

Pareto

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Lecture 1. The development of twentieth century sociology: Pareto

Pareto's significance for sociology does not lie in his economic theories but rather in the conception he has of a 'scientific' sociology.

This conception is developed, and explored, in several books written during his stay, as Professor of Economics, at the University of Lausanne. These books include *The Mind and Society* (published as *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916) in four volumes) and *Les Systemes Socialistes* (1902), a critique of socialist arguments. There are some commentaries on Pareto: the most available being Finer, S. E. *Vilfredo Pareto* and Meisl, J. *Pareto and Mosca*. They are not necessarily the best. A collection of seminar papers on Pareto is lodged in the Sociology Resource Centre.

1.1. Pareto's academic interests were history and economics and the problems of methodology. He is clearly a positivist and this is reflected in the work he did in history and economics as well as his sociological contribution. Pareto would not have accepted these distinctions and they are, in many ways, simply a reflection of the distribution of academic specialisms in the twentieth century.

1.2 Pareto's most significant contribution to sociology is the four-volume treatise entitled *The Mind and Society*. This book consists, first, of an exploration of the methodological problems involved in examining society and, second, of applying the methodology that is developed to the analysis of contemporary European society in order to identify the conditions that have to be satisfied for general social equilibrium to exist. Pareto's analysis of European society is a demonstration that the conditions necessary for social equilibrium have been generally present in Europe over the last two or three thousand years. The methodology is essentially positivist and Pareto begins by observing that the problem with idealism is that 'it had been the fundamental conviction of idealism that truth is not given to man from some external source (as in sensationalist psychologies and epistemologies) but originated in the process of interaction between thought and reality, between theory and practice. The function of thought was not merely to collect, comprehend and order facts but also to contribute a quality that rendered such activity possible, a quality that was thus *a priori* to facts. A decisive portion of the human world consisted, idealists held, of elements that could not be verifiable by observation.'

The consequence, for Pareto, is that 'the positivist attack on universal concepts, on the grounds that they cannot be reduced to observable facts, abstracts from the domain of knowledge everything that may not yet be a fact'. It is clear that, for Pareto, 'the principle of positivism has been the ultimate authority of the fact and observing the 'immediate given' the ultimate method of verification'.

What Pareto sought to do was to establish a method of analysis that would reveal the immediate given even if it was a recording in a historical document.

1.3 Pareto's methodology.

Pareto, in *The Mind and Society*, proposes to develop 'a logico-experimental science' which would be applicable to history and therefore to the uncovering of 'facts' about social life. This method is characterised by Pareto as follows:

- (i) intrinsic truths are ignored;
- (ii) the relationships obtaining between things within the limits of time and space are revealed by experience and observation;
- (iii) we start with facts to work out theories... 'our purpose is to discover theories that picture facts of experience and observation';
- (iv) every inquiry is, therefore, relative, contingent and probable;
- (v) we keep strictly to things as facts. The proofs we seek in experience and observation keep open house to all facts, whatever their character, provided that, directly or indirectly, they point the way to discovering a uniformity';
- (vi) the method is one of successive approximations.

This method is almost identical to the method Bacon recommends in his inductive method of arriving at generalisations from the enumeration of particulars. Equally it satisfies the general principles of positivist science (or method) summarised by Kolakowski. It is clear that any commitment to fact, and the significance of observation and experience (noted three times in the seven points) which is the cornerstone of positivist method, requires the development of a method that can move from the particulars of observation and experience to the generalisations that are derived from the particular observations and experiences we have. These generalisations are 'experimental uniformities'. Experimental uniformities are 'law like statements' and from that point of view 'there is not the slightest difference between the laws of political economy or sociology and the laws of other sciences'.

An extract from the book will help to demonstrate the nature of Pareto's arguments.

523. if, therefore, we set out to arrange theories according to the character of their demonstrations, we have to distinguish two types. In one the nexus consists entirely of logical implications of facts; in the other there is an added something that transcends experience - some concept of necessity, duty or the like. Finally, to complete our survey, we must further consider propositions in which the logical nexus is reduced to little or nothing - which are mere descriptions or narrations. In that way we get the three following classes:

Class 1. Descriptive propositions (section 525)

Class 2. Propositions asserting experimental uniformities.

