

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

While I find the flow of Stephen Turner's essay a bit ragged and disjointed, I find Turner shows a masterful understanding of the thought of Carl Friedrich and Vilfredo Pareto all the same. As Turner explains well, Friedrich and Pareto are effectively different scholarly creatures. Friedrich epitomizes the well-placed academic who is seeking to advance ideological constructions that amplifies his significance within his perceived audience of elite thinkers. In contrast, Pareto epitomizes the thinker who believes deeply that the social world, like the natural world, operates with law-like regularity that is hidden in plain sight but capable of being discovered.

Where Friedrich marched to the ideological drumbeat of contemporary progressivism where democracy was extolled with religious reverence when speaking of the need to "protect our democracy", Pareto exemplified the character of that common man that Friedrich surely despised while declaring the opposite for public consumption. Elite theory for Pareto did not address normative questions concerning who should rule. To the contrary, Pareto observed that rulership was a feature of all the higher mammals. Throughout the human world, moreover, Pareto identified something like the 80-20 principle. This principle expressed Pareto's recognition that throughout the fields of human endeavor, the bulk of the contributions are made by a relatively small number of participants. The social world does not reflect the symmetry of Gaussian distributions. To the contrary, it is mostly characterized by skewed distributions, which is the world of elite theory.

Friedrich's treatment of elites, however, was relatively static. Friedrich recognized that he was ensconced in an elite institution, Harvard, and thought this was good into the indefinite future. For Friedrich, elite theory mapped onto the goodness of his work. Pareto was a different character entirely in his development of elite theory. Elites were neither good nor bad. They just were there, as an unavoidable feature of all human groupings. There was no choice about the matter. Whether the subject is a fifth-grade spelling bee, the awarding of first violin in a symphony orchestra, or victory in a marathon, someone will stand out above the others. In these and all human activity, elite performers will appear. Pareto stressed the circulation of elites, while recognizing that any particular ruling elite would understandably seek to maintain its position of power. How to promote a circulation of elites without degrading the performance of those organizations to which elites are attached is a significant and perhaps unanswerable question. Turner does a masterful job of rendering Pareto of value to contemporary readers, and I think that Turner's treatment of Friedrich supplied a good foil for

accomplishing this outcome.

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