

## Pareto's Non-logical Actions and the Issue of Humanity

Fabio D'Andrea<sup>a</sup>

### Abstract

In this essay I put forward the hypothesis that Pareto's theory of action should be understood as an unintentional, pioneering study on the complexity of humanity rather than as an attempt to explain and correct non-logical behaviours. Through a critical reading of Pareto's vocabulary and unspoken convictions, it will be shown that he went well beyond his own intentions highlighting a fundamental – though unacknowledged and stigmatized – dynamics of human interaction and organization. Building on Pareto's evidence of the importance of non-logical action, it is possible to free humanity from the normative obligation to be rational and begin to understand the actual complexity of interaction and culture creation, taking into account heuristic spheres that rationalization has banned from awareness, but are still crucial, unbeknownst to us: corporeity, emotions, symbolic-imaginal thinking.

Keywords: awareness, complexity, humanity.

### 1. The dark lump of the residues

One of the most interesting aspects of contemporary sociology is to revisit essential authors, frequently the acknowledged fathers of the discipline, in perspectives that free them from orthodox interpretations effectively perceived as suffocating; a striking fact is that this need for renewal cohabits effortlessly with a ritual repetition of the eighteenth-century foundations of rigour, scientific rules and non-assessment that inspired such interpretations, made yet more binding by the flourishing quantophobia aroused and fed by the reaction to the need itself. In other words, a large part of the current debate seems to share what will become apparent in Pareto's conceptual set-up, i.e., a *low-intensity*

---

<sup>a</sup> Department of Filosofia, scienze sociali, umane e della formazione, University of Perugia, Italy.

Corresponding author:  
Fabio D'Andrea  
E-mail: fabio.dandrea@unipg.it

Received: 19 November 2023

Accepted: 30 April 2024

Published: 5 December 2024



Copyright rests with the author/s. This is an open access, peer reviewed article published under the Creative Commons License (CC BY 3.0).

*schizophrenia* that signals an increasing loss of control over the processes on which Modernity is founded. Whether we turn to Durand, eminent in the “schizomorphic structures” in western *Weltanschauung* (1984, pp. 202-215), or follow in the steps of Latour in the careful reconstruction of the double modern Constitution – the essential point of which is that “it renders the work of mediation that assembles hybrids invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable” although it never ceases, since if it should come to an end “the modern world would immediately cease to function. Like all other collectives it lives on that blending” (Latour, 1993, p. 34) – what we find is a growing divergence between what is said and what is done that goes well beyond a temporary incongruence and shows itself to be consubstantial with cultural enterprise, making it to a certain extent impermeable to its own contradictions.

“We must admit that this is a rather neat construction that makes it possible to do everything without being limited by anything” (Latour, 1993, p. 32), or that, at least, is the feeling you get until you run into trouble. The topic of unlimitedness is one of the most important in the weaving of the modern symphony (Pacelli, 2019) and is a good example of the ability to make unsubstantiated statements which, however, worm their way into common sense with all the force of the imagination that generated them and claim their fulfilment. Few living things are as dependent as the human being, none other so utterly and vehemently denies it: denies being in continuous need of air to breathe and food and water for nutrition; denies needing quality relations on which to anchor his own stability; denies needing a myriad of objects in order to survive, so much so that Morin defined man an “open system” (Morin, 1990; 1999) existing only in the relation and hence without the possibility (or the luxury) of deciding whether or not to be part of the becoming of the world.

In the same way that modern man, against all evidence, proclaims his freedom and autonomy given his fervent desire to be so, he defines himself as essentially rational. Pareto’s action theory illustrates this point right from its defining presentation: set up on a traditional dichotomy, it distinguishes between logical and non-logical actions, and that already gives a clear idea of the order of importance and value of the alternatives. Defining one thing as not being another is an efficient way of confirming its subordinacy, just as when we say of someone that he is not human, since he inspires horror or is someone from whom we wish to separate ourselves by condemning him radically. Pareto’s strategy presents a situation in which a certain type of action is positively assessed and is a good deal more important than the other, which is seen as secondary. Things would be evident if not for the fact that this other type is the reason why Pareto gave up economy and its advantages, holding it incapable of accounting for the greater part of what happens in society, where non-logical actions are the overwhelming majority: by rule of thumb, they make

up ninety percent of the observable, while “perfect” logical actions reach about ten percent. We say one thing, we see another.

