and limited expectations.

A harsh sociologist would note that philosophical skepticism and modest devotion to humdrum labor are an evasion of dangerous tension. They are ^{a convenient} ideology for modern professionals; they reassure specialists in mental labor who have surrendered grand vision to the powers that be, or to a dead past, or, in such violently "developing" countries as Russia, to revolutionaries. The great majority of the Russian intelligentsia were strongly attracted to the lowlying dignity of the professional surrender, and on that basis, in the course of the Civil War, an explicit compromise was arranged. The new regime would buy the services of silently hostile specialists. The disapproval of Bolshevism by the overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia would be tolerated on condition that the disapproval be unorganized, politically inactive, not expressed in print.¹²

That compromise was intolerably unprincipled to minorities on both sides of the barricades. On one side some of the anti-Communist intelligently emigrated. On the other, some Bosheviks demanded the suppression of "bourgeois" high culture. (The culminating symbol of that violent reaction was the highly publicized banishment of

161 scholars in 1922, chiefly social theorists and philosophers.)¹³ And at the barricade itself a handful of thinkers, Blonskii among them, sought to transcend a purely political compromise between the Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia. They began to seek an accommodation of Bolshevism with high culture on a principled level, within such professional fields as philosophy and psychology. In the language of the time, they sought "recognition" (priznanie) of the revolution, in intellectual thought as well as political submission.

With respect to political ideology "recognition" was brief, brusque, crude. Blonskii did not reason his way out of Socialist Revolutionary ideology in any systematic manner. He simply turned away, as a convert takes the decisive step from darkness to light, saving reason for the other side, in the world lit up by his new faith.¹⁴ "October clearly showed me the two sides of the barricade; I perceived keenly that there can be no middle ground, and since November of 1917 I have known the joy of being on the side of the people."¹⁵ Indeed, that slam-bang manner of the convert, the abrupt dogmatic choice that protects the mind against the torments of unbridled reason, extended far beyond political ideology. With clangorous incongruity it resounded time and again in Blonskii's new writings on philosophy and psychology, most strongly in denunciations of the metaphysical philosophy that had absorbed much of his energy before the revolution. He now accused it of being an upper-class mystification, without making any serious effort to prove the accusation by reasoned argument.¹⁶ Analogous denunciations of psychological science seemed to point toward simple suppression of it too, along with the philosophies and the political ideologies of the class enemy. But consistently or not, Blonskii continued to be a professional philosopher and psychologist. He sought to go beyond denunciation, to transform both disciplines so they might serve the politically victorious lower class in its struggle for a new socialist culture. He tried especially to transform psychology into a science that would harmonize with Marxism in re-

volutionary theory, and would be practically useful in socialist education.

Just think: in backward Russia, during the darkest days of civil war and famine, an intelligent, converting to Bolshevism, strove against the tendency of his class to split the professional mind from the political soul, and thus made the first effort to create a Marxist psychology. Physically indistinguishable from the political pamphlets of the time (brittle pulp paper, either yellow-brown or gray, with print so coarsely smudged as to be illegible in places), Blonskii's two little treatises of 1920-21 were an unprecedented intellectual venture.¹⁷ They were the first effort anyone had ever made anywhere to reconcile revolutionary Marxism and professional psychology, each of which claimed scientific understanding of human beings.

For the previous forty years the advanced centers of modern culture, especially the German-speaking centers, had poured out streams of publications on Marxism and on psychology, separate streams. No one had seriously confronted the obvious question whether they might be compatible with each other. Both Marxists and professional psychologists had been prudently purblind, sufficiently sophisticated or modern to ignore such troublesome questions. The new science of psychology could be regarded as a useful technical specialty linked to medicine or pedagogy; or it could be considered largely theoretical and ideological, though increasingly separate from philosophy. Prerevolutionary Marxists dropped rare occasional remarks that pointed inconsistently in both directions.¹⁸ Psychologists never discussed the possible significance of Marxism for their science or their science for Marxism. Only when revolution and civil war pressed the intelligentsia of a backward country into political submission to

Marxist-Leninist rule, did a psychologist abandon professional prudence and try to show that Marxism and psychology were complementary approaches to an understanding of human beings.