Class 3. Propositions that either add something to experimental uniformities, or ignore them.

524. Scientific theories consist of propositions of the first and second class....Sociological theories and many economic theories have hitherto made liberal use of propositions of the third class so affecting results.

Such propositions must be eliminated if we would have a sociology or economics of a truly scientific character.

1.3.1 Pareto's aim is to produce a 'scientific sociology' which enables truly scientific propositions about social facts to be produced. To do this he must distinguish between logical and non-logical action and to do this he requires some specification (i) of the nature of logical action, (ii) some indication of the distinction between logical and non-logical action and (iii) some account of social behaviour as non-logical action but which can be analysed as logical action. He defines logical action thus:

those operations logically united to their end, not only from the point of view of the subject who performs the operation but also for those who have more extended knowledge. Logical actions are those actions that conjoin means to ends not only from the standpoint of the subject performing them but from the standpoint of other persons who have a more extensive knowledge ... in other words actions that are logical both subjectively and objectively in the sense just explained. Other actions we shall call non-logical. This latter class we shall divide into a number of varieties.' (Pareto, V. *Mind and Society*, section 150).

Pareto then moves on to consider the classification of these actions arguing as follows: 'We examine actions from their logico-experimental character. We propose to follow the principles of the classification called natural in botany' (section 147) and 'It is not actions as we find them in the concrete we are called upon to classify but the elements constituting them' (section 145).

Further 'social facts are the elements of our study. Our first effort will be to classify them for the purpose of attaining the one and only objective we have in view: the discovery, namely, of uniformities (laws) in the relations between them' (section 144).

1.3.2 The problem, for Pareto, is that his methodology hinges on his ability to establish the nature of non-logical conduct. In section 162 he specifies the nature of non-logical conduct.

Thinking of animals, let us assume that the conduct B...which we are in a position to observe, is connected with a hypothetical psychic state A. In human beings that psychic state is revealed not through the conduct alone but also through the expression of sentiments, C, which often develop moral, religious and other similar theories. The very marked tendency in human beings to transform non-logical into logical conduct leads them to imagine that B is an effect of the cause C. So, a direct relationship, CB, is assumed, instead of the indirect relationship arising through the two relations AB, AC.'

Pareto justifies his aim of explaining non-logical action in the following way. 'In particular now that we have identified one such purpose—the purpose of giving logical status to conduct that does not possess it—we have to ask by what means and devices that purpose is achieved' (section 198)

His analysis enabled Pareto to identify two elements: a relatively stable element (sentiments) and a relatively variable element (derivations and derivatives). This second element comprises logical reasoning, sophisms and historical facts that serve to infer the existence of sentiments and residues.

Sentiments are manifested in society by residues and 'the sentiments or instincts that correspond to residues, along with those corresponding to appetites, interests, etc. are the main factors in determining social equilibrium' (*Mind and Society*, vol.1, p. 511)

References: Pareto, V., 1963, *The Mind and Society*. New York, Dover Books.

Lecture 2. Development of twentieth century sociology: Pareto-II

As we discovered last week Pareto identifies a relatively constant element—sentiments—and a relatively variable element—derivatives and derivations—as constant features of all human action. The principal aim of *The Mind and Society*, and indeed of Pareto's work in general, is to demonstrate that the application of methods of rational enquiry will lead to a clear understanding of the nature and conditions of social equilibrium and to a realisation that 'non-logical action' is comprehensible by reason. It must be admitted however that the book itself does not offer a very clear example of how this may be achieved.

2.1 The concept of sentiments (the psychic origin of all actions) is divided by Pareto into six classes of residues. Residues are, in Pareto's view, the expression of sentiments.

The six classes are as follows:

- Class I Residues: Instinct of combinations;
- Class II Group persistences;
- Class III Need of expressing sentiments;
- Class IV Connected with sociality;
- Class V Integrity of the individual;
- Class VI Sexuality.

Residues give rise to derivatives, which in turn give rise to derivations. Derivations are the historical facts that fill *The Mind and Society*. They serve as the starting point for a process of logical, inductive inference, which enables Pareto to infer first, the existence of derivations, second, the residues which give rise to derivations and finally, the existence of sentiments that give rise to residues.