The positivist scourger of the “pseudo-sciences that interpret facts with feeling, with longing, with prejudice” (Pareto, 2016, p. 19), thus all unawares stumbles into the same fallacy of which he accuses others. He hopes for a reverse state of things where men and women behave in line with reason, and that his search will facilitate such an outcome; yet such a wish is superimposed on the factual reality invoked, in that it does not conform to what is and replaces it with what (he thinks) should be. In this, Pareto is very similar to those authors referred at the start: his shrewdness and intelligence encourage him to go beyond himself and the paradigmatic limits within which he works, although he cannot admit it or does not realize it. So, regarding religious life, Durkheim cannot help opening a loophole towards the non-rational (and here is another case of a rogue definition!), discoursing on mana and social effervescence; so Weber, the farthest-seeing of the troop, while taking fervent part in the modern perspective, undermines its stability with the ideas that today make him valuable: charisma, disenchantment, the polytheism of values, where rationalistic claims sink down through the revelation of human complexity.

While logical actions are merely another version of economic actions and add little to their understanding, non-logical actions are the real object of Pareto's research, taking up practically the whole of the *Trattato* (1916). In my humble opinion, their study is Pareto's major contribution to sociological thinking, because within its frame he senses and begins to describe a dynamic that may turn out to be highly significant. Yet here again, the terminology is semantically dense: non-logical actions come from an obscure, constant background of emotions, desires and appetites defined – with a singular choice – *residues*. A rapid search reveals that Google, for example, offers the meaning of that word as “a small amount of something that remains after the main part has gone or been taken or used” while the Italian online encyclopaedia Treccani stops at “that which is left over, which remains”<sup>1</sup>: in both cases we have to do with something of the lowest order, a useless reject, an impression in harmonious synergy with the sense of censure already noted with regard to the definition of the typology of action in whose context the residues are found<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/residuo/> 03/11/23.

<sup>2</sup> It makes little difference; indeed, another good example of derivation is the fact that, as Jedlowski remarks, “*residues* are what Pareto sees as being *fundamental* in man. ‘Residue’ in his terminology means what remains once the behaviour of men has been broken down into its elementary components” (Jedlowski, 2020, p. 165). It is no coincidence that Jedlowski himself introduces the definition by murmuring “although to a student

What has already been observed therefore also goes for them: there would be nothing to criticize if an insignificant fraction of human action found its origin therein; while, given that they would seem to be responsible for practically the whole of it, the divergence between reality and defining claim is yet more remarkable: any process that left as residue ninety percent of the material utilized would be abandoned as being uneconomical. Again, Pareto allows his convictions and idiosyncrasies to tinge in bright hues the objectivity of his thinking. There is, however, something more: the implicit reference to a process from which the residues derive. In his choice of vocabulary there is not only the negative tone of scoria, rubbish; there is also the echo of a positive *quantum* that some form of processing has produced from the original material, leaving behind this inert lump.

I have always loved words, the contradictory wealth of their meaning that obstinately lives on despite the wear-and-tear caused by the media and today's compulsive communication. Over the years I have gone on thinking of this register while other topics occupied the inner scene: in particular the strange, long imaginal coherence of our culture that unfolds from Plato to Saint Thomas and beyond, until it achieves the Cartesian arrangement that has dominated our skies until recent years and only now verges towards sunset. From the Charioteer's prison of flesh to Descartes' *res extensa* and to Pareto's obscure residues, there is a continuity that might escape the eye of one over-confident of his own rationality and of the monolithic consistency of his learning; yet it is revealed to whoever is no supporter of cognitive exceptionalism, considering it rather as an accident of knowledge. Its store of hyper-specialisation and relational incapacity makes it difficult to realize that disciplinary fences are not always able to keep at bay the knowledge that springs up within them, so that at times it escapes and becomes – in ways which Durkheim would probably call “bastardly” – the shared heritage in the *Weltanschauung* of culture. And especially if – as could have happened to Descartes – this knowledge helps to confront deep doubts and to furnish answers to hastily underestimated questions, both the former and the latter being more widespread than public discourse wishes or is able to admit. It is no coincidence that *cogito ergo sum* continues to be the popular label for any initiative of philosophical divulgation that appears in the newsagents or the bookshop: beyond the debatable and debated assertion, it supplies an apparently simple strategy to answer the query of *what it means to be human beings* (D'Andrea, 2017).

