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Pareto's Problem: An Analysis of Human Behavior

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Vilfredo Pareto published his *Trattato di sociologia generale* in 1916 and in the intervening century it has not achieved any degree of prominence in sociology. Pareto's problem is that his writings have either been neglected or attacked. The reason for Pareto's problem is that sociologists have not understood what Pareto set out to achieve. Although he claimed to have written a treatise on general sociology, his sociological ideas differed from most of his contemporaries and many of their successors. While sociologists tend to explain social interactions by focusing on groups, Pareto looked to the individual. While sociologists have sought to explain social interactions by examining the rational foundations for those interactions, Pareto regarded those explanations as nothing more than pseudo justifications. Pareto insisted that people are prompted to act because of their passions and then they provide "rational" explanations to justify them. Pareto's *Trattato* is an analysis of human behavior — not sociology as generally accepted, but as a particular type of social psychology. By understanding what Pareto intended to accomplish, perhaps scholars will finally accord Vilfredo Pareto a place in the history of sociology, and thereby solve Pareto's problem.

Keywords: Pareto, behavior, social theory, emotions, justification

Vilfredo Pareto has a problem. More than a century after he published his *Treatise on General Sociology* (*Trattato di sociologia generale*) he is either ignored or condemned by sociologists. Writing in 1936, the Austrian–German sociologist Leopold von Wiese asked whether Pareto's work should be regarded as sociology and he answered that he thoroughly denied that it was.[1] Why is Pareto regarded by many sociologists as not being a genuine sociologist? Pareto not only devoted a decade to writing his book but he also spent two years correcting the page proofs. Thus, the *Trattato* that was published in 1916 was Pareto's carefully written work; and he then oversaw and approved of the French translation which appeared the

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[1] "Ist das nun Soziologie? Ich verneine es durchaus." See Leopold von Wiese (1936, p. 442).

next year.[2] The answer to why Pareto's work is dismissed by sociologists is because his understanding of sociology is different than the conception held by most sociologists. They conceive of sociology as the study of human societies whereas Pareto believes that sociology is the analysis of human behavior. Sociologists consider themselves part of the human sciences; Pareto considered his approach to be similar to the natural sciences. His study revealed that far from being rational, most of our behavior is not motivated by reason.[3] Until such time as sociologists understand Pareto's aims, his sociology will continue to be ignored — hence Pareto's problem.

The purpose of this essay is to clarify what Pareto meant by sociology and what his aims and methods were in his *Treatise on General Sociology*. This essay is divided into three parts: (1) an introductory part which outlines many of the complaints against Pareto, (2) a lengthy part devoted to explication of Pareto's social theory, and (3) a brief conclusion which is an evaluation of Pareto's ideas. It is hoped that this essay will help clarify what Pareto intended to do in constructing his social theory and to show that his theory deserves its rightful place in social theory, if not in sociology. Pareto's social thinking is also instructive in helping us understand human behavior and social interaction.

Part One. Pareto's Problem: Complaints and Criticisms

Leopold von Wiese was not the only sociologist to express disapproval of Pareto's general sociology. In 1935, the first issue of the *Journal of Social Philosophy* appeared and most of it was devoted to Pareto's works. Most of the four contributions were largely negative and William McDougall spoke for the other contributors when he complained that Pareto's *Treatise* was badly written, full of contradictions, and was a failure. McDougall suggested that the book itself was "harmless enough" but he complained that there were too many professors who were forcing "thousands of innocent young people to waste a year or two of their lives struggling vainly to extract grains of wisdom from a foolish book" (McDougall, 1935, pp. 37, 44, 51). Writing in 1937, Raymond Aron complained that Pareto's language was almost unintelligible, and his conclusions were almost all negative. Rather than being a "value-free" scholar, Pareto was a polemical thinker. As a result, Aron suggested that there was virtually nothing to be learned from Pareto (Aron, 1937, pp. 491, 495, 511–512, 520).[4]

[2] Pareto's *Trattato* was translated into French in 1917 as *Traité de Sociologie generale.*

[3] James Burnham captured Pareto's thinking well when he wrote: "What happens to society, whether it progresses or decays, is free or despotic, happy or miserable, poor or prosperous, is only to the slightest degree influenced by the deliberate, rational purposes held by human beings." Man is not, a "rational animal." See Burnham (2020, pp. 158, 163).

[4] To Aron's credit, he changed his mind. Aron wrote the first essay in the inaugural volume of *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto.* He not only defended Pareto from the charge of being a fascist but also argued for the significance of Pareto's writings (Aron, 1963, pp. 10–15, 26). By 1967, Aron had again revised his opinion of Pareto and he now recognized the significance of Pareto's works (Aron, 1967).