If there was heroism in the project--and I think there was--it was the absurd heroism that typifies synthetic theorizing about human beings in our century. To specialists drowning in an irresistible tide of fragmentation Blonskii threw little cries to rise above the flood on revolutionary wings. His treatises were synthetic in the mocking sense--ersatz, artificial, inauthentic--that 20th-century chemistry has poured into a once dignified term. He skimmed over the hard problems that had caused psychology to split away from philosophy, and were causing psychology to split further into incompatible schools. He dredged up theories of the mind proposed by a variety of thinkers--from Hume and Kant to Titchener and Freud; even Jacques Loeb's and Ivan Pavlov's reduction of mind to neural reflexes--and threw them together with Marxist declarations that modes of production are the expression and the determinant of the evolving mind. Striving for synthesis, he achieved eclectic clutter. And all his inconsistent hypotheses for a science of the mind were intermittently subverted by his denunciation of psychological science as an obfuscation, which diverts one from action to change the world into academic exercises at interpreting it.¹⁹

Blonskii's synthetic heroism is mildly amusing--or mildly depressing, if one yearns for coherent understanding of the mind--until one reflects on the ominous context and portent. His were not treatises for sequestered psychologists in an advanced country, where politicians and intellectuals minimize conflict by a sullen divorce of political leadership from professional thinking. Within the psycho-

logical profession Blonskii was offering a platform for active "recognition" of a newly victorious, urgently dictatorial political ideology that called itself science. If political leaders would ever assert their authority on that platform, psychologists would have little or no professional authority to serve as a counterweight. Unlike physicists or biologists, they lacked a clear set of commonly accepted principles and well proved knowledge. They were fragmented into schools and trends, each incompatible with the other, and all presenting claims of knowledge on the very subject--human beings, their behavior, their minds--where political leaders are practical experts and masters -- scientific masters, the Communists claim.

An ominous portent is not a seal of doom. The effort to create a Marxist-Leninist psychology could have proceeded along such eclectic, pluralist lines as Blonskii projected, and it could have been ignored by political leaders, as it was when he projected it. Lenin had one of Blonskii's treatises in his personal library,²⁰ but there is no evidence that he or any other of the highest leaders paid any serious attention to the call for a Marxist psychology before 1923, when Agitprop deliberately raised the problem among psychologists --with eclectic and pluralist discussion as the result while NEP endured. Yet very early, in the midst of the Civil War, the highest leaders went out of their way to persuade Ivan Pavlov that there was an exceptionally honored place for him in revolutionary Russia, in spite of his strongly expressed disapproval of Bolshevism. And many years later, in the era of high Stalinism, ~~that~~ incongruous kowtow to Pavlov in 1920-21 would be hailed as the first move toward the suppression of eclecticism and pluralism in psychology, toward official "recognition" of Pavlov's "teaching" (uchenie) as the only correct embodiment of Marxism-Leninism in psychology.

To understand those paradoxical developments one must be constantly aware that they were paradoxical developments, that is, illogical and unforeseen results of a complex historical process. It is mythic invention to attribute to Lenin and his comrades foreknowledge of a Stalinist goal, or even a clear conception of elementary issues in their unexpected entanglement with psychology and neurophysiology. As they repeatedly confessed, they approached Pavlov's "teaching" with the simple credulity of laymen contemplating natural science, not as lordly ideologists laying down the principles of Marxist psychology. His dogs salivating to ringing bells were^a popularly accepted symbol of the scientific way to understand the mind, by reducing it to associative functions of the nervous system. Marx and Engels had ridiculed the ideology of ^hpsychological reductionism back in the 1860s and '70s, but the Bolshevik leaders venerated natural science and were therefore quite vulnerable to the popular view of Pavlov as the experimenter who had turned the ideology into hard science. In vivid lectures and essays he had been showing how to reduce mind to neural matter in experimentally proven fact, not in abstract speculation. That at any rate was his central argument, and to some extent the Bolshevik leaders were persuaded, for his lectures were collected and published in fulfillment of a 1921 decree signed by Lenin himself.

Yet Lenin was quite chary of explicit commitment to Pavlov's "teaching," perhaps because he had used his wartime leisure in Swiss exile to study Hegel. His philosophical notebooks of 1914-16 contain decidedly mentalistic speculations about approaches to

a scientific understanding of the mind.²¹ There are no Pavlovian speculations in the notebooks, or in any of his writings; not a word to support the Stalinist myth that Lenin started the official "recognition" of Pavlov's "teaching" as the embodiment of Marxism in psychology. His only significant comment on the famous physiologist occurred in a narrowly practical letter to Zinoviev, of June 25, 1920.²² It was exclusively concerned with the awkward problems raised by Pavlov's threat to emigrate, since the terrible deprivations of the time made it virtually impossible for him to continue his normal work at home.