Besides his masterly ability in giving an elegant formulation of the western paradigm and its divisive features, this is why Descartes' influence on modern

---

it may seem counterintuitive”: not only to a student, but to anyone paying attention to the deep, imaginal level of terminological choices.

culture has been highly significant, contributing to the creation of an “obvious” to which many later referred, more or less consciously; the imaginal homology between *res extensa* and residues is a good example and sets Pareto within a wider cultural context that features contempt for the body and dichotomic passion. Yet the positive, creative part of the semantic field of the residue still goes unexplained. To find the missing link, something else was needed: *Descartes' Error* (1994), a work by a Portuguese neurologist, Antonio Damasio. Brilliantly bringing together the neurosciences, philosophy, and sociology, it is a criticism of some non-evident consequences of Cartesianism. Reading it brought to the surface that inkling that had till then escaped attention and now started to take shape, for the sociologist of the imaginary and of the depths “must be capable of swimming amidst the waves but also of plunging down into the deepest currents; he must be both steersman and deep-sea diver” (Secundulfo, 2019, p. 8), and putting into words what he glimpses often requires a humble art open to advice and aid. The missing link was the great process of *evolution*, a multi-turning point in modern culture that has likewise escaped specialistic tutelage to become common sense, unfortunately for the most part through adaptations and interpretations in line with the imaginal paradigm so well expressed by Descartes. It is time to have another look at Darwin's work; thanks to simplifications and deviations, it has become something that Darwin himself would probably have trouble in recognizing, while it would be a fertile hunting-ground for pointers to another world vision that we urgently need. On the one hand, the social Darwinism of Spencer and his successors derives from *The Origin of Species* (1859) and goes hand-in-hand with the great work of modern rationalization, paving the way for the ravings that so indelibly ravaged the last century; and on the other, in 1866 Haeckel was inspired by it for the rise of ecology which, in his words, designates “all the sciences of the relations of the organism with the environment, including in the wider acceptance all the conditions of existence”: a complex, collaborative science focusing right from the start on interdependence and co-evolution, dynamics to be stoutly reasserted today against every excess of sectorization.

The evolutionistic perspective in the modern style gives an account of Pareto's choice of words: thousands of years of work on the raw material of the *res extensa* laboriously sparks the brilliant flame of the *res cogitans*, the distinctive, dignifying feature of humankind, the perfecting of which cannot fail to be the final purpose of evolution itself. It is a slow and costly work, given the quantity of residues that it leaves behind, but it is undoubtedly worthwhile, for the reasons indicated. Thus, an imaginal pathway is traced that leads towards the ultra-socialization of the Nineteen-seventies and on to the present cognitivist reductionism which identifies man with his brain, which is however due to be overtaken by more reliable material supports for conscience: in this sense the

hardware/software pair is the up-dated edition of Cartesian dichotomy, on the basis of which millions of dollars are spent searching for digital immortality. Pareto is among the creators of the process to shape the real that Weber was to call rationalization, sensing its problematic outcome in the figure of the “steel cage”: and Pareto too, like Weber, offers his own contradictory contribution, consolidating it at one level and undermining its foundations at another, a level deeper and less distinct.

## 2. The need for derivations

From residues come the non-logical actions that are however unacceptable to man as such; when they come to be represented, they have to be transformed in some way into their opposite. This is the alchemy *derivations* bring about, later interpretations aiming to preserve the rational consistency of the agent. There seems nothing strange in this statement: as Marchianò observes, “while performing mainly non-logical actions, man is a rational being and therefore needs to find a justification for his non-logical actions” (2016, p. 6). Yet it is worthwhile drawing attention to certain debatable aspects regarding this obvious remark: since Pareto’s time, it has been unclear how the definition of being logical or rational can be reconciled with the acknowledged preponderance of non-logical actions. Again, if we give credence to the remark, we should hold that the human being is in the main non-logical, albeit managing at times to behave as Pareto and many others would wish. Nor is it clear, even accepting the definition in question, why a logical being must *always* be logical, so much so that he is unable to accept any of his own non-conforming conduct without needing to re-interpret it in a rational perspective: it would appear that in so doing he is responding to a *normative* imposition that somehow obliges him to be rational. Lastly, there is the question – and it is central – of how he can be satisfied with the rationalizing *maquillage* he imposes on his own action: as a logical being, he should straightaway realize what he is doing and therefore recognize his own self-deceit; which poses the bewildering alternative between on-going double-dealing which makes no sense, and the schizophrenia already mentioned, and not just a light bout of it.

