

Vilfredo Pareto

A Biographical Portrait

By ARTHUR LIVINGSTON

PARETO was born in Paris in 1848 of a French mother and an Italian political exile who had become a French citizen—the Marquis Raffaele Pareto. That gentleman took advantage of the Franco-Italian episode of '59 to return to Italy and seek a living as a government employee under the new kingdom. He was a civil engineer on the railroads with headquarters at first in Turin. That was why Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto (the middle names came from uncles) got his secondary education in Turin and went on through the famous Polytechnical Institute of that city whence he graduated in 1870. In 1871 Pareto's family moved with the rest of the Piedmontese bureaucracy to Rome, and he himself began his career there as an engineer in the railroads department. In 1874 he went to Florence as superintendent of a group of iron mines located in the Arno Valley. For a moment the political career that was traditional in his family beckoned to him. However he had none of the temperament of the politician. Beaten in his first campaign as an opposition candidate on a free-trade platform for the district of Pistoia, he retired from politics for good and ever bore a deep-seated grudge against the parliamentary system.

Between 1882 and 1892, we find Pareto living in studious retirement first in Florence and then in Fiesole, preparing himself and offering himself for a professorship in economics which is never accorded him in Italy. In 1894 the opportunity comes from abroad, when Leon Walras selects him for the chair he is himself to vacate at Lausanne. Pareto was to live quietly in Switzerland for the rest of his life, that is, to August 19, 1923, when he died in his villa in Celigny (Geneva). One hears of a very rare trip to Italy, of a few others as far as Paris, London, or Berlin.

Pareto made his name from the standpoint of Italy for his current comment on public affairs in the decade between 1894 and 1904. Even then his political position was peculiar. A furious critic of what he called the pluto-demagogic régime in Italy, he was just as severe in his arraignment of parliamentary socialism (that other pole of Italian political life), so that in those early days he could be dubbed in the socialist press the "Karl Marx of the bourgeoisie." (I imported that slogan for my campaigns for Pareto in the early twenties. I believe I saw it first dripping from the pen of Mussolini in *Avanti*. The earliest document I can at present point to is the Pareto obituary in the *Giornale d'Italia*, August 20, 1923.) As a relentless foe of the Italian government his house in Lausanne was the Mecca of Italian political exiles (even Mussolini); as an anti-socialist he was a

sort of god of the Liberal opposition (see Prezzolini-Papini in the days of *Il regno*.) Subtract anything that smacks of state worship and state tyranny from fascism (that is subtracting a whole lot), one can therefore see that biographically as well as theoretically there is a pre-fascist something about Pareto. Subtracting sentimentalism from pre-war anarchism (that is subtracting almost everything) and adding to it (that is almost impossible) an all-absorbing passion for scientific thinking, one can feel in Pareto's love of freedom, in his anti-bureaucratic spirit, a certain temperamental kinship between him and men like Malatesta and Bakunin. I leave for those who know to say whether such feeling may or may not have figured in Pareto's romance with Bakunin's daughter.

In the case of Pareto, one must temper one's fondness for labelling people by this or that group. No man ever lived more perfectly than he "above the mêlée." There was something Olympian (as well, at times, as something petulant) in his aloofness from the everyday world, which, in his theory and in his conviction he regarded as the playground of sentiment. Early in the century he inherited wealth, and for a time, as a concession to his wife, the Princess Bakunin, he became a capital host and entertainer. But after that he lapsed into greater aloofness from people than ever and in his later years he had an almost pathological terror of meeting anyone not of the familiar circle. His extravagant love of animals was not discordant with this detachment from human beings, on which his first marriage came to grief. Pareto's great hobby was Angora cats, of which he had dozens, one cat, in particular, lying in his lap or nestling about his neck like a fur collar while he wrote at his desk. To cats he eventually added birds, and finally squirrels. He had, it is said, trained one squirrel to eat only out of his hand, so that when he died the squirrel went on a hunger strike and died too.

