Vilfredo Pareto on Culture and Derivations: Virtuism as a Logicizing Perversion

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Abstract

The essay investigates the sociological premises at the basis of Vilfredo Pareto's tenet of "virtuism" as it complies with his effort to combine sociology, literature and communication and deal with the conservative action fostered by the Catholics against the diffusion of immoral contents and images. The criticism of any form of censorship concerns the celebration of art and the opposition to fanaticism (both religious and political) undermining the everlasting power of culture. In Pareto's perspective, the juxtaposition of residues and derivations, along with the dialectics of logical and non-logical actions, sheds light on the argumentative techniques that social actors exploit to logically legitimate actions, gestures and decisions that usually appear to be inspired by prejudices, false opinions and cultural heritage, as Pareto scornfully underlines in The Virtuist Myth and Immoral Literature (1914). Two events impose a sharp reflection on the tenet of morality within the public sphere and the impact that images, texts and symbols have on individual and collective sensitivity: the covering of ancient Roman statues in the Capitoline Museum in Rome for the visit of an Iranian president, and the removal of a seventeenthcentury painting of a butcher from a Cambridge (UK) university dining hall after protests by vegan students. Such tenets and impacts were illustrated by Federico Fellini in The Temptation of Dr. Antonio (1962). Once again, logical and non-logical actions comply with cultural beliefs and communicative practices, at a time ruled by new forms of moral and immoral display.

Keywords: society, communication, art, censorship, literature.

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1. Introduction

Vilfredo Pareto's long essay The Virtuist Myth and Immoral Literature was published in 1911 in French by Marcel Rivière in Paris (Le mythe vertuïste et la lettérature immorale), and re-published in a second edition - revised and expanded by the author - in 1914 in Italian by Bernardo Lux in Rome (Il mito virtuista e la letteratura immorale), two years before The Treatise of General Sociology. It is more than the social denunciation of the government's attempt to prosecute writers, editors, publishers and artists accused of undermining public ethics through writings and images presumed to be immoral. Italian Prime Minister Luigi Luzzatti's intention to support censorial action against "immoral writers" highlights the age-old issue of the secularization of public life and politics and the influence of ecclesiastic power. The decision of the Chamber of Deputies, voted on June 4th 1910, to allow the police to seize all obscene publications which "might scandalize children" (Pareto, 1914, p. 17), led Pareto to take a stand against the increasing influence of Catholics and conservatives - renamed with the insightful neologism "virtuists" - in the management of public life. Therefore, Pareto's essay can be read nowadays as a stunningly prophetical condemnation of any form of obscurantism, bigotry and censorship limiting freedom of speech and thought, with particular regard to the cultural sphere, including literature, music, painting and journalism (Lombardinilo, 2016).

To the fore is the increasing circulation of contents and images in the early twentieth century, made possible thanks to the improvement of printing techniques and photographic strategies: "Print was also a major factor in the development of the sense of personal privacy that marks modern society. It produced books smaller and more portable than those common in a manuscript culture, setting the stage psychologically for solo reading in a quiet corner, and eventually for completely silent reading" (Ong, 2012, p. 128). The easier and cheaper is the way to share and diffuse information, the more complex and challenging is the monitoring of the flow of symbols, signs and contents available to public opinion, as Veblen heralded in The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) about the sociological implications of the so called 'conspicuous consumption'. In the same tone, Pareto denounces the political and ideological backlashes hindering the process of the democratization of culture and the practice of free thought, with particular regard to the works of art and literary creations (Lombardinilo, 2021b). In this perspective, Pareto seems to foreshadow the communicative implications of the mechanization of productive processes and the technical reproducibility of images and contents investigated twenty years later by Walter Benjamin, who successfully focused on the negative effects of iconic standardization and mass-produced contents (Caygill, 2020).

