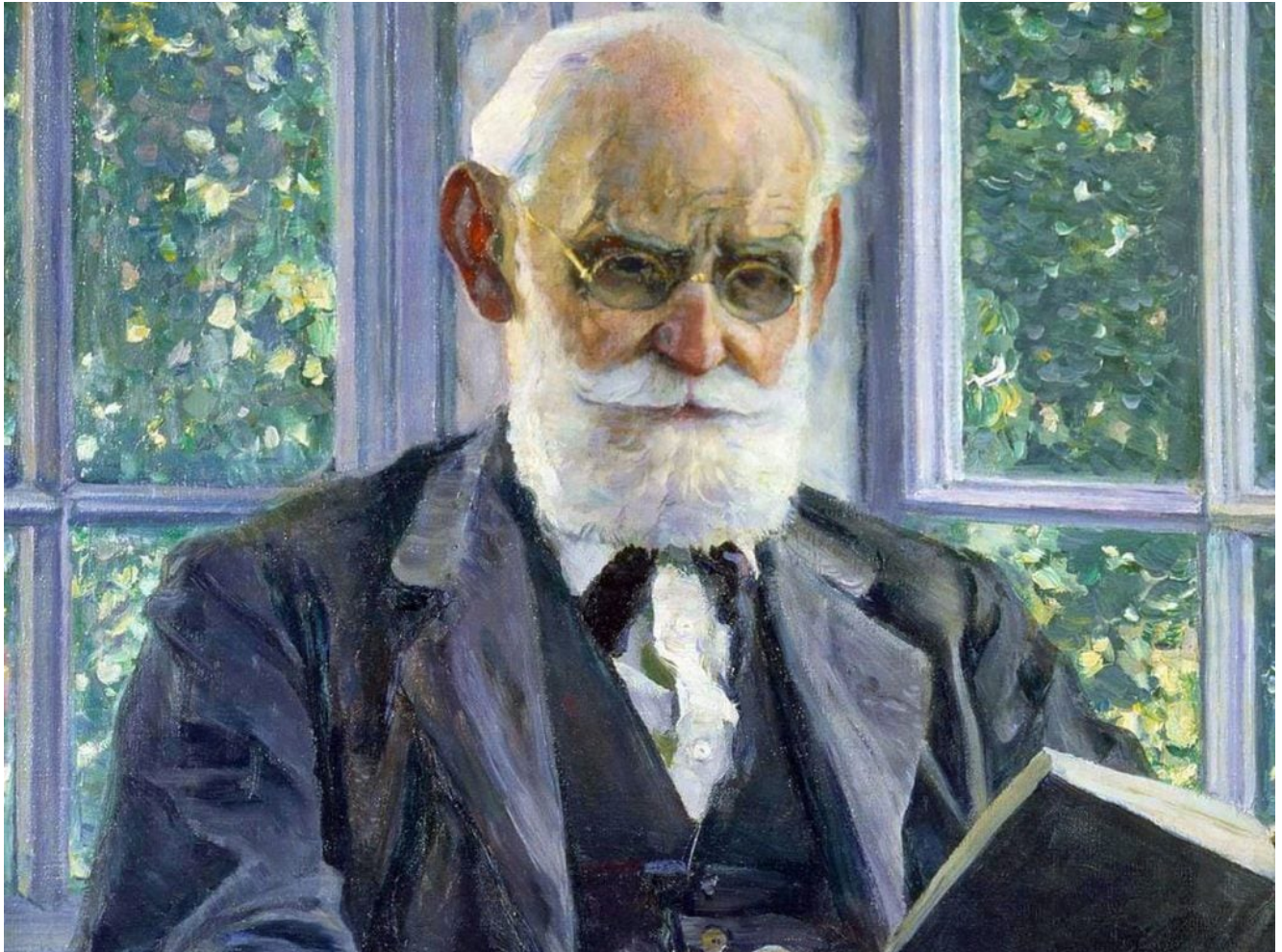


Professor Ivan Pavlov on Professor Dov Waxman



Ivan Pavlov

by Lev Tsitrin

A few seconds can be enough to reveal all about oneself that really matters. Consider, for instance, this tweet: “Yesterday, Biden and Netanyahu finally met to discuss the (unlikely) prospect of normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. On the same day, 6 Palestinians were killed by the IDF. The disconnect between these events says a lot about the Biden administration’s priorities.”