There were some scholars who not only believed that there were things to be learned from Pareto's writings but that his treatise on sociology was extremely important. These individuals included Aldous Huxley, Lawrence J. Henderson, Gottfried Eisermann, Joseph Schumpeter, Warren J. Samuels, Charles J. Powers, Samuel E. Finer, and Norberto Bobbio.[5] With the single exception of Powers, not one of these individuals was a sociologist. Huxley was a writer, Henderson was a chemist, Schumpeter and Samuels taught economics, Finer taught history, and Bobbio taught political science. Huxley admired Pareto more for his view of the human condition than for his scholarship and much the same can be said about Henderson. And, Schumpeter, Eisermann, and Samuels regarded Pareto favorably because he brought an economist's approach to sociological problems. Finer and Bobbio may have been among the best defenders of Pareto because they seemed to have understood his work better than others. But even these two seemed unaware of the magnitude of Pareto's thinking. Much of that lack of awareness may have been due to their training — Finer in history and Bobbio in law. The present approach is based upon philosophy and socio-economics.

Part Two. Pareto's Analysis of Human Behavior

Vilfredo Pareto's education, work, and teaching are pertinent to understanding Pareto's unusual approach to sociological issues. Like his father, Vilfredo was trained as an engineer and between 1870 and 1890, he was employed in industrial management, specifically in the railroad, and then in mining and iron works (Mornati, 2018a, pp. 52–103). During 1891 and 1892, Pareto turned to writing on politics and social issues. He took up the invitation to write the introduction to a collection of essays on the first volume of Marx's *Das Kapital* (Mornati, 2018b, pp. 221–223). That not only furthered his disapproval of socialism but also prompted his interest in economics. Pareto's interest in economics was fostered by his friendship with Matteo Pantaleoni. Pantaleoni was about the same age as Pareto but was a professor of economics and it was through Pantaleoni that Pareto met Leon Walras. Walras was intending to retire from his professorship at the University of Lausanne and he was looking for someone competent to replace him.[6] Pareto was formally approved in 1893 and began teaching economics. However, his concern with political and social issues continued. He was still highly critical of the Italian government but he was becoming disillusioned with socialism and with liberalism. In fact, around 1900 his disillusionment led

[5] Huxley (1935); Henderson (1937); Eisermann (1961); Schumpeter (1965); Finer (1966); Bobbio (1972); Samuels (1974); Powers (1987). George Homans and Charles Curtius could be included but they acknowledged that their understanding of Pareto was based upon Henderson's lectures at Harvard. See Homans and Curtius (1934).

[6] The story about the delays and difficulties is interesting but not germane here. See Mornati, 2018b, pp. 1–40.

him to abandon both liberalism and political activism (Mornati, 2020, pp 77–80). This disillusionment also led to Pareto's transformation to an anti-liberal and to a scholar devoted to social thinking. Pareto's biographer, Fiorenzo Mornati, did not offer any account of this radical transformation; however, Samuel Finer (1968) did in his article "Pareto and Pluto-Democracy: The Retreat to Galapagos." Finer argued that in the late 1890s, Pareto was realizing that his belief in liberalism was unfounded and his defense of the workers was actually counterproductive. Finer maintained that Pareto now understood that the liberalism of the Left was an illusion and that as soon as the workers gained political power, they became part of the problem. The workers joined with the capitalists to form what he called the "pluto-democracy." It was a "*pluto*-democracy" because of the plutocrats but it was a "pluto-*democracy*" because of the workers. The problem was that the workers who had been the exploited jumped at the chance to become part of the exploiters. Pareto hated the bourgeoise because they bullied; now the workers joined them in bullying. He had defended the workers in print and in action; Finer insisted that Pareto's indignation and rage was because he felt betrayed by the people that he had cared about the most: like "the lover betrayed by his mistress." The phrase "The Retreat to Galapagos" is a reference to Aron's reference to Sartre's comment to Camus that since he blamed the European governments as well as the European workers, the only solution was for Camus to flee to the outermost part of the world — the Galapagos Islands. Sartre meant that metaphorically for Camus, but Pareto had fled to his hermitage at Cèligny (Finer, 1968, pp. 440, 449–450). It was at his home that he began work on what Huxley referred to as "Vilfredo Pareto's Museum of Human Stupidity" (Huxley, 1935, p. 1).