This apparent checkmate may be resolved by acknowledging that the claim of rationality at all costs which turns into rationalism is none other than the following: a claim distorting human complexity, from which it would be advisable to start breaking free, just as the fathers of sociology are breaking free from the tight strictures imposed upon them by that very claim. Yet this formulation is tainted by the same excess of simplification it criticizes: the process that leads to the powerful device we are discussing is anything but

simple and becomes manifest in multiple registers, of which I shall now attempt to give an initial idea.

We spoke of the rules regarding the request for generalized rationality addressed more or less explicitly to anyone who is part of our culture and its rigid configuration in an either/or alternative, in line with the paradigmatic choice of disjunction as the dominant logical operation: "The paradigm grants privilege to certain logical operations to the detriment of others, such as disjunction to the detriment of conjunction" (Morin, 1999, p. 8). This privilege, within the paradigm, means that the disjunctive mode is held to be "natural" and informs reasoning at every level, so that there are no options apart from "rational" or "irrational", with the positive valorisation of the first term of the dichotomy. This is a non-evident effect of the dichotomic attitude itself which distorts the presumed symmetry in favour of one of the terms, as happens for example in the ubiquitous, over-used alternative friend/enemy, we/they. If we add to this the Cartesian over-determination of rationality as the single reliable indicator of the humanity of the subject, we begin to understand why restoring the idea of the multi-dimensionality of the human being is such a demanding task.

Like most of the weightiest questions, that on the humanity of the subject has been hastily set aside by a Modernity anxious to conquer the world through an ever more incisive intervention of correction and enhancement: the *hybris* coming from the alliance between science and technology accentuates an extroversion already present due to the loss of awareness regarding the inner dimensions and the decline in the knowledges connected to them. The issues regarding them are disposed of as heaps of worn-out conceptions, now obsolete and invalid, which however does not mean that they have magically become less important: there is, once more, a gap between what is asserted (what is desired) and what actually *is*. And indeed, who wouldn't want the ancestral degree of reassurance bequeathed by the certainty of being human? No longer suspended between beast and divinity, between angel and demon, between Jekyll and Hyde; no more half-and-half beings teetering in the balance (D'Andrea, 2005), but beings finally solid, freed of all suspicion. And here it is, the magic proclamation which, with wishful thinking and all the strength of a new power, abolishes doubt and has done with it: no more time wasted with stupid questions on what is now a given fact, let's get on with shaping the world according to the new criteria!

Yet again, however, wishing is not sufficient and the affirmation/repression strategy has the effect of taking the topic away from the light of shared and acknowledged discourses, leaving each one to do his own summing-up in the fearful solitude of his own heart. Beck records a similar situation in relation to the other great constituting affirmation of the modern

myth – the control over the world by means of technology and calculation that should have rendered the question of humanity obsolete – and sees as the outcome a condition which we “strangely” tend to overlook: “Sociologists talk a lot about and conduct extensive research on insecurity, though they generally mean by this social insecurity. They thereby overlook what a dramatic decline of ontological security now confronts lifeworlds, even in the peaceful corners of the earth” (Beck, 2009, p. 45). Here too we have an unfulfilled promise, expectations fed beyond any reason which turn into their own opposites, all the more difficult to manage and tolerate the more lively and sincere was the confidence preceding them, against which they break to pieces. Yet they are hardly ever spoken of, so profound, unconscious and crucial is the link between those promises and the consistency of our own subjective matter, so firmly is the fate of the former bound to that of the latter.

