

Michael McLure, *Pareto, Economics and Sociology: The Mechanical Analogy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 240, \$90. ISBN 0 41524174 X.

Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) is one of the most studied economists. Although he is one of the greatest economists ever and an important sociologist, little attention has been paid yet to his methodology, even if his writings present many considerations on scientific method and epistemology of natural and social sciences.

The main thesis of Micheal McLure's book, *Pareto, Economics and Sociology*, is that it is impossible to understand what Pareto wanted to accomplish in the fields of economics, sociology, and the political sciences without taking his methodology into account, in particular his use of the mechanical analogy, as the subtitle of the book explicitly states.

McLure's book is an expression of a veritable renaissance of interest in Pareto's methodology. Two journal special-issues (*Revue Européenne de Sciences Sociales* 116 (1998), *History of Economic Ideas* 73 (1997), three international Seminars (Turin, Lausanne, Pisa), and a significant number of papers, have devoted great attention to Pareto's methodology.

In particular, the claim of this book is to show that Pareto's methodology, and the mechanical analogy in particular, is still alive and capable of inspiring current social theory because it "provides a useful framework for integrated and timeless studies of government and public policy" (p. 2). The theory of government and public theory that come from Pareto's approach, based on "successive approximations" (the famous Paretian expression), are then compared with Buchanan's economic approach to politics (public choice). More to the point, the author, with courage, lists the added value of his book in three points: To *correct* the errors in the secondary literature, in particular the misinterpretations of issues associated with Pareto's methodology (a special emphasis is given to rectify Philip Mirowski's thesis, embodied in *More Heat Than Light*, about Pareto's confusion in mastering the "integrability problem"); to *clarify* the issues raised in the literature—here the accent is to highlight issues on the relationship between Pareto's methodological framework and contemporary theory of public policy; and finally, an *enhancement* of the secondary literature. This involves the development of a framework for a successive approximations approach to government and public policy: Pareto is presented as a forerunner of contemporary public choice theory.

McLure is also clear in declaring his four research goals:

1. To establish the relationship between determinism and ideology in Pareto's work, after consideration of his methodology . . .
2. to review the development of Pareto's application of pure economic theory to the analysis of collective economic welfare
3. to compare and contrast methodological features of Pareto's political sociology with . . . Buchanan's economic approach to politics . . .
4. to employ Pareto's methodolog[y] . . . to develop a timeless and synthetic 'successive approximation' approach to interpreting the process of 'government' and 'public policy'" (p. 4). Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are related to the first goal, chapter 5 to the second, chapters 6 and 7 to research goal three, chapter 8 to the fourth.

The book as a whole, reaches the above goals fairly successfully, and thanks to McLure we now have new hints for a fuller understanding of Pareto's methodology and theory.

In what follows I discuss some issues raised by the reading of this book, related to the methodology of the study of past economists. It is surely legitimate to go back to the thought of a past economist in search of new inspirations for contemporary theories and problems: today everybody can read Smith, Marx, Machiavelli, or Dante *directly*, using the product of their magnificent intelligence as insights for private, professional, or political life. In the same manner, a scholar can read Pareto or another great economist for illuminating the contemporary theories, or revitalizing anaemic theoretical debates.

This is possible, but it is dangerous, and every historian knows that. It is the same danger besetting, for instance, the reader of the Bible who, looking for inspiration, would not take into account the results of the modern exegesis. That exegesis explains that words in the original cultural context meant things very different from, and sometimes opposite to, the current meaning. But it is surely possible to contemplate the Bible, or any sacred text, without exegesis, and it is also possible to read Pareto without using the historical method in approaching his texts. It is a bit less certain that this choice is possible for a *scientific* work on the thought of an important author such as Pareto. This does not mean that only professional historians are allowed to write books about dead people. We know works on past philosophers, poets, or even economists written by non-historians, that are veritable masterpieces (think Heidegger, Jaspers or, to remain in the field of economics, Keynes or Schumpeter). Notwithstanding, there are some basic and universally shared rules—without endorsing particular schools—that every scholar, historian or not, must follow in dealing with dead authors.