Pareto Before the Trattato

Pareto did not start out to work on his "Museum"; he wrote a number of books which led up to the *Trattato*. There were three books which Pareto had published between 1896 and 1909 and they reveal Pareto's evolution from an economist to a sociologist. The first book was *Cours d'Economie Politique* and as its French title indicated, it was primarily devoted to economics. Its title also indicates that the book was based upon lectures that Pareto had given at the University at Lausanne. The second book was *Les Systèmes Socialistes* which appeared in two volumes in 1902. This book was Pareto's critique of socialism but it also addressed the issue of why people chose to believe in such a utopian fantasy. The third book was the *Manuel d'Economie Politique* and it was published in 1906 in an Italian edition, followed by the French edition in 1909. Much of the *Manual* is devoted to economic issues, including capital, property, and population. But it also contains the beginnings of Pareto's theory of human behavior. One such important issue is found in Chapter I on "General Principles." In § 36 Pareto takes up the claim that "political economy cannot use the same tools as the natural sciences" because

"it is a moral science." He offers several lines of rebuttal: (1) the truth of a theory can be determined by one and only one criterion and that is the "agreement with facts." In § 37 he insisted that (2) science concerns itself only with facts that can be verified. In § 38 he maintained that (3) things which lie outside of verification may very well have value; what they do not, and cannot, have is scientific value (Pareto, 2020, pp. 13–14, §§ 37–38). Those who try to establish value by appealing to criteria that is not verification are not scientists; they are metaphysicians (Pareto, 2020, p. 17, § 47). In an enlightening footnote, Pareto recounted how Croce urged him to read "Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and other metaphysicians" but that it was hopeless because "the term absolute appeared incomprehensible to me . . . and I am afraid, to them too" (Pareto, 2020, p. 18, § 51). Pareto does not totally discount philosophical claims; he just insists that the only way to justify using them is to determine "whether, directly or indirectly, they agree with experience" (Pareto, 2020, p. 19, § 51).

Pareto's main focus on social issues is found in Chapter II: "The Introduction to Social Science." He insisted in § 1 that political economy, and in fact, every social science, is founded upon psychology and that psychology is the study of human actions. It is helpful to classify different types of human actions. Pareto distinguishes between what he calls non-logical actions and logical actions. The first actions are done because of habit or tradition or custom; they lack deliberation. The second actions are done intentionally; that is, the individual has a specific reason for doing so. If a person has a reason then the action is considered to be "logical." However, if a person does not have a reason, this does not mean the action is "illogical," but only that it is "non-logical" (Pareto, 2020, p. 20). Pareto then spent several pages on philosophers and their preoccupations with "Truth, Beauty, and the Good," but he objected that these are "absolutes" which are beyond experimental validation (Pareto, 2020, p. 26, § 18). Pareto took particular exception to those who insisted that the "good" is useful, and evil is harmful: "Anyone who speaks like this flies in the face of facts, and to prove his affirmation he can only resort to sophistries" (Pareto, 2020, p. 30, note 16, § 28). Similarly, he took aim at those in France who admire the "Declaration of the Rights of Man." He noted that The Declaration sounds like something legal, but it is "meaningless" and it contains "pseudo-scientific arguments" which have no "objective value" (Pareto, 2020, pp. 34–35, §§ 39, 40). Unfortunately, many people fail to see the difference between science and religion; that is, between reason and faith (Pareto, 2020, p. 39, § 50).

Pareto noted that there is not just the failure to see the difference between reason and faith, but that people often fail to recognize the contradictions in what they claim to believe in. He offered a number of examples: the Italian socialists who claim to believe in equality but have no problem in looking down on non-union members. The people who believe in the equality of all citizens but insist there must be privileged tribunals (Pareto, 2020, p. 39, § 50). Pareto then spent

almost fifty sections discussing further examples. This must have been puzzling to anyone who has been expecting a theoretical introduction to social science. One must remember that Pareto is not concerned with theories as he is with facts, because facts are crucial for theories. In § 100 he returned to the connection between truth and faith: "The authors almost never search for the truth, but look for arguments to defend what they consider in advance to be the truth, which is for them an article of faith" (Pareto, 2020, p. 59, § 100). He insisted that people claim that they are being reasonable but they are actually motivated by desires and emotions. Pareto concluded his "Introduction to Social Science" by arguing "Men are moved by sentiment and interest, but they like to imagine that they are moved by reason; hence, they seek — and always find — a theory which, a posteriori, gives a veneer of logic to their actions" (Pareto, 2020, p. 67, § 108). This quotation is the fundamental thesis of Pareto's theory of human behavior. Pareto spent the next decade developing it into the lengthy form which is found in his *Trattato*.