Lenin wrote that it would

hardly be rational to permit Pavlov to go abroad, for he has previously spoken out openly in this sense, that, being a truthful person, he will be unable, in case appropriate discussions are started, to refrain from speaking out against the Soviet regime and Communism in Russia.

At the same time this scientist constitutes such a big cultural value [bol'shuiu kul'turnuiu tsennost'] that it is impossible to think of keeping him in Russia by force, in conditions of material deprivation.²³

← Therefore, Lenin argued, Pavlov should be treated as an exceptional case. His food ration should be made extraordinarily large and he should be given an especially comfortable place to live. In a government decree spelling out the details, which was published

in February, 1921 over Lenin's signature, exceptional provision was also ordered for Pavlov's scientific work, and the State Publishing House was directed to use the best available materials to publish a deluxe collection of Pavlov's essays and lectures during the past twenty years, the time he had been working on conditioned reflexes. The cryptic characterization of Pavlov in Lenin's letter--"such a big cultural value"--was slightly expanded but hardly clarified in the decree: "Academician Pavlov's absolutely exceptional scientific achievements...have significance for the toilers of the entire world."²⁴ Evidently Lenin was unwilling or unable to venture even a sentence or a phrase that might help the toilers to understand the significance of Pavlov's scientific achievements as distinct from his scandalously anti-Communist ideology.

An outside observer with the advantage of hindsight can see why Pavlov's achievements seemed so exceptional. They glowed against a dark background of prevailing backwardness, the backwardness of Russia among scientific nations, the backwardness of psychology among the sciences. Pavlov was Russia's only Nobel laureate, and he had won that distinction in the natural sciences, as a physiologist not as a psychologist. For the most recent period in his long life--he was born in 1849--he had been claiming to extend the indisputable methods of the natural sciences to the study of the mind, and the public took his success for granted. He was the down-to-earth provincial Russian physiologist who was overcoming the mystical confusion of cosmopolitan psychology.

With respect to political ideology, on the other hand, Pavlov had the ordinary views of the learned estate, and not of Russia alone. Like the German Gelehrten whom he admired, he professed

haughty disdain for "politics,"^a disdain that was actually a masked submission to those who wielded political authority, whether the Kaiser's, the Tsar's, or Lenin's.²⁵ The chief difference between the German and the Russian mandarins was the underlying satisfaction that the Germans felt for their old regime, in contrast with the dissatisfaction of the Russians, who eagerly welcomed the fall of their emperor. The February Revolution prompted many scholars and scientists to descend from Olympian silence on politics, or to rise from silent submission to political authority-- in any case, to speak out. In April, 1917 Pavlov took part in an academic celebration of the dawn of Russian democracy. His speech focussed on the hope that the new freedom would enable Russian science to escape from shameful backwardness. Germany was the ultimate model to catch up with and surpass. Its supremacy in science and technology, he argued, explained German's success in fighting against countries that were superior in population and resources.²⁶

On that grossly political level Pavlov's ideology was quite common, easily distinguishable from his exceptional position in science, and easily denied printed expression under the Bolshevik regime as it had been under the tsarist regime. (Later on, when the Bolsheviks turned openly to the job of making Russia stronger than Germany, he would have access to a political forum once again.) But within the writings that he offered as science, ideology was intricately entangled with psychology and even with neurophysiology. "The Reflex of Freedom," to take the most egregious example of the messy mixture, was a lecture he gave in May, 1917, published in a medical journal in 1918, and included in the 1923 volume that

was published on Lenin's say-so.²⁷ The essay began with purely factual observation, but quickly revealed the theoretical difficulties that saturate factual observation in psychology. About two dogs in a hundred could not be trained to stand quietly in harness on the laboratory table and thus to respond with appropriate variations of saliva flow to ringing bells, flashing lights, electric shocks--the "indifferent stimuli" that the dog's central nervous system was forced to associate with the periodic appearance and non-appearance of food. The two-percent minority salivated profusely and continuously all the time they were on the table, as nervous people in unsettling circumstances sweat and fidget. That anthropomorphic insight--or pathetic fallacy--was Pavlov's.²⁸ With it he unwittingly confessed that he was still trapped in the common habit of inferring mental states from external behavior--in short, reading the minds of other creatures--even though he endlessly insisted that he had escaped from such subjective mindreading.