The attention given to Saudi-Israeli ties indeed tells volumes about Biden’s priorities – but the tweet’s focus on the

presumed “disconnect” that is somehow evident in Biden’s thinking is even more revealing of the thinking of the author. To him, prioritizing the rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia is wrong; Biden should be focusing instead on the Palestinians, the innocent victims brutalized by the Israeli army.

The tweet shows a particular train of thought – or rather, an ideological rut – that came into existence thirty years ago, in the heyday of Oslo accords. Back then, it was believed that Palestinians finally decided to abandon their dream of destroying Israel, and chose to settle the conflict by having their own separate and demilitarized state, living thereafter happily within the mutually agreed borders.

This was the general consensus in Israel, which elected governments laser-focused on bringing about this peaceful eventuality. But the dream got dashed when Arafat rebuffed Clinton’s offer, and resorted to the violence of the intifada in which over a thousand Israelis got killed in suicide bombings, and several thousand got maimed. That the dream of destroying Israel was never abandoned is daily reinforced by the fact that Palestinians lionize their terrorist “martyrs” (the six that were mentioned in the tweet were also of that breed) and when given a free choice in Gaza of electing a government, chose Hamas over PA, chose Hamas’s clarion call for war on Israel over PA’s lip service on seeking accommodation (the reason no elections are being held in West Bank, and Abbas is now in the 18th year of his 4-year term, is because the world now knows how Palestinian electorate will vote, and prefers the absence of democracy to Hamas’ government in West Bank). It is clear by now – to the Israeli public, to Biden, and to Gulf Arabs – that Palestinians represent the anti-Israel voice of the past, while the present, common, urgent threats are Iran and Islamism that are fighting against both Israel, and Arab governments.

But not everyone, apparently, got this memo. The author of the

tweet still lives in the distant past of the Oslo hope – the hope that got killed by Palestinian intransigence, rejectionism, and violence. He lives in the world that is not overshadowed by ayatollahs' Iran and by Islamist violence.

One could argue that to live in fantasy is his right – until one learns his job title. Dov Waxman is – take a deep breath – “Professor @ UCLA; Gilbert Foundation Chair of Israel Studies, & Director of Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies [who] tweets on Israel/Palestine and antisemitism.” If you don't believe me, check his credentials for yourself: his twitter handle is @DovWaxman.

So how is it possible for an academic to be so ignorant of the reality in his very own area of study? I was puzzled, but then recalled something I read, long ago, in Russian – Professor Pavlov's (of “Pavlov's dog” fame) public lecture given in 1918 that was titled, rather provocatively, *“On the mind in general, and on Russian mind in particular.”* In it – among many other things – he gave a striking example for the need to not veer away from the observable facts as the chief scientific virtue. He recalled how he and a colleague observed a phenomenon for which they found a good explanation – but as Pavlov kept turning it in his mind, he thought of an alternative reason that could have caused that same phenomenon, invalidating their prior explanation. To arrive at the truth, he suggested another set of experiments – but his colleague got so wedded to the previously-given explanation, that he asked that new experiments not be performed: what if they wind up invalidating the beautiful theory they arrived at earlier?

To Pavlov, this kind of thinking was a crime against science – to him, only that had value that was empirically true. Not so to his colleague – whom Pavlov did not name, but only assured his audience that he was brilliant – but did not have the strength to face the reality as it is.

Pavlov attributed this attitude to some hidden defect in the Russian mind – but clearly, as Professor Waxman's tweet proves, it is not just Russians who suffer from a sentimental but unjustified attachment to doubtful theories. American academics, it seems, are equally afflicted by the desire to ignore facts that contradict their theories. Needless to say, it is much easier to do this in humanities than in hard sciences where facts indeed rule. In humanities, a glib tongue is all that's needed – plus, the subject matter is often nebulous. Wildest theories can be all the rage where facts don't matter.

And this attitude is typical of the mainstream press, too. Factual correctness takes back seat to the political correctness; Professor Dov Waxman has a spiritual twin in Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*.

So do not despair, Professor Pavlov. Ignoring facts is not a uniquely Russian trait, just like the conditional reflex you discovered is not unique to Russian dogs. UCLA Professor Dov Waxman is an excellent empirical proof of this undeniable fact. Intellectual dishonesty (not to mention outright folly) are universal, Professor Pavlov.