The Trattato

Pareto's *Trattato* has been referred to as monstrous, and in terms of length and degree of difficulty it is (Bobbio, 1972, pp. 55–56). It is also regarded as difficult because of Pareto's "peculiar system of numbering" the paragraphs. As the editor of the English edition pointed out, Pareto tended to use some form of that numbering in most of his works and he defended Pareto's use as it was Pareto's method for drawing attention to the systematic whole of the *Trattato* (Livingston, 1935, p. vii). Pareto set out his methodological approach in the first chapter, "The Scientific Approach," where he indicated how his work differed from others in the opening paragraph. The study of human society is often specialized: law, political economy, political history, history of religions, but he insisted that the study of human society in general deserves the name of sociology (Pareto, 1935a, p. 3, § 1). Pareto immediately admitted that that definition was "very inadequate" but he defended it by pointing to other sciences which also lack strict definitions. He added that not even mathematical sciences provide strict definitions. He suggested that definitions are arbitrary just like the borders between various sciences.

Pareto's approach to sociology is fundamentally different from other sociologists. His scientific approach is further underscored by the claim that he will proceed by hypotheticals rather than by demonstrated truths (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 3–4, §§ 2, 3). He explicitly contrasted his approach to other sociologists: they were all dogmatic, including Comte. Comte's claim of "positivism" was deceiving; his sociology was dogmatic and a type of faith. Pareto maintained those who have faith are naturally intolerant since they possess the "absolute truth," and that eliminates the possibility of some other truth. Pareto again differentiates his sociology from all others: those sociologies are largely matters of faith; but his is completely experimental. By that, he means that he follows the natural sciences

and relies solely on experience. By experience, he means observation (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 6–7, § 6). The terms "true" and "false" can apply only to those things which are in experience. "True" and "false" cannot apply to metaphysics because metaphysics is beyond the realm of observation. The standard for metaphysics must be something else, such as a divine revelation (Pareto, 1935a, p. 13, § 16). Metaphysics is the "science" of "essences" and "principles" so Pareto freely admits that his sociology cannot be regarded as a metaphysical "science." He offers Hegel's "science" as a metaphysical "science" — a philosophy of the absolute and of unity. But Pareto rejected the idea of a philosophy of an absolute and he dismissed the notion of unity — both went beyond the boundaries of time and space. Instead, he expressed his belief in the natural sciences and he stated his "wish is to construct a system of sociology on the model of celestial mechanics, physics, chemistry" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 16, § 20). He repeatedly emphasized that there needs to be some standard by which something can be judged to be true or false (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 12, 14, 24, §§ 14, 17, 45). Pareto contrasted his experimental sociology with metaphysics and insisted that experimental science has no dogmas; Hegel was one of the last thinkers to try "to subordinate experience to metaphysics" and the result was "comic absurdity" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 26, § 51). Whereas metaphysics has absolute truth, experimental science has hypotheses. Whereas metaphysics is concerned with ends, experimental science uses hypotheses simply as means. These hypotheses need to be verified and that can only be done by experience (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 28–29, § 59).

Pareto not only chose to differ from sociologists, he also took pains to differentiate himself from economists. During the decades leading up to the publication of the *Trattato*, many economists were preoccupied by the notion of "value." He conceded that "value" plays a prominent role in economic theory, but it loses its importance when economists regard it as a metaphysical entity — because if it is regarded as such, it is beyond empirical verifiability (Pareto, 1935a, p. 30, § 62). By restricting himself to empirical verification, Pareto insisted that he is released from tackling such philosophical issues as Nominalism or Realism. He also insisted that he could study the individual qua individual, and assume that an aggregate would be similar to the individual (Pareto, 1935a, p. 31–32, §§ 65, 66). By studying sociology in a manner similar to studying the natural sciences, Pareto (1935a, pp. 32–37, §§ 69, 70) maintained that he will be guided by nine core principles:

(1) Metaphysical propositions are avoided
(2) Experience and observation can be the only legitimate means of verification
(3) His approach will not intrude into theology and metaphysics and expect those to do the same
(4) Facts may lead to theories and uniformities may lead to laws; but the facts are not subject to the laws, but the laws are subject to the facts

(5) Results are contingent and relative; they provide probabilities
(6) Facts are not subject to moral judgment
(7) Facts are subject to proofs
(8) Facts and proofs need to adhere to things as we experience them
(9) This study yields "successive approximations"

These nine principles can be reduced to the following: Pareto will limit himself to the facts which can be verified; anything else is metaphysics, theology, or ethics. Since none of the three areas involve experience, they lay outside the scope of his sociological study.