Many such anomalies attended Pavlov's shift from purely physiological studies of the digestive system, which had won him a Nobel Prize, to studies of conditioned reflexes, which were winning him popular fame as a psychologist. His central claim to fame was the rigorously objective method that he brought to psychology, the replacement of "introspection" by a physiologist's correlation of physical stimuli and physical responses. Or so he believed, and the public innocently accepted his self-evaluation. They did not ask, for example, whether pure objectivity was not violated before the supposed beginning of the conditioning experiments. Before data were recorded Pavlov and his assistants made friends with the dogs, and thus prepared them to be calm in the laboratory situation, so

that the stop and go of their salivation might fit the stop and go of the "indifferent stimuli." Absolute objectivity, the complete elimination of subjective interaction between humans and higher animals--or even more among humans--may be impossible to the extent that the creatures are conscious of themselves and each other. Edward Thorndike, the American pioneer of behaviorism, was unwittingly illustrating this great difficulty in a different way. He did not train his cats to go calmly into his experimental puzzle boxes. He thrust them in snarling and clawing, which unwittingly injected a different kind of unmeasured subjectivity into his subsequent measurements of their behavior.²⁹

The tunnel vision of masterful specialists protected Pavlov and Thorndike from such crippling criticisms of their experimental route to important findings, and the public was correspondingly blinkered, calmly prepared to accept reinforcement of the mechanical spirit of the age. Even such a sophisticated critic of mechanism as Bertrand Russell was unaware of the great incongruities between aspiration and achievement in Pavlov's "teaching."³⁰ Psychologists and neurophysiologists of rival schools--indeed, some of Pavlov's own disciples who turned to questioning--hardly reached the public with their specialized criticisms of his methods and conclusions. He maintained his self-assurance and his reputation by ignoring most criticisms, in public at any rate. In private he brushed most of them aside with an increasingly short temper, as his capacity for self-criticism was worn away by fame and old age. He was especially incensed against fellow specialists in neurophysiology who noted that his neurological explanations of conditioning were purely imaginary and--worse yet--increasingly at odds with the accumulating data of rigorous brain studies.³¹

Yet great technical knowledge was not necessary to appreciate how extravagantly speculative and ideological Pavlov was in his supposed physiology of "higher nervous activity," as he preferred to call the mind. In essays like "The Reflex of Freedom" he flouted scientific rigor in the most obvious ways. He not only imagined a "reflex of freedom" to explain the continuous salivation of exceptionally nervous dogs. He derived it from the unchained lifestyle of hypothetical stray dogs, which he imagined to have been the progenitors of the nervous creatures that salivated profusely and continuously on the laboratory table. On the other hand, he speculated, chained yarddogs had probably been the progenitors of the calm dogs that salivated and stopped as the experimentors dictated. The compliant majority exhibited yet another physiological fantasy, "the reflex of slavery"--and so did many Russians. "How often," Pavlov exclaimed, "in what varied ways, has the reflex of slavery appeared on Russian soil, and how useful to become conscious of it! ...[For then one can] suppress that reflex by systematic measures, by successful inhibition."³²

Pavlov was a typical modern scientist in his willful ignorance of philosophy, his contemptuous indifference to the philosophical tradition from which he had escaped, he thought, into the verified truths of experimental science.³³ The paradoxical combination of determinism and voluntarism, the hope that personal freedom and dignity can be won by submission to impersonal necessity, can be found in Stoicism and Christianity as well as Marxism and behaviorism --and Pavlov's supposedly physiological "teaching." Insiders, participants in a particular school, are usually unaware of the broad underlying affinity, and grow angry when they sense it. One school's sense of exalted submission to the necessities of god or nature

is a repulsive caricature, an abomination, to a rival school. In a private letter to a disciple in Canada Pavlov praised "the sense of human dignity" that had prompted the exceptional man to emigrate. "All around me," he wrote, "I am astounded to observe the absence of that sense. People who have been thrown into prison two or three times quite without grounds, like dogs being tied to a stake, forget it so quickly, without recognition of spiritual defeat."³⁴ In public writing Pavlov carefully avoided such harsh comment, and his Bolshevik critics showed reciprocal restraint. They limited themselves to a brief exchange of courteous polemics in 1923-24, when Pavlov included "The Reflex of Freedom" in his collection of scientific essays, and lectured medical students on the superiority of his "teaching" to the pseudo-science called Marxism.

