

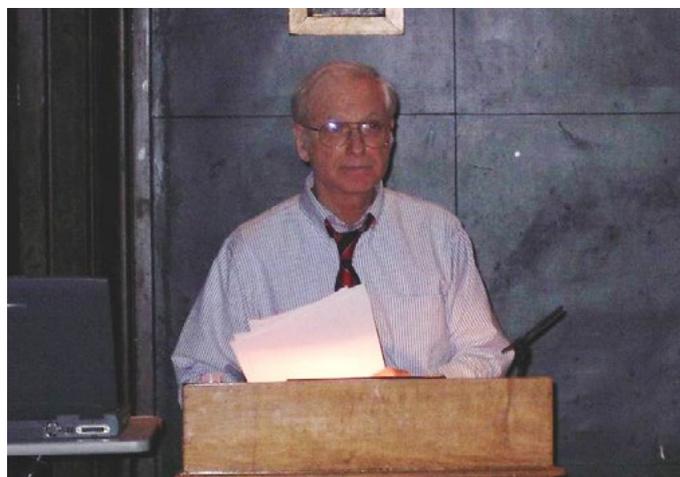
## Introduction to the Special Issue: Robert A. Rescorla: The Heir of Pavlov

On April 28, 1903, Ivan P. Pavlov presented in the amphitheater of the Medical School of the University of Madrid his theory of conditional reflexes, result of the work carried out for years by him and his collaborators in his laboratory at St. Petersburg. On that date a new era was opening in the history of experimental psychology. Research on the conditions, contents, mechanisms, and applications of Pavlovian conditioning has advanced for more than a century by researchers such as John García, Allan R. Wagner, John Gibbon, Nickolas J. Mackintosh or Leon J. Kamin, to name just a few of those who are no longer with us. But among all of them the figure of Robert A. Rescorla stands out in its own right. His genius for designing elegant and rigorous experiments and his creativity have powerfully influenced the development of the psychology of learning for half a century, since his 1967 article on control procedures.

I met Bob Rescorla in Madrid almost forty years ago, when I was a graduate student. Bob had come to Spain to participate in a conference on cognitive psychology. When he finished his presentation, the students were informed that Professor Rescorla was willing to discuss with them their research projects. One by one, Bob attended to all the students and discussed with each one their ideas and experimental designs. The scene of the students lining up to talk to Bob reminded me of the faithful Catholics waiting their turn in church for confession. With the difference that I had never seen before such enthusiasm and devotion in any church.

In 2003 we met again. I was organizing the commemoration of the centenary of the lecture that Pavlov gave in Madrid in 1903, in which he presented for the first time his theory on “psychic reflexes.” I asked Bob to give the closing lecture and he agreed. In the same amphitheater and from the same stage from which Pavlov had spoken exactly 100 years earlier, Bob presented “[Contemporary Study of Pavlovian Conditioning](#)”, later published in *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*. At the end of Bob’s lecture, a colleague whispered in my ear: “If the ghost of Pavlov is present in the theater, he must be very

satisfied with what his heirs have done.” I smiled and, for a moment, I seemed to notice a knowing look on the face of Pavlov, whose portrait by Mikhail Nesterov presided over the sessions.



1 Robert A. Rescorla. Madrid, april 2003. Pavlov's Lecture Centennial.



2 Madrid, april 2003. Pavlov's Lecture Centennial. Left to right: Luis Aguado, Víctor García-Hoz Rosales, Robert A. Boakes, Viktor M. Klimenko, Javier Bandrés, Joseph J. Plaud, Nicholas J. Mackintosh, Antonio Colodrón, Robert A. Rescorla, Gabriel Ruiz, Juan Bautista Fuentes.

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3. Madrid, april 2003. Pavlov's Lecture Centennial. Left to right: Robert A. Rescorla, Joseph J. Plaud, Gabriel Ruiz, Daniel P. Todes, Viktor M. Klimenko.

Bob continued to honor me for years with his friendship and, with his usual generosity, assisted me on international publishing projects that, without his help, I might not have been able to complete successfully.

Today I have the honor to present this special issue of *Revista de Historia de la Psicología*, in which four outstanding experimental psychologists, Paul Rozin, Charles R. Gallistel, Jan De Houwer and Juan M. Rosas pay tribute to one of the greatest researchers in the history of experimental psychology: Robert A. Rescorla, the Heir of Pavlov.

Javier Bandrés  
*Executive Editor*