After delineating his nine principles, Pareto offered a number of warnings: (1) he insisted that he was not insinuating that his approach is better than any others; in fact, "better" does not have meaning in his study, (2) he further insists that his approach and the metaphysical/theological approach cannot be compared; relativism and absolutism are incomparable, (3) when he calls a doctrine absurd, he does not imply that it is not beneficial to society. Something can be experimentally untrue and have social utility, and (4) he may find fault about others' ideas, but the objections are based upon facts and not on beliefs. In a confessional footnote he acknowledges some of his preferences but Pareto insisted that what he writes in his *Trattato* should not be understood as his "personal sentiments" but "exclusively for reports on objective relationships between things, between facts, and between experimental uniformities" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 38–39, §§ 71–75, note 1).

Pareto also differentiated his sociology from political economy. Political economy has been regarded as a practical discipline and political economists have sought to influence human behavior. Pareto insisted that he differed from political economists and that he had no intention in trying to change others' behavior. He illustrated his approach by distinguishing between an amateur entomologist who delights in beautiful butterflies, but has no interest in flies and avoids beetles, and a professional scientist who does not differentiate but studies *all* types. As Pareto memorably put it: "We keep open house to all facts whether they are important, childish, or misguided, as long as it has logico-experimental significance" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 43–45, §§ 80–81, 84). Pareto recognized that his claim to pursue science was to be doubted; he complained that even in his *Manual of Political Economy* he had insisted that he had no further ambition than to find generalities. However, he believed that many readers of the *Trattato* would be convinced that he had some moral lessons in mind (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 46–47, §§ 87, 88).

Pareto acknowledged that some scientists would also misunderstand him: they want to talk of necessity but Pareto insists that his generalities are limited to a particular time and space. Furthermore, he admits that his reasoning is not syllogistic; his answers are deduced but not deductive. Aristotelian logic results in necessary proofs; Pareto's logic results in probabilities. Rather than "All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal," Pareto's conclusion is only

that it is "very probable that Socrates is mortal" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 51, § 97). He later adds that science is progressive, that what was considered scientifically valid yesterday, may be considered differently today. There are no absolutes in science and there are no absolutes in scientific language (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 51, 56–57, §§ 97, 108). Pareto noted with some sorrow that the history of science has been filled with battles between experimental science and the "methods of introspection." They are defeated, but they reappear: since they cannot successfully fight in the open, they fight hidden like snakes in the grass. He regarded Hegel's philosophy of nature as being nothing more than metaphysics and although Spencer claimed that his theory was positivistic, it ascribed to "absolute reality" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 58–59, §§ 109–112). Absolutes imply dogma, but science has no dogma. And that means that there cannot be any a priori nor is there any issue about determinism. In history and in sociology, many thinkers could not use the typical terms of what is possible or impossible. That is because they thought in deterministic terms; that is, "what ever happens cannot happen otherwise" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 68–69, § 131). Pareto rejected such language because he rejected determinism. But that should not be taken to mean that we have an alternative method for determining what might have happened. For example, the question "What would have happened had Napoleon won at Waterloo?" can be answered only by "We do not know" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 71, § 139).

Pareto readily confessed to the fact that no human being is devoid of sentiments and those affect a scientist's beliefs and decisions. Accordingly, there is no such person as one who is strictly objective. However, he did insist that self-detachment was possible, even in the social sciences. He also insisted it is only by way of minimizing the power of preconceptions, sentiments, and beliefs to a minimum that "progress in the social sciences [is] to be achieved" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 72, § 143). Having spent more than 70 pages explaining what his sociology was, he suggested that his work be termed "general sociology" because he was providing a very general picture; much like someone who provides a sphere for the earth and leaves it to others to fill in the oceans, continents, and mountains. Pareto (Pareto, 1935a, p. 74, § 144) will leave it to future researchers to fill in the details.

One may be excused for being bewildered by Pareto's claim that he did not provide details because the *Trattato* is composed mostly of detailed accounts of the most varied kind. He wrote about natural science and natural law and about metaphysics and ethics. But his main point was that human behavior is generally prompted by what he referred to as "non-logical" impulses. These may be low-level like particular desires or pet peeves, or they may be high-minded like matters of conscience or conviction. Pareto's main points are (1) contrary to many historical and contemporary accounts, human conduct is "non-logical," meaning that it is not motivated by reason but by what he calls "sentiments," and (2) that humans feel the overwhelming need to cover the real non-rational impulses with "rational" explanations. One explanation that Pareto gives is that people tend to

