

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

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Review of Stephen Turner's "Carl Friedrich and the Cancellation of Pareto"

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Anyone expecting the essay "Carl Friedrich and the Cancellation of Pareto" to be a dry account of a minor quarrel will be pleasantly surprised. Instead of being boring and tedious Stephen Turner's account is enjoyable and even riveting. It is both a revealing account of Friedrich's ideological prejudices and a vigorous defense of Pareto's social psychology. It is also a story about how ideas are appropriated and transformed into intellectual weapons which are then used against thinkers who hold differing views; that is, the academic power elite.

Carl Joachim Friedrich and Vilfredo Pareto have mostly faded from memory but in their time they were regarded as among the most important scholars in the United States and in Europe. Friedrich was born in Germany and became an American political philosopher while Pareto began as an engineer in Italy before moving to Switzerland to teach economics and then sociology. What Friedrich and Pareto had in common was an interest in elites; but as Turner persuasively argues, Pareto sought to "unmask" elites whereas Friedrich seemed to hide behind one. The fact that this makes Friedrich hypocritical is only one vice; far worse was that he sought to discredit Pareto. But as Turner makes clear, Friedrich was not content to discredit Pareto, but sought to discredit those who did not ascribe to his theory of "democracy." It is this second travesty that Turner uncovers and corrects.

Much of Turner's essay seeks to locate Friedrich in an era in which thinkers could be both intellectuals and political players: Friedrich was a major professor at Harvard but he was also a powerful force in practical politics. Turner explains that Friedrich not only wrote scholarly treatises, but he influenced a range of powerful politicians including Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Kissinger (Turner 2023: 2).

Carl Friedrich presented himself as a defender of democracy and a champion of the "common man" but Turner reveals that Friedrich preferred order to the disorder of democracy and he wanted the "common man" to be obedient to his leaders. While Friedrich distanced himself from the Nazis, he agreed with them that pernicious thinkers like Pareto, Weber, and Kelsen were cynics who did not believe in the Truth. So, Friedrich engaged in distortions and then accused Pareto of using "tricks" (Turner 2023: 10). He could not directly attack Pareto's account of elites because it was a scholarly one; he had to suggest that Pareto was an elitist who despised the "common man." Anyone who has read Pareto's writings knows that Pareto was a long-term socialist and when he later rejected the Italian socialists it was because they had become just as anti-democratic as the bourgeois.

Turner's larger point is that Friedrich had to discredit Pareto because Pareto's account of the elites was too revealing. Friedrich did not want the truth to be told about elites because as Turner writes, Friedrich was one of the academics who were "eager to be part of the elite themselves." (Turner 2023: 13). Turner mentions an essay that Friedrich published in *Foreign Affairs* in which he defended Hindenburg. As a German-American and a constitutional scholar he would be regarded as being well-suited to counsel the US on what to think about dictatorship in Germany. Turner quotes one crucial line from "Dictatorship in Germany?": "The crisis through which Germany has been passing does not at all imply the establishment of a dictatorship." (Friedrich 1930: 131; Turner 2023: 3). This was meant to reassure Americans that Germany was not a threat. But this was not a scholarly analysis, but political posturing. Not only did Friedrich compliment Carl Schmitt's constitutional acumen; he also echoed Schmitt's preference for authoritarianism. Friedrich overlooked Hindenburg's many failings and mistakes (Friedrich 1930: 132). Friedrich's 1930 article was not designed to inform; it was intended to convince.

Friedrich thought in terms of opposites: what he represented was good; consequently, what his opponent believed was bad. Since he was convinced that he was a believer in democracy and the "common man", then Pareto must have been an elitist and anti-democratic. Turner explains that Friedrich agreed with Pareto that bureaucracy was a product of the modern state but Friedrich needed a means to disassociate his view from Pareto's. The difference was that Friedrich insisted that a genuine bureaucracy functions well if it is supporting the state and what is needed to ensure this is a "responsible leadership" which is duly recognized by the "common man" (Turner 2023: 7-8). As Turner put it: "From Friedrich's point of view, Pareto was another cynic skeptic who undermined rational authority." (Turner 2023: 4). Of course, much of Pareto's project was to show that leaders can rely either on force (lions) or on cunning (foxes) and those who choose the latter claim that they have genuine reasons for their decisions. However, as Pareto argued, these are not reasons but are thinly disguised personal choices and beliefs. As Turner notes, Friedrich's account is "an ideology that he denied was an ideology." (Turner 2023: 4). Turner underscores this attempt at deflection by quoting Friedrich "there is, under democracy, no such thing as a 'governing elite', but there are 'superiorities.'" (Turner 2023: 9). As Turner later points out, Friedrich's argument is "essentially circular" (Turner 2023: 13).

If there is any problem with Turner's account it is that it minimizes Pareto's complex and original social-political thinking. However, that is not Turner's fault because Pareto's two- thousand-page magnum opus makes it virtually impossible to distill his thought into a dozen pages. Furthermore, Pareto was not the main focus of Turner's essay—Friedrich was. Turner set out to reveal that Friedrich was less than honest in his critique of Pareto and he admirably achieved that aim. Friedrich may have thought he had "unmasked" Pareto's anti-democratic elitism, but it is Turner who has "unmasked" Carl Friedrich. Turner does so by demonstrating that Friedrich put forth a false and misleading account of Pareto, and that it was Friedrich who was the real anti-democratic elitist.

References:

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