Derivations are classified in four groups: assertion; authority; accords with sentiments or principles and, finally, verbal proofs.

Pareto is quite clear about the relationship between residues, sentiments, derivations. He writes:

Let us beware of ascribing any objective existence to our residues or even to sentiments. What we observe in reality is a group of human beings in a mental condition indicated by what we call sentiments...Residues are among the elements that determine the social equilibrium...derivations also manifest sentiments. Directly they manifest the sentiments that correspond to the residues in which they originate. Indirectly they manifest sentiments through the residues that serve for purposes of derivation. (Section 1690)

2.2 What is the nature of social equilibrium that Pareto is so concerned to demonstrate? All societies represent regular, rhythmic movements. An understanding of this regular rhythm is obtained by examining:

- i) the distribution of residues in a given society,
- ii) distribution of residues in time either as a result of changes in the individuals belonging to the same social strata or as a result of changes caused by a mixing of social strata.

The analysis of these elements results in Pareto's theory of elite circulation and the attainment of a dynamic social equilibrium.

2.3 The definition of elite (section 2031) is: ‘the class of people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity’. The elite can then be divided into two branches: governing and non-governing. The remainder of the population can be called the non-elite’ (section 2034).

Class circulation comprises the process whereby members of the non-elite move into the elite. This steady sifting and interchange is constant and is an essential component of social equilibrium. Second, within the elite the distribution of residues between the governing and non-governing elites is a crucial element in determining the nature of social equilibrium.

2056. In virtue of class circulation, the governing elite is always in a state of slow and continuous transformation. It flows on like a river, never being today what it was yesterday. From time to time sudden and violent disturbances occur. There is a flood—the river overflows its banks. Afterwards, the new governing elite again resumes its slow transformation. The flood has subsided, the river is again flowing normally in its wonted bed.

2057. Revolutions come about through accumulations in the higher strata of society—either because of a slowing down in class circulation, or from other causes—of decadent elements no longer possessing the residues suitable for keeping them in power, and shrinking from the use of force; while meantime in the lower strata of society elements of suitable quality are coming to the fore, possessing enough residues suitable for exercising the functions of government and willing enough to use force. (*The Mind and Society*, pp. 1431)

2.4 Pareto is clear that ‘one of the principal factors determining the social equilibrium was the relative proportions of class I and class II residues in individuals’ (section 2413).

In principle, Pareto argues that all individuals possess all residues but in different intensities. To illustrate the process, consider the following example:

Pareto identifies two groups: the ‘S’s’ and the ‘R’s’. The Group of ‘S’s’ are ‘individuals whose incomes are essentially variable and depend upon the person’s wideawakeness in discovering sources of gain’.

In that group, generally speaking, will be found those promoters of enterprise—those entrepreneurs (speculators)... And let us put into another category, which we may call R, persons who have fixed or virtually fixed incomes not depending to any great extent on ingenious combinations that may be conceived by an active mind—these we can call rentiers... In the speculator Class I residues predominate; in the rentier group Class II residues... The S group is primarily responsible for change, economic and social progress. The R group instead is a powerful element in stability, and in many cases counteracts the dangers attending the adventurous capers of the S’s... The differing relative proportions in which S types and R types are combined in the governing class correspond to differing types of civilisation; and such proportions are among the principal traits that have to be considered in social heterogeneity’ (Sections 2233–36)

This explanation of social equilibrium through the differing distribution of class I and class II residues is achieved by a thorough analysis of European history. For example, section 2311:

It follows that when periods of rapid increase in economic prosperity are more the rule than periods of depression, the governing class gets richer and richer in speculators, who contribute class I residues to it in powerful dosage (2178); and poorer and poorer in ‘gentlemen’ - in people living on virtually fixed incomes—in whom class II residues are generally the more powerful.

That change in the composition of the governing class tends to incline a people more and more to economic enterprise and to increase economic prosperity until new forces come into play to check the movement' (2221).

The opposite is the case when the periods of economic depression or, what is worse, of economic retrogression, are the rule. The first situation is exemplified by our modern civilized peoples. Examples of the second would be the people of the Mediterranean basin under the declining Roman empire down into the Middle Ages.