read "dreamers" like Plato and Aristotle who are prone to "preaching to people as to what they ought to do — an exceedingly bootless occupation — instead of finding out what they actually do" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 185, §§ 227, 278). Even more modern thinkers like John Stuart Mill "thought less of things as they are than of things as the ought to be" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 194–195, §§ 298, 299). The problem as Pareto saw it was that intellectuals worshipped "Reason," "Truth," "Progress," and similar ideas (Pareto, 1935a, p. 198, § 304). Again, Pareto did not argue that these ideas are intrinsically bad or useless; he argued that they are irrelevant to science because "scientific problems are solved by facts" (Pareto, 1935a, p. 234, § 379). Unfortunately, much of human history is driven by horrors of dogma and beliefs. Pareto spent pages upon pages documenting such travesties but he reached fever pitch when discussing what happened to girls who were consigned to religious circles and then were accused of breaking their vows of chastity. Pareto was incredulous that the Roman Vestals and the Virgins of the Sun of Peru could be subjected to the same punishment: "They were buried alive!" By burying the girl alive they could claim that they had not actually killed her because they believed that they should not kill "a person consecrated to the gods" (Pareto, 1935a, pp. 458–462, §§ 754–763).

Pareto concludes the first volume of the *Trattato* by contrasting the pseudo-sciences of Rousseau and Engels with pure economics. While they and others try to "explain" human conduct by appealing to non-facts, pure economics is advantageous because it is able to draw inferences from "very few experimental principles." It is also advantageous because of its use of logic and its ability to state its reasonings in mathematical form (Pareto, 1935a, p. 491, § 825).

Pareto began volume two by observing that what is important is what he referred to as "social equilibrium"; that is, the balance that is needed to maintain social harmony. While much of history is composed of wars and revolutions, there needs to be some sense of balance; similar to the balance that is found in nature. That sort of thinking led him to recognize that "truth" and "utility" "are not one and the same but may, and often do, stand in contradiction" (Pareto, 1935b, pp. 499–500, § 843). Volume two and volume three are devoted to the particulars of his theory and that means his notions of residues and derivations. Residues are one's psychic states while derivations are the rationalizations which are used to justify those interests. They are myths, fictions, and attempts at arguments (Samuels, 1974, pp. 15–17, 34–35). Residues are psychic states and they are neither good nor bad, but can be useful, negligible, or harmful, while derivations are the assertions and claims that we employ to justify those states of mind.

Volume three has more than 500 pages, but it has only three chapters. All three are devoted in some form to derivations. One major takeaway from Pareto's theory is that people do mistake the cause for the effect. Pareto wrote that both the person in the street and the metaphysician believe that the derivation is the cause of the conduct whereas in reality it is the conduct that is the cause of the

derivation (Pareto, 1935c, p. 1121, § 1689). Another more minor but perhaps just as fascinating claim is Pareto's observation regarding the contrast between Italy and Prussia. Italy is a Catholic country whereas Prussia is Lutheran, so one would think that obedience to law would be stronger in the Catholic country. However, Prussians have the "residues" of submission to authority as well as the faith in the monarchy and a dedication to the military. These residues are "weak" in Italy (Pareto, 1935c, p. 1291, § 1856). While the notions of residues and derivations are central to Pareto's sociology and his discussions of their specific manifestations are often amusing, they are not particularly relevant to Pareto's "problem." What is more germane to Pareto's "problem" is found in volume four: *The General Form of Society*.

As with volume three, the fourth volume is more than 500 pages and it has only two chapters: "The General Form of Society" and "The Social Equilibrium in History." As the title of the second chapter indicates, its focus is historical; what is relevant here is the first chapter. For Pareto, society is not a static, monolithic entity but is a dynamic composite; much like an animal organism in which the various components are constantly interacting with each other. But Pareto also noted that different societies have existed in different places and different times; accordingly, he restricted his account to what he knew best: the West (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1433–1434, §§ 2060–2069). Pareto uses the pure sciences as an ideal; however, sociology lacks those sciences' precision (Pareto, 1935d, p. 1457, §§ 2106, 2107). In Pareto's opinion, utility is the most important consideration for individuals — how much something benefits them. Unfortunately, many individuals, and especially social reformers, believe that when they ask "What is the best form of society?" they think they are solving an objective problem. In reality, it is a subjective problem because they are really asking "What form of society best fits my sentiments?" (Pareto, 1935d, p. 1477, § 2145). This substitution is also found in the discipline of history — we like to believe that we are telling history as it happened but often the history is combined with myths and stories. The historian is not interested in the story per se, but he or she is interested in the moral that one should draw from it. That is much of the reason that the historian seeks to tell the story as simply as possible: so that the lesson can be more easily understood and accepted (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1501, 1503, §§ 2156–2160, 2162). Pareto was convinced that that was the approach historians generally take, but he pointed out that they are particularly prone to do so when pronouncing the guilt of public figures. One of Pareto's examples was Napoleon. Historians contended that Napoleon's coup d'état which originally brought him into power was a "crime." Pareto's response is that a crime can be easily determined when the act is judged according to a penal code; but it is almost impossible to determine when that act is a political event. He clarified this by reminding his readers that France went through a succession of governments which came into being by overthrowing the previous government and then announcing that the new government was even more legitimate than the

