



Ivan Petrovich Pavlov

Russian Physiologist, Psychologist, M.D.
1849-1936

Ivan Pavlov was a Russian physiologist, psychologist, and physician. Pavlov contributed to many areas of physiology and neurology. His work can be divided into three phases: the physiology of the circulation of the blood, the physiology of the digestion, and higher nervous activity. His work on conditioned and unconditioned reflexes brought him the greatest acclaim. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1904 for research pertaining to the digestive system, which ultimately led him logically to create a science of conditioned reflexes. His experimental work demonstrated that both conditioned (learned) and unconditioned reflexes exist. In his study of the reflex regulation of the activity of the digestive glands, Pavlov paid special attention to the phenomenon of “psychic secretion,” which is caused by food stimuli at a distance from the animal. Pavlov was also the first to show that unconditioned reflexes change and evolve as we age. He also described how reflexes have evolved as a protection mechanism. Pavlov assumed that psychic phenomena can be understood on the basis of evidence gathered externally to the subject and although he was not original in this line of thought, his gifts as an experimenter and surgeon allowed him to devise and conduct original and revealing experiments with animals. Pavlov was rare in that he enjoyed worldwide acclaim throughout his career despite working and living in Russia. As a result, his work is widely known and studied.

Credits and Additional Reading

Pavlov, I. P., “Conditioned Reflexes,” Dover Publications, 2003 (originally published Oxford University Press, 1927)
Babkin, B. P., “Pavlov: A Biography,” 1949 (re-issued 1971)