Here is a particular aspect of this dynamic which escapes attention in the several interpretations that have indeed identified the distortive power of the paradigm and its incentive towards conformity, such as the sociologies of conflict or the various social constructivisms: this is not an instrumental imposition or a contractual relationship, however unbalanced. Although partially correct, this perspective is faulty in its absolutization of its partiality and reduces a multiple relation to one single rationalistic-instrumental key that envisages its own actions and choices as issuing from the calculation of profit maximization. Here, on the other hand, more than in previous occasions, the fact is that Modernity has founded its success not so much on its (vaunted) power to transform the world, but on the promise – implied and explicitly denied, with the paradoxical adroitness described by Latour – of freeing men from their secret, primordial terrors: their vulnerability to the whims of Fate; illness and death; their doubt on the meaning of the world and of themselves. Subscribing to its vision has a redemptive effect which in part compensates for the enfeeblement of the religious perspective and exploits the consequent vagaries of religiosity from one form to another (D’Andrea, 2008) in order to appropriate its attraction furtively; in part it takes root in the doubt it claims it has dispelled and becomes the only (unsaid) guarantee against its return. The paradigm thus makes any criticism addressed to it very costly, since whoever expresses it weakens himself at the same time, upsetting his inner equilibrium, and is encouraged in most cases to maintain the representation against all evidence to the contrary.

Over time, Descartes’ *cogito* becomes the seal of a pact that frees men and women from the nocturnal anxieties of which Supertramp sing in *The Logical Song* (1979), at the cost of accepting the mono-dimensional world of economic reason. This is a long-term process that goes largely unnoticed, counterbalanced as it is by other aspects of a culture that is in any case varied and contradictory



and by the obstinate survival of holistic traits of previous traditional cultures through the *bridge-representations* identified by Dumont (1991), in a dynamic where the checks and balances operate mainly in the grey zone that flourishes just under the level of the dominant rhetoric: in everyday behaviour escaping sharp-eyed regulations, in the cracks between the norms, in the interiority that becomes more and more *residual*. Reserves of flexibility and other spaces, however, shrink as the rationalization process goes forward and occupies the worlds of life that were as yet beyond its reach, creating the “steel cage” denounced by Weber. This occupation is associated with the narrowing of the definition of what is rational, which tends to coincide with the old abstract model of *homo oeconomicus*, turned into the “faithful” representation of the whole of *homo*, and this synergy makes it more and more difficult to respect the terms of the rational=human equation. It is this tension, unexpressed and pervasive, that makes derivations *necessary*, derivations that prove to be the only instrument available to subjects to square the circle of expectations so divergent from reality as to be unreachable and that remain the only strategy to face the ancient doubt that returns: the torsion of rationality into rationalization in fact makes us wonder, willy-nilly, what we are and reveals the falsity of the initial assumption, “Descartes’ error”, *the undue and by now intolerable reduction of the human to the merely rational*.

This is why man needs to prove himself rational: to be recognized and to recognize himself as human. Today’s theories on recognition – like most human sciences – start out from the “obvious” affirmation *a priori* of the human’s humanity and from there go on to discuss what must be recognized, to what extent, why, and so on and so forth, according to a well-tested model (for a position closer to that advanced here see Corvino, 2021). They recognize no previous degree of recognition, delegating any of its identity dimensions to psychology, which in turn monopolizes everything that is not rational, in its own way trying – in the last few years especially – to bring about the alchemic transformation dreamt of by Pareto, from residue to a set of figures and parameters accompanied by models and algorithms. Hardly anyone seems to realize that in the meantime the arts, in their various forms, have done nothing but wonder what it means to be human. From the TV series *Westworld* to the songs of Muse, passing on the way through a legion of performances and books, the central question that has crept out of the woodwork is: how do I recognize someone (myself) as human? And that is something that radically transcends the instrumental-normative dimension of the ownership of rights and privileges, for it touches the ancestral chords of belonging, the “underground power” that founds the groups of which Maffesoli (1992) speaks in reference to Durkheim’s “social divine”, the flesh and blood bonds with the Other. No wonder such queries are aired when a man or a woman humiliates, injures or