one they had just dispatched (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1504–1505, § 2163). His point is that people want to justify their own judgments and Pareto asked his readers to consider Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City* and to compare those two works with Cicero's "Philippics" and Taine's third volume of his history of the French Revolution. Pareto insisted that the two sets of books could not be confused with each other because the first set examines "relationships between social facts" whereas the "latter aim chiefly at ethical judgments" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1506–1507, §§ 2164, 2165). Pareto's claim about the French Revolution is applicable to disputes regarding almost every revolution. Those people who oppose it will despise the "depravity of character" of the revolutionaries; those who are in favor will despise "the wickedness of their adversaries" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1507–1508, § 2166). There have been few thinkers who concentrated on facts, but there have been more who preferred ethics. Pareto offered two reasons for historians to have chosen the "ethical method"— one subjective and the other objective. The subjective reason is to offer morals along with a few facts; and that the historian's subjective feelings and goals are more important to them than the facts. Pareto believed that this was a general trait shared by most historians. The objective reason is the high degree of difficulty in determining exactly what the actors genuinely believed. There are often inconsistent statements as well as assessing the sincerity of the various statements. Pareto asked whether anyone really thinks that the Romans were duped by Augustus or the French were duped by Robespierre? He added that these situations were unlike a jeweler who hoodwinks a customer into thinking that a piece of glass is really a diamond (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1509–1510, §§ 2168, 2169).

Pareto was convinced that the metaphysical ideal of statis and unity is an illusion; societies are composed of individuals and are constantly in flux. As in the natural world, there is force in society, and as in the natural world it is pointless to ask whether force "ought to be used in a society." Force is used by those who wish to preserve society as it is as well as by those who wish to change it. It is not an ethical issue; it is simply a matter of fact that has been borne out throughout history (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1510–1513, §§ 2170–2175). These sections on force are sometimes singled out for particular criticism. Critics tend to view Pareto's remarks as an endorsement of violence, yet throughout his book he has taken pains to state that his work is about things as they have been and how they are; and never about how they should be.[7]

Pareto insisted that there is a governing class in every form of state, even when it is ruled by a despot. It is just that the governing class is not nearly as visible as

[7] Many of these critics could be ignored because they were not considered competent scholars. A major exception was Hannah Arendt who in *On Violence* claimed that Pareto, like Georges Sorel, glorified violence; thus, showing a striking lack of understanding of Sorel but even more so of Pareto. See Arendt (1970, pp. 71–72, 81–82).

it is in other types of state. In an absolute state the ruler is the one who is always present; in a democracy there is the parliament. But in each of these types of state there is still a group of people who make sure that the government functions (Pareto, 1935d, p. 1573, § 2253). Furthermore, the governing class is not a "homogeneous body" but it, too, has a "government," which means that it has a leader (either a person or a committee). Sometimes the "leader" of the governing class is visible and sometimes not. Similarly, sometimes the ruling class is prompted by logic; but often it is driven by emotions (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1575–1577, § 2254).

Pareto insisted that there are two groups that use different instruments to hold on to power. One group uses force; the other uses cunning. Historically, most rulers used force to maintain their dominance but modern democracies tend to rely on cunning. What both have tended to do is to couch their approaches using ethics — they accuse their opponents of acting unethically (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1585–1595, §§ 2257–2262). The rulers often accuse others in order to distract their own population from recognizing the existing corruption. Rulers cast their opponents as nefarious crooks while claiming that their own actions are motivated by "the purest and loftiest morality." But often they are simply exercising their power. Pareto has particular contempt for judges who misuse their authority — they claim to be motivated by virtue and morality, but then they sentence some poor person who had done some minor misdeed to a maximum sentence. That prompted Pareto to observe that if justice is giving each what he deserves, then this is not "just, because the victims are getting more than their due" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1600–1602, 1605, §§ 2262, 2264). He then turned to political parties and their corruption. He admits that there are political actors who genuinely have the welfare of their constituents at heart; but there are many who speak about the general welfare of their people but their real concerns are their own selfish needs (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1610–1612, § 2268). Sometimes politicians use what Pareto called the "theory of public needs" to come to power or to justify having power. This is when politicians claim to be doing something because of some "public need" but this is only a claim to cover up the fact that it is really one's own needs that are being satisfied (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1618–1619, § 2272).