In the preface to the 1923 book Pavlov inserted another ideological challenge to Marxism, which seems quite daring, but only when we compare it with the complete suppression of such challenges since the twenties. By comparison with the ideological conflicts of the half-century preceding 1917, Pavlov's challenge to Marxism in 1923 is extremely muted and brief. With the progress of the natural sciences, he observed, the human mind was achieving astonishing technical triumphs, but

the same human being, with the same mind, governed by some dark forces acting within itself, causes incalculable material losses and inexpressible suffering by wars and by revolutions with their horrors, which take man back to bestial relationships. Only the ultimate science, the exact science of man himself--and the most reliable approach to it from the field of all-powerful natural science--will lead man out of the present darkness and cleanse him of the present shame of interpersonal relations. ³⁵

As revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks could hardly ignore the assertion that revolution is, like war, a regression to bestiality. As Marxists, they could hardly ignore the assertion that only a physiological approach could reach a genuinely scientific understanding of human beings. The challenge was all the more provocative since Pavlov, in a 1923 lecture, repeated and enlarged on his criticism of Marxism as a pseudo-science of human behavior. He did that in the introductory lecture to his course on physiology at the Medical Academy, which seems to have achieved limited distribution in published form, for student use. The highest political ideologists--Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin--replied at length in Pravda, Izvestiia, and in Red Virgin Soil, the major journal of high culture.³⁶ Their central problem was to draw a line, or erect a wall, which would separate Marxism, the science of social evolution, from Pavlov's "teaching," the supposed physiology of the mind. Yet they inconsistently regarded Marxism as a comprehensive philosophy, with important critical implications for the science of the mind, and they could not even think of the opposite possibility, that the science of the mind might have critical implications for Marxism. In short, they could not confront the clash of principles that required a wall to keep the peace.

Serious criticism of Pavlov would have drawn Bolshevik ideologists into the question, What is a reflex in physiological fact, as distinguished from metaphorical fictions like the reflexes of freedom and of slavery? Trotsky and Bukharin simply brushed those fantasies aside with a little genial laughter. Certainly they did not get deeply involved in analysis of Pavlov's "reflex of purpose." It is closely akin to the so-called orientation reflex, the alert

focusing of the animal's attention on some item of interest, if I may use the everyday language that describes behavior by unashamedly attributing mental qualities to pricking of ears, pointing of head, and stiffening of body. Holistic concepts like the orientation reflex were and still are very hard to place on one or another side of the lines that arbitrarily separate physiology from psychology and both from evolutionary studies, Marxism included. Yet Zinoviev, Trotsky, and Bukharin avoided such problems not only in their public criticism of Pavlov, but even in their private thinking. We can penetrate that sanctuary, though behaviorists would forbid the trespass, not only by noting the obvious sincerity of their uncritical praise for Pavlov's physiological "teaching." We also have a private letter that Trotsky wrote to Pavlov in 1923, in which he endorsed the widespread notion that Freud and Pavlov were working toward a unified science of the mind from opposite ends of a mountain shaft, Freud from the psychological top down to the physiological bottom, Pavlov from the bottom up.³⁷ Trotsky respectfully asked Pavlov's opinion, but Pavlov disdained to reply. (Or Soviet editors have concealed a reply that they cannot approve.)

In any case, the highest Bolshevik ideologists had no thought of venturing into Pavlov's domain, and thus could not perceive how extravagantly speculative he was there, in his supposed physiology. They simply took it for granted that his "teaching" was natural science, not to be criticized by laymen. They also were confident that it was materialist in its philosophical essence, though Pavlov denied that.³⁸ Bukharin was especially insistent on this point. He simply ignored the neo-Kantian argument, which Pavlov approved, to the effect that his analysis of phenomena left the problem of mental or material essences unresolved. Bukharin declared Pavlov's "teaching"

to be "a weapon in the iron arsenal of materialist ideology."³⁹ Since Bukharin was becoming the Party's chief ideologist, as Lenin declined to the grave (or rather, to mummified eternity in a glass case), those words quickly became an official catch phrase. They would be repeated even by sophisticated critics of Pavlov's "teaching," in jarring dissonance with their arguments that it was inadequate to explain the mind, and even inadequate as physiology.⁴⁰ Willy-nilly the chief ideologist had struck the characteristic pose of samodurstvo, and deferential specialists would respond with the bowing and scraping of self-effacing obezlichenie.

