

# Review of: "Carl Friedrich and the Cancellation of Pareto"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

## Review of "Carl Friedrich and the Cancellation of Pareto" by Stephen Turner

I complement the author on (i) the topic of his research, which permits an original and interesting contrast between Pareto and Friedrich, and (ii) the quality of much of his paper.

### Adding some context

In most cases, critical assessment of a scholar's work is typically not characterised as the 'cancellation' of ideas. In the case of critical commentaries of Pareto, however, there have been many absolute extremely critical commentaries of his *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* that perhaps it is not misleading to frame them in the context of an attempted cancellation. Carl J. Friedrich's treatment of Pareto in *The New Belief in the Common Man*, I think, be considered on that basis with some justification. But I think that has to be placed in context by indicating, early in the paper, the major common themes of other harsh or disparaging commentaries of Pareto's sociology, both those written before Friedrich's book (for example, Benedetto Croce (1924 [1935]) and Max Millikan (1935)) and those written after Friedrich's book (such as Werner Stark (1963)).

Of course, history reveals that, notwithstanding the critical appraisal noted above, Pareto's sociology was not cancelled.

In view of that, in addition to noting the works of more appreciative scholars of the Pareto circle (though include Cot 2011 as an additional reference), a footnote could also be added to advise that the critics failure to 'Cancel Pareto' was also related to positive assessments by other major sociological thinkers, such as Raymond Aron in Europe. Perhaps incidental comments by some literary figures may also have been significant in that regard. I have in mind Aldous Huxley, who wrote that the "author to whom I owe the most is the Italian, Vilfredo Pareto. In his monumental *Sociologia Generale* I discovered many of my own still vague and incoherent notions methodically set down and learnedly documented. ... [It is] a superb piece of work'. (1927: p. xviii), and the poet W. H. Auden, who, in his poem *Letter to Lord Byron* (1937: p. 54), wrote that:

*A second-hand acquaintance of Pareto's*

*Ranks higher than an intimate of Plato's.*

### Comments on specific sections of the Paper

The section "Why focus on Friedrich" is appropriate to the paper (especially for readers like me who are less familiar with

Friedrich than Pareto). The contrast between the intellectual and political aspects of Friedrich's interest in Pareto is very useful. The characterisation of Friedrich as a 'controversialist' (perhaps I would use the term 'polemicist'!) accords very well with my reading of his account of Pareto in *The New Belief in the Common Man*. Consequently, while Friedrich may have wanted to negate the influence of Pareto's ideas, as a polemicist, it appears that he needed Pareto as a subject so he could emphasise controversy (i.e. use Pareto as a point of reference for Friedrich for putting his own ideas in clear form).

In the next section, "The Common Man and the Critique of Pareto", the author points out that Friedrich characterises Pareto as dealing with irrationalism, in part to play the polemicist by pairing Pareto with Marx as opponents of rationalist analysis (i.e. placing Marx on one side of anti-rationalism and Pareto the other). I think that point of Friedrich's should be underlined in the paper because it appears to me to be at odds with Pareto's insistence that non-logical action is 'not illogical'. When subsequently criticising Friedrich's interpretation of Pareto I suggest that the author give consideration to whether or not Friedrich failed to appreciate that Pareto's non-logical action is not synonymous with irrational action.

In the next section, "Elites and Democracy" a quote of Friedrich is included where he claims that Pareto is simply repeating Mosca's statement on governing and subject classes. As there is a significant secondary literature on that topic, including Bobbio (1972), I suggest that that literature be referenced. The remainder of the discussion in this section is interesting to read but I don't have the background to critically comment on the author's very critical assessment of Friedrich's professed affection for the common man.

In the section 'Bureaucrats and officials' the author points to Pareto's observation that people do important government work behind the scenes and compares it to Friedrich's account of bureaucracy. He then suggests that this creates a dilemma for Friedrich (is not political authority exercised by bureaucratic elites not un-democratic?) but not for Pareto, who treats elites as the norm in all states including democratic ones. That discussion is fine but I think it should be pointed out that officials are just one of a number of 'concrete' illustrations of factors that influence social equilibrium whereas Pareto's theory of social equilibrium itself is, in fact, highly abstract. That is, the forces associated with abstract notions like residues, derivations, interests, heterogeneity etc. give the theoretical representation of social equilibrium - it is not given in reference to concrete notions like institutions and public servants (these aspects would be considered under particular or applied sociology).

The last section, "The Covert Defence of Bureaucratic Rule", seeks to establish that the real difference between the two subjects is not their difference views on democracy. That point comes through very clearly in the last few paragraphs of the section (which could, in fact, be presented as the conclusion of the paper) but the relevance of the first half of the section is less clear to me. I suspect that some points raised are being laboured there, so I suggest that that part of the section be edited to maintain the focus tightly on the two thinkers' similarities in relation to their thinking on democracy.

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