Pareto returned to his distinction between those governments which rely on force and use religious beliefs and those governments which rely on intelligence and cunning. Examples of the former include Sparta and Rome under Augustus; examples of the latter include Athens and many medieval republics. Both types have problems but the first group is often replaced by the second group. As much as Pareto thinks highly of intelligence, he believed that many of these cunning governments succeed because they are not burdened by scruples. However, they are doomed because they begin to atrophy and they reach a point where the government of force conquers the cunning state — hence, continuing the political cycles (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1622–1626, §§ 2274–2282). Countries not only go through political cycles but they also undergo economic cycles: periods of prosperity are

followed by periods of poverty (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1630–1634, §§ 2288–2298). Finally, he wrote about cycles of class. For the most part, those who strive, rise in status. There are, Pareto admitted, those who became wealthy but at the cost to many others. But there have been numerous entrepreneurs who have created massive wealth for others while becoming rich themselves (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1634–1636, §§ 2300–2301). He pointed out that rulers who really cared about their people were better liked and had a lower risk of losing support. He also noted that the level of risk was less during times of prosperity but during difficult times the ruler who continues to work hard to minimize poverty has an increased chance of being obeyed (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1639–1643, §§ 2306–2310).

After devoting twenty pages to the issue of religious property and to some economic problems, Pareto turned to what he referred to as "social oscillations" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1651–1671, §§ 2316–2320). He acknowledged that a complete account would be the history of humankind, so he restricted himself to some brief observations. Plato was an idealist who preached about the perfect state; Aristotle used "less metaphysics" but was not entirely devoid of it. The problem as Pareto saw it was that "Metaphysicists as a rule are contemptuous of facts" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1681–1686, §§ 2330). Metaphysics often yields to science, but then science is replaced by belief — this is the eternal alternation between faith and reason (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1690–1694, §§ 2340–2342). This is the history of the West and Pareto moved rapidly through this history, outlining the periods when faith was strongest and those when science was in ascendancy (Pareto, 1935d, 1695–1726. §§ 2344–2393).

Pareto moved towards the conclusion of this lengthy part by suggesting that he had arrived at a "general conception of the social complex, not only in its static but also in its dynamic aspects" (Pareto, 1935d, p. 1727, § 2397). Faith and metaphysics are static — they "aspire to an ultimate, eternal resting-place." However, science is living; thus, theories are born, live, and die; once they have outlived their usefulness, then they are replaced. Pareto stated: "Every theory fulfils its function, and nothing more can be asked of it" (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1728–1730, § 2400). Pareto did not claim his method was unique; rather, he fully acknowledged that this was the method of the natural sciences. But the natural scientist does not usually need to be on guard against his own beliefs, whereas the social scientist is inclined to seek what fits his own sentiments — what "ought to be" rather than for "what is and nothing else." Finally, the social sciences must follow the natural sciences in reducing complicated concrete phenomena to simpler theories which are again verified by the facts. Only then can the study of human behavior — as the study of the social — can become a science (Pareto, 1935d, pp. 1737–1739, § 2411).

Part Three. Pareto's Problem Solved?

Before concluding, it is worth remembering what Pareto wrote about Georges Sorel: "As to certain university professors who habitually mistake pedantry for

science and, given a theory, focus their microscope on insignificant errors and other trifles, they are completely destitute of the intellectual capacities required for understanding the work of a scientist of Sorel's stature."[8] Pareto could have easily been referring to himself. Pareto had his liberal free market ideals but as Finer has pointed out, he had eventually given them up (Eisermann, 1989, p. 200; Finer, 1968, pp. 446, 468). When he ceased being a political activist and began being a social scientist, he recognized that his concern would no longer be with ideals but with facts. One can fault him for being too lengthy and too preoccupied with historical examples, but one cannot criticize him for things that he neither did nor set out to do. He did not promote a social order nor did he extoll a type of government. He strove to describe social conduct as it actually occurs and not how it should be.[9] By recognizing that Pareto had no intention to preach about how to save the world and was solely concerned with telling truths about society, Pareto's problem is finally solved.[10]

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[8] See Pareto (1935d, p. 1535, § 2193, note 2). See also James Burnham who quotes this passage in his discussion of Sorel in *The Machiavellians*. Unfortunately, he erroneously lists it as § 2183. See Burnham (2020, p, 108, note *).

[9] Natasha Piano suggested that many scholars misinterpreted Pareto because his "cynical and aggressive rhetoric was easily misunderstood as exhibiting antidemocratic proclivities." She also suggested that if Pareto had lived longer, he would have likely joined Mosca in distancing himself from fascism (Piano, 2019, p. 527).

[10] In Part VI devoted to Pareto, Burnham (2020, p. 156) wrote "Everyone can argue all night about how to save society; but only a rare few have told us any truths about society."

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