First, in studying a deceased author, we must situate his system within his *cultural context*: in the case of Pareto, this context has a name: Positivism. If we know the characteristics of Positivism, and the connected reactions against neo-Idealism, Marxism, and the Historical school, we immediately realize that Pareto's theses on mechanic analogy and successive approximations—the core elements of McLure's work—were the methodological tools of every true positivist (and neo-positivist). There is no reference to Positivism and to positivist-thinker contemporaries of Pareto in the book.

Second, one cannot avoid taking into consideration the knowledge of the *author's life*, character, temper, and his biographical vicissitudes. In Pareto's case, it is very hard to understand what he meant by "logical and non-logical conduct" (an important piece of this book), ignoring his experience of twenty years in mechanical engineering in Tuscany, and his battle against the stupidity and irrationality (non-logical conduct) of Italian politicians.

A third element is the analysis of the author's *interlocutors*. To study the dialogue between Pareto and Pantaleoni, Vailati, Croce, Marshall, Edgeworth, and Walras would have helped the author to realize that Pareto's mechanical dream, his confidence in successive approximation, his methodological monism (i.e., not seeing any difference between natural and human sciences), belonged, already in Pareto's time, to the past. The re-examined dialogue between Pareto

and Sforza on general equilibrium and collective welfare, a very well-done part of the book, is a good example of the importance of Pareto's interlocutors.

Finally, for correctly understanding and fully grasping an author, it is very important and necessary to know the author's *sources*. There is no reference to Pareto's sources in this book: neither his economic sources, nor his philosophical and scientific sources. A look at his economic or philosophical sources would have shown, for instance, that Pareto's methodology is almost totally inherited from J. S. Mill's *Logic*—it is strange to not find any reference to Mill in McLure's book.

These four elements are necessary because the book aims also at correcting and enhancing historical-methodological interpretations of secondary literature. My critical remarks do not apply to the more theoretical part of the book. In fact, what McLure pretends to do is not just write a book on history of thought, but to encompass Pareto's theory on non-logical conduct within a positive framework. In particular, McLure recognizes that Pareto's project was more complex and richer than the picture of him inherited from Hicks's and Samuelson's readings in the 1930s and 1940s. These authors took up Pareto's economics, separating it from his theory of logical and non-logical actions, so paving the way to the Rational Choice Theory of the twentieth century, which has gone precisely in that direction. McLure's main theoretical thesis is that the mechanical analogy and the methodology of successive approximations is what is still alive of Pareto's theory. I would suggest that Pareto's theory is still alive not because of the theories he provided, but because of the *questions* he raised. Especially, alive is his *dream* of finally writing an economic theory (a synthetic economics) able to understand the real world. These elements are present in McLure's text, representing the more interesting part of the book.

To conclude, McLure's book supplies an original approach to Pareto's thought. At the same time, his announced future research on Pareto could surely be enriched by a greater familiarity with the history of economic thought literature and method (and methodology). This literature surely can be corrected, clarified, and enhanced, but it also can have something important to say.

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Donald A. Walker, ed., *Equilibrium; Vol. I: Introduction to Equilibrium Economics; Vol. II: Equilibrium in Traditional Models; Vol. III: Some Recent Types of Equilibrium Models, Critical Ideas in Economics* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), pp. XXIII, 583, 598, 621, 400, \$640. ISBN 1 855898 928 0.

This three-volume collection edited by Professor Donald Walker, the well-known Walras scholar, belongs to the Elgar series on Critical Ideas in Economics. Comprising eighty-five contributions, it totals 1800 pages (however, equilibrium is such a central topic that a twofold size could easily have been accommodated).

Volume I, entitled "Introduction to Equilibrium Economics," consists of three