Proverbial also is Pareto's wit in conversation. His biographers will have plenty of fun in assembling the roster of his off-hand jests, made frequently at the expense of people who ventured to argue with him without complete mastery of the Paretan analytical categories. But there are other anecdotes of a more genial temper. Here is one that I plagiarize from Vittorio Racca. Shortly after Pareto had received his inheritance and while his hospitality was soaring on sumptuous wing, a family friend from Genoa called on a visit of condolence:

"You have no idea how sad I am," said the friend. "So it is true then? Your poor uncle has passed to a better life?"

"Alas, yes!" said Pareto. "But so have we."

Arthur Livingston, associate professor of Romance languages at Columbia University, has translated many works from the Italian into English in addition to his rendition of Pareto's masterpiece.

The Validity of Pareto's Theories

By BENEDETTO CROCE

THE editor of the second Italian edition of Pareto's "Treatise on Sociology" calls it "one of the most admirable masterpieces of Italian genius," but though it may displease the reverence which is growing up in regard to so worthy a man as Pareto, I can say no less than that it is rather a case of the scientific study of monsters. It exhibits in typical form what happens when one attempts to construct a science of human society and of politics with the methods of positivism, and when one proceeds seriously to carry out that sort of business. Note well that I say the methods of positivism, and not the methods of the natural sciences, for the latter do not contradict philosophic and historical intelligence but rather presuppose it as the basis of their constructions. The methods of positivism on the contrary, as used by Pareto, are the methods of an extravagant philosophy, founded on an impossible logic, which attempts to treat spiritual acts as merely external things, and to classify them and to find their relations, uniformities, and "laws," and accepts the results as those of true science.

The consequence is that Pareto executes nothing that he attempts, because it is intrinsically impossible of execution; but with enormous labor he builds up constructions that are either devoid of any determinate sense, or when they have sense, are quite obvious, that is, merely derived from commonly accepted thought. For example, he distinguishes two kinds of action, logical and non-logical. But by logical actions he sometimes means actions that are merely utilitarian or economic, and by non-logical actions those that are moral or religious (an echo of the old terminology of English seventeenth-century ethics); whereas at other times he conceives of logical actions as those that are coherent and non-logical actions as incoherent. However this may be, whether we understand them in one sense or the other, the two classes are no discovery of Pareto, and in neither sense have they been dialectically deduced and demonstrated, but remain merely vague assertions.

Another example is his theory of "residues" (which seem to be nothing but so-called "sentiments") and of "derivations," that is, the manner in which men think or pretend to think. A third example is his theory of social *élites*. These, he says, arise, increase, grow feeble, and finally give way to new groups, dying out (as in sixteenth century Italy) because there prevailed in the older group the "residues" of Class I over those of Class II, that is the instinct of combination over the persistence of aggregates; which is merely saying what in the old histories

and in our poor current speech we call the prevalence of intelligence over will or of nerves over muscles.

Instead of developed and determinate theories of sociology and of politics, which Pareto does not give and is in no position to give, what we find in the stout volumes of his work are quite other things: translations, as it were, into mathematical symbols of the truths and beliefs given by ordinary common sense; countless anecdotes drawn largely from ancient Greek texts but much more largely from the daily newspapers of his own time; innumerable eruptions of temper of an exasperated and pessimistic moralist; bizarre sallies and outbursts of antipathy against "metaphysics," Plato, Kant, Hegel, etc.; and, most curious of all, incessant attacks on those who band together for the improvement of public and private morals and who agitate against obscene books and postcards. To this last point Pareto returns over and over again, and it is difficult, in fact, to understand the motive for so much irritation. In my own case, for instance, these moralists cause me no annoyance whatever, and I am hardly aware of their existence. But it is quite impossible, most of all, to understand how a writer so disturbed and irritable could ever have held before himself the ideal of the calm and dispassionate scientist, the cold observer, the indifferent mathematical calculator, and have recognized himself in it.