kills other men and women; or when hundreds of thousands die of hardship, illness, hunger, while we make glossy lists of a handful of millionaires; or else when we let them drown in the sea or perish in refugee camps out of our sight and far from our consciences. No wonder rhetoric today can no longer stand up against the evidence exploding from the abyss to engulf western societies if they ignore this essential question, and it is no surprise that one of the most powerful books on the subject, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, is rarely cited among Bauman's books (1992). Binding its stability to all this, Modernity has taken a tremendous risk on being able to control the Chthonic magma alluded to in the *Treccani* entry on Pareto: "With its overflowing and somewhat contrived classifications of residues and derivations, the *Trattato* seems like an erratic mass in a landscape whose surface is mapped with the precision of positivist scientism but whose subsoil bubbles with a magma attracting investigators of the subconscious. The mathematics of the *Manual of Political Economy* has here been replaced by the speleology of the irrational"<sup>3</sup>.

A great deal of this discussion pivots on the assessment of this risk, for it appears likely that it has not even been recognized as a risk. The striking human ability (which it would be wise to take into consideration should we wish to formulate new criteria of identifiability) to ignore inconvenient ideas and circumstances, or else to re-formulate them if they do not fit in with our plans, is as striking as the willingness to be convinced of the outcome of such processes, and derivations are a glaring example of this. Yet I believe the underground approach of the above citation is no longer enough to become aware of it – albeit perfectly consistent with what we would expect from a diurnal imaginary, according to Durand – or the self-deceiving line preferred by Pareto, according to which derivations come within "the ways in which men attempt to dissimulate, mutate, explain certain of the features belonging to some among their ways of doing things" (1916, vol. II, p. 1). We have already seen that the "explanation" of the reasons that should encourage men to take that amount of trouble is something of a failure, and having recourse to the irrational subconscious is not a great deal different. Yet what such strategies show is a useful starting point: both hark back to the Cartesian dichotomic perspective; they have no hesitation in assuming it and applying it. The only thing that can justify a conduct that does not come up to expectations is the intrusion of the irrational – the latter is yet more derogatory than "non-rational" and is, in any case, a further residual category that contains within it diverse spheres – or else the reluctance of the human animal to adapt itself to what its better part intimates: here we also have a touch of anthropological pessimism that forms a

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vilfredo-pareto\\_%28II-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Filosofia%29/05/11/23](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vilfredo-pareto_%28II-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Filosofia%29/05/11/23).

constellation with the distress felt by whoever cannot help registering the undue preponderance of insensate gestures in social doings.

### 3. Awareness and side effects

Yet if we were to change perspective, things would look different, much less negative for the poor human being. Giving up Cartesian opposites and integrating a range of new discoveries into the discourse, we would find ourselves looking at a complex being who, in acting, mixes the whole spectrum of strategies to which he has had recourse throughout the dizzying climb that has, step by step, brought him to today, as evolution placed at his disposal more refined instruments for comprehending and shaping the world. Cognitive strategies such as:

- *corporeity*, the first register from which the others later unfolded; the *emotional sphere* that ethology shows to be at the root of the social behaviour of numerous other species (Humphrey, 1986) and that also plays a crucial role in the relational fabric of coexistence (Maffesoli, 1988) and in rational activity (Damasio, 1994);
- *symbolical-imaginal knowledge* that Durand, in the wake of the reflexological school of Betcherev, anchors firmly to the “reflexive dominants [...], the most primitive sense-motor systems that make up the primordial ‘adaptive’ systems of ontogenesis” (Durand, 1984, p. 47) and that precedes by thousands of years the rise of language;
- and lastly *reason*, self-awareness, abstract thought, what we deem distinguishes us irrevocably from the rest of the living.

This is a complex, inclusive model which does not intend in any way to deny the importance of the rational component, but to reintegrate it in the system of processes and dynamics from which it had origin and by which it is still strongly influenced.

Retrieving the meaningfulness of the evolutive process, its stages and their chronology, enables a deconstruction of the narration that overestimates one to the detriment of the others, with ever-increasing existential and cognitive costs. As Humphrey observes, “the advance of civilisation, instead of making people more secure in their knowledge of who and what they are, has fundamentally had the opposite effect. On one level the world is better managed and scientifically explained than it ever was before; and human beings are more accessible than ever. Yet, despite that, people have lost confidence in their own powers. Few any longer *feel* the power of understanding in their daily lives” (1986, p. 168).