All that lies beyond the temporal limits of our conference, in the complex Soviet discussions of psychology and neurophysiology during the mid and late twenties. The point here is the self-contradictory mixture of tension and forbearance that set the framework for those discussions. Pavlov and the Bolshevik leaders touched swords in 1923-24, and quickly backed away from all-out combat. They protected themselves from damaging conflict over irreconcilable differences by agreeing on the common view of the natural sciences--and supposed natural sciences--as an area of miraculous certainty in an otherwise uncertain world, as the sacrosanct realm of the purely technical. In this respect Trotsky and Bukharin uncritically shared the spirit of our century. They praised an allegedly physiological "teaching" which, they cheerfully admitted, they were incompetent to judge.⁴¹ Such protestations of the layman's incompetence were--and are --part of the blinkered vision that enables 20th-century leaders to go on preaching grand old ideologies which are deeply at odds with the basic assumptions of many scientific disciplines. Pavlov on his side quickly retreated to the characteristic diplomatic silence of scholars and scientists, who forbear from making a big issue of

ideological disagreements with their political masters--or with scholars and scientists in rival schools and disciplines.

Yet at the very same time Blonskii's effort to transcend the genteel disintegration of high culture was being endorsed by Agitprop, and turned into a continuing campaign.⁴² In January, 1923 K.N. Kornilov astonished the first postrevolutionary Congress of Psycho-neurology with a call for Marxist transformation of the human sciences.⁴³ The "recognition" of Marxism preached by Blonskii was henceforth to be official policy. A devilish confusion resulted--with a certain excitement, to be sure, the tawdry, feverish excitement that colored so much of high culture in the 1920s. Virtually all the invisible colleges or schools of psychology and neurophysiology found Marxist spokesmen. There were Soviet Marxist versions of Freudianism, of Gestalt, of behaviorism, of comparative animal psychology (as ethology was then called), of cognitive psychology, and of course of physiological psychology--itself divided into the rival schools of Pavlov and Bekhterev, and others I will not here trouble you with. There would even be a solitary splendid beginning of the philosophical brooding over psychology that would be called Marxist existentialism when it would be reinvented much later in Western Europe.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, in spite of all the diversity that these Soviet thinkers of the twenties would share with their colleagues in the West, they would exhibit one characteristic in common, a distinctively Soviet innovation in the high culture of the 20th century. All would be part of a professed effort to achieve unity in the human sciences "under the banner of Marxism." To use the brutally plain language of George Chelpanov, all the discussants subjected themselves to the "dictatorship of Marxism."⁴⁵ Chelpanov was the dean of Russia's experimental psychologists, who was removed from the central Institute

of Psychology, which he had founded and directed until 1923. He was removed because he was too free with such plain talk, too explicit in arguing that the drive to unify the human sciences entailed either an eclectic pretense of unity or the subjection of rival schools to a single one, such as "reflexology."

Chelpanov's greatest offense was to invoke Marxism against the drive for a Marxist psychology. Properly interpreted, he argued, Marxism required a continued effort to divorce philosophy from experimental psychology, which should strive to be as factual, as philosophically neutral, as mathematics or physics.⁴⁶ The ideological authorities would not allow that viewpoint to be thoroughly examined, even though--or because--it was so strongly implicit in the distinction that they themselves persistently made between Pavlov's admirable science and his deplorable political ideology. The fragmented high culture of the 20th century was to be hammered into unity "under the banner of Marxism."⁴⁷ Anyone who challenged the possibility of such unification--such philosophizing with a hammer, to borrow Nietzsche's ominous phrase--became an outcast. And of course excommunications can achieve unity of culture, within a state church belligerently fortified against the divisive opinions of heretics and heathens.

Let me repeat. Ominous portents are not a seal of doom. Many evidences of the fortress mentality appeared in the Soviet Marxist state church of the twenties, but the dominant tone was openminded creativity in the search for Marxist unity of high culture. Eclectic pretensions of unity sanctioned a reality of pluralism in the search. We all know how brief that golden age of fairly free discussions proved to be. By 1929 angry impatient hands would seize weapons from Bukharin's "iron arsenal of materialist ideology" to beat down eclectic pretensions

and achieve monolithic unity by subjecting all rivals to a single school within each discipline. No doubt the chief cause of that cultural cataclysm in 1929-32 would be the resurgence of the civil war mentality among political leaders. But we must recognize the cultural tensions that helped to inflame their political minds. The Bolshevik Party was never intended to be a debating society, as its leaders have been insisting since 1901. Yet modern high culture has irresistibly generated debating societies even--or most of all--among those who are most intent on transcending its fragmentation. Those Bolsheviks who have believed that such transcendence is to be achieved through practical assault on Russia's backwardness would reveal the most intense yearning for a unified culture, and the most intense intolerance of debate.