There is only one aspect in which Pareto's work presents any real interest. It is his constant assertion of force as the creator of political facts, against democratic conceptions. For this reason the book, in the political struggles of our day, will please not a few people. But the anti-democratic argument and the exaltation of force have been expressed by so many voices at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, that Pareto can be considered only as one of these many voices. It would be quite another task (and one for which Pareto was unsuited) to penetrate and illuminate with the intellect the problem of democracy and anti-democracy, and to assign the proper significance and the logical limits to these diverse and contrasting exigencies of historic life.

In stating frankly my judgment of this book, I do not intend to detract from the merits of Pareto's other work as an economist, nor to cast any reflections on those who respect him as a man who loved, and made others love, serious scientific research, as a man who loved, and made others love, integrity and virtue. His friends and disciples, who remain grateful to him and devoted to his memory, attest the educative force which radiated from his conversation and his example.

Benedetto Croce, one of the outstanding philosophers of contemporary times, is the proponent of the doctrine identifying concrete philosophy with history. His theories have excited widespread interest, and a lively controversy has raged over them.

The City Wilderness

GREENWICH VILLAGE — 1920-1930. *A Comment on American Civilization in the Post-War Years.* By Caroline F. Ware. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1935. \$4.

Reviewed by JOHN PALMER GAVIT

AS used to be said of Brooklyn, "Greenwich Village," as most casual folks understood the expression, is, or rather was, not a place but a state of mind. In this book there is a chapter, entitled "Villagers: Art and Sex as Avenues of Escape," which depicts that state of mind with admirable candor, showing how to that particular region in the lower west side of New York City there gravitated for some reason impossible to explain adequately, the heterogeneous crowd of a few real but mostly second-rate, third-rate, no-rate and pseudo, artists, writers, and the neurotic hangers-on of art and writing—pretty much the whole tatterdemalio that loves to think of itself as Bohemia, aping the Quartier Latin of Paris. It never was very real or at all important on any merits of any kind; but as this chapter shows, even five years ago it was losing such character as it had, sogging down into a fairly average representative of crowded cosmopolitan life in a big American city. It is rather a pity that the very title of the book emphasizes this phase, drawing undue attention to one minor aspect, and so blanketing for many readers the much more significant and enlightening material which makes up its bulk.

For it is a scholarly and comprehensive study of a decidedly typical American city neighborhood, a cross-section of American city life, gaining importance from the fact that the period which it

covers came after the shut-down of unrestricted immigration—too soon, of course, to give us any clear idea of the way in which those immigrants already here will be assimilated. But you do see quite vividly the way in which what the author calls "the inherited pattern of American life" has failed to mould the lives of the newcomers partly because it has been abandoned and repudiated by so many of the native-born to whom it was traditional; but chiefly perhaps because those who still treasure it, or think they do, have made no effort to embody or interpret it to the newcomers. If the foreign-born population has not understood "America" as the older-stock Americans understand it, and have flocked by themselves in dense neighborhoods such as this old Ninth Ward, it is because so little was done to enlighten them and keep them from unwholesome segregation.

Anyone who ever lived in a social settlement, or otherwise in one of these neighborhoods, will find this book familiar. It will be no surprise to him to find this story one of "people—just people," living their lives as best they can in a very difficult time, under conditions leading, as the author says, toward social disorganization and cultural confusion. The perennial pollution by corrupt political influence has been worse during the post-war years, the new factor of organized racketeering, the overtaking of commercialized prostitution by "amateur" competition in the widespread breakdown of personal moral standards, the increasing encroachment of unemployment—all these things and many other demoralizing tendencies of this period, are certainly no better now than they were in the decade with which this study deals. Poignantly



CAROLINE WARE'S JACKET DRAWING FOR "GREENWICH VILLAGE"
From a painting by Edward Laning.