In accepting the idea of the human's complexity, we absolve him of the "sin" of not being up to impossible expectations that admit of no other solution than derivations, and we open up to retrieving "confidence in our own powers" and self-esteem, undermined by the everlasting feeling of insufficiency that accompanies the (slight) Cartesian schizophrenia. In accepting the possibility of partial awareness that issues from this, we place ourselves in a condition to begin to understand a great deal of what has so far escaped our attention or else has been set aside with colourful labels such as the "perverse" or "unintentional" effects of action, themselves derived from a dichotomic vision that admits nothing but "awareness" or "unawareness". And yet, as seen in the case of Pareto, this brutal alternative allows for no explanation for much of what happens within and around us, while admitting a polyphony of movements – some of which "felt" rather than understood, guessed rather than explained – could lead to a different sensitivity for human action and new frameworks of comprehension.

For these territories we lack words and instruments, because modern knowledge has perhaps glimpsed them, but has been careful not to set foot therein, preferring to build containing walls – a distressing activity that easily shifts from the metaphoric to the real – rather than breaking new ground. This essay would like to be a step in this direction, although the way forward brings in its wake the dizziness of which Kafka spoke: "I have an experience and I am not joking when I say that it is seasickness on dry land" (Kafka as cited in Rella, 1993, p. 24), the aftermath of giving up one's own comfort zone and the difficulty of finding a shared language to expound one's own proposals in. It is, however, a renewal, the need for which begins to make itself felt in several quarters, as well shown by Beck. He is often critical of what he calls mainstream sociology which in his posthumous book, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, he accuses of continuing to talk about social change without realizing the different dimension of contemporary events: "Change brings a characteristic future of modernity into focus, namely permanent transformation, while basic concepts and the certainties that support them remain constant. Metamorphosis, by contrast, destabilizes these certainties of modern society. It shifts the focus to 'being in the world' and 'seeing the world', to events and processes which are unintended, which generally go unnoticed, which prevail beyond the domains of politics and democracy as side effects of radical technical and economic modernization" (Beck, 2016, p. xi).

The idea of metamorphosis expresses the same need to be free of a conceptual, representative apparatus no longer adequate to the comprehension of a world where processes have gone well beyond the capacity of control and management by those who originated them and where those same claims of control and management show their shortcomings and the distortions they have

caused. In Beck's reflection there are a number of factors responsible for this state of things, and they also form the frame within which comes the reading of Pareto's theory proposed here: the *limits of scientific knowledge*, forgotten by many of its specialists and practically absent from the widespread perception of common sense, which bring with them a growing gap between expectations and results and a generalized confidence crisis; the *scale* of the initiatives undertaken on the basis of this version without limits of knowledge; the *paradigmatic inertia* and the *resistance to change* of which we have already spoken, which mean that "the challenges of the beginning of the twenty-first century are being negotiated in terms of concepts and recipes drawn from the early industrial society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The threats to which we are exposed and the security promises which seek to contain them stem from different centuries" (Beck, 2009, p. 28).

The perspective presented here agrees with one of Beck's most original convictions: the fact that the end of Modernity is largely due to its *successes*, it is somehow one of its "non-intentional effects", even though it lasts longer. The scope of many discoveries has repercussions and consequences that cannot be foreseen and that trigger processes leading to the overturn of the conditions that generated them. Thus the new evidence on the duration and scan of the human evolutionary process renders unsustainable the traditional vision of the appearance of a *homo sapiens* almost identical to us, capable from the start of thought and word and therefore characterized essentially by reason; it makes this the most recent and fascinating outcome of a dizzying climb yet at the same time it returns importance and topical interest to other components that the dominance of the *res cogitans* has removed from widespread attention and awareness.

In approaching the conclusion, I believe it important to underline the centrality, even in Beck's perspective, of "non-intentional" processes and effects. Thanks to one of his intuitions, the time has come to contemplate the possibility that these may not necessarily be negative, that along with the "negative side effects of goods", there may be "positive side effects of bads" (Beck, 2016, p. 116); in other words, that even the good/bad dichotomy requires a less drastic approach and should be remodulated in different contexts. Yet the negative opinion on the unintentional gains sense from a claim for the absolute control and predictability of Modernity, where anything not planned and projected is by definition dysfunctional<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, perhaps co-existence and well-being also rest on the unobserved deployment of

---

<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting, in this view, to start anew thinking about the intentions and orientations of action in other masters of sociological thinking, such as, for example, Weber and Parsons.

the collateral dynamics of our conscious life, dynamics that an excess of rationalization may hinder or even prevent.

After a lengthy examination of cases where excellent reasons have led to disastrous results and vice versa, Pareto observes: “In these and in many other similar cases, if the work done is considered useful for society, we may say that it was aided by those who, aiming at an ideal purpose, passed unaware along a road they would never have taken had they known where it was to lead” (2016, p. 26). Of course, in his perspective based on the “careful study of facts” (2016, p. 23), these are lucky happenings that confirm one of his most acute assumptions, that is that “ideal ends can be at one and the same time absurd and highly useful for society; a fact that here we should recall repeatedly, since it is easily neglected” (2016, p. 20). The gap, however, between fanciful derivations and the “real movement” (2016, p. 26) of society remains, as does the judgement that follows upon it, unscathed by the possibility that it is perhaps the unforeseen consequence of the desired ideal that identifies one of the most important *creative* dynamics in the human initiative. For the considerations so far illustrated, the unforeseen is not, for Modernity, the moment when “a god opens the way”, as Euripides wrote thousands of years ago; it is rather the treacherous obstacle that undermines radiant certainties and has to be exorcised through the exhausting search for those responsible and the ritual reaffirmation of the inadequacy of the human being. Completely overturning the perspective, it might prove useful to wonder whether the on-going reduction of the social process to the foreseeable-administrable is not an elimination of the unperceived dynamics that for so long have enabled the bureaucratic illusion to declare itself the winner: bit by bit as *homo rationalis* leaves behind him the men and women of the twenty-first century, what is going to happen to the carefully-regulated, prescribed working of modern institutions, built on the former and not on the latter? It might be that Modern humanity, in its quest for predictability and control, is running the risk of preventing the world from happening around us, as it has been doing, unobserved, for ages.

## References

- Bauman, Z. (1992). *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (2009). *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (2016). *The Metamorphosis of the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Corvino, I. (2021). *Appartenersi. Verso un modello complesso di interpretazione del riconoscimento*. Milano: Meltemi.
- Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books.

- D'Andrea, F. (2005). *L'uomo mediano. Religiosità e Bildung nella cultura occidentale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- D'Andrea, F. (2008). *La séduction du sacré: une lecture du phénomène religieux postmoderne*. *Sociétés*, 101, 3, 91-103.
- D'Andrea, F. (2017). Being Human. A few Remarks about Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum*. *Studi di Sociologia*, 2, 135-146.
- Dumont, L. (1991). *Homo Aequalis II. L'idéologie allemande. France-Allemagne et retour*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Durand, G. (1984). *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire. Introduction à l'archétypologie générale*. Paris: Dunod.
- Humphrey, N. (1986). *The Inner Eye*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Jedlowski, P. (2020). *Il mondo in questione. Introduzione alla storia del pensiero sociologico*. Roma: Carocci.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Maffesoli, M. (1988). *Le temps des tribus. Le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés de Masse*. Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck.
- Maffesoli, M. (1992). *La transfiguration du politique. La tribalisation du monde*. Paris: Grasset.
- Marchianò, F. (2016). Introduzione. In V. Pareto, *Trasformazione della democrazia* (pp. 5-16). Roma: Castelvecchi.
- Morin, E. (1990). *Introduction à la pensée complexe*. Paris: ESF.
- Morin, E. (1999). *Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future*. UNESCO <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117740>
- Pacelli, D. (Ed.) (2019). *Il limite come canone interpretativo. Riflessioni e ambiti di applicazione a confronto*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Pareto, V. (1916). *Trattato di sociologia generale*, 2 voll. Firenze: Barbera.
- Pareto, V. (2016). *Trasformazione della democrazia*. Roma: Castelvecchi.
- Rella, F. (1993). *Miti e figure del moderno*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Secondulfo, D. (2019). Prefazione. Per una sociologia dell'immaginario e del profondo. In P.L. Marzo & L. Mori (Eds.), *Le vie sociali dell'immaginario. Per una sociologia del profondo* (pp. 7-17). Milano: Mimesis.