Without forgetting his historical and literary proficiency and thanks also to his economic and political interests, Pareto underlines the ideological myopia hampering free thought and free art, thus reacting against the Catholic crusade targeting immoral writings allegedly undermining public decency. His long tirade against the political decision to prosecute artists, writers, publishers and booksellers is without any political meaning and gains an anti-clerical implication, for a new form of Inquisition was lurking within the hidden meanders of public life. Thus, Pareto's attack on the new forms of "virtuism" afflicting current times can be interpreted as an essay of culture sociology inspired by political and religious causes, assuming that "Pareto did not intend to be a political scientist. On the contrary, his interest in politics itself must be understood as part of his much broader sociological vision. This means that, rather than elaborating abstract categories to think autonomously and ahistorically about the political sphere, he intended to explain the complex intertwining of factors and forces shaping society through history. In short, though never posing as a prophet, he adopted a very long diachronic perspective both towards the past and the plausible future. He was therefore able to understand in a non-trivial way his own time and also, in some respects, what was yet to come" (Susca, 2021, pp. 110-111).

Pareto's forceful defense of the artistic genius reveals a very modern and robust refusal of any form of cultural stigmatization, especially any perpetrated by those powerful elites investigated for so long by the author in his economic and sociological studies. His huge cultural knowledge has to be duly considered in order to better understand the intellectual and social premises of his interdisciplinary approach, as Joseph Femia and Alasdair Marshall point out about the convergence of realism and scientism in Pareto's methodology: "When analyzing society, Pareto emphasized complex interdependency, treating each social form as a state of dynamic equilibrium where economic, political and social phenomena interact" (Femia and Marshall, 2012, p. 1). The unstable equilibrium produced by World War I is not only the demonstration that Pareto's realism was founded on solid epistemological premises, but also that his analysis of the centripetal and centrifugal forces modelling social patterns is far from being obsolete or old-fashioned, as the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine seems to confirm (Lombardinilo, 2021b). In this perspective, Pareto helps us understand that every conflict, as well as every social fact, both individual and collective, concerns public opinion and information, in line with the need to depict the complexity of daily life. In other words, Pareto seems to anticipate Walter Lippmann's analysis of the narrative paradigms chosen to represent social facts and the symbolic patterns exploited by journalists and advertisers to catch the reader's attention (Van Rythoven, 2022; Schudson, 2008).

Freedom of speech usually collides with the influence of elites and power lobbies, as Pareto directly experienced during his journalistic activity. No compromise can be found when religious conflicts, political polemics and cultural blindness jeopardize the universal flair of art and literature which concern the sphere of creativity and the human craving for eternity, as William Blake argued in one of his most acute Proverbs of Hell: "Eternity is in love with the productions of time". Therefore, the dogged attack on the Italian "virtuists" engaged in a defensive struggle against immorality and in favor of dogmatic virtue turns into an outstanding defense of communicative freedom and aesthetic creativity, at a time of constant innovation in literary media and editorial techniques (Tarascio, 1976). In this sense, the tenet of "virtuism" belongs to a specific sector of Pareto's sociology, as it deals not only with the dialectics of residues and derivations and the fluctuations of logical and nonlogical actions, but also with the communicative distortions deriving from the narrating and reporting of facts at risk of being manipulated in the absence of images and footage. The introduction to The Virtuist Myth and Immoral Literature is a sort of declaration of intent, in which the tenets of culture, communication and public diffusion play a central thematic role:

Foreign is the thing, foreign therefore must be the name, and I can't manage without neologisms: virtuist, virtuism.

Despite my investigations, I did not find the Italian synonym that cheers me, because this fact shows that the Latin soul shuns such a mess that comes from the hypocrites of the North. Unfortunately, it is sufficient, to our shame, that in Italy we ape those idiots.

It is true that we had, and still have, our hypocrites, our zealots, our sanctimonious persons, our Holy Willies, and other similar cockroaches; but none of them can be compared to the 'virtuist', who is a blunt protestant product of Germany and the Anglo-Saxons.

Nevertheless, it is strange that we Italians of the present time s always want to imitate some foreign people, maybe to pay them back for having imitated Italy at other times, and if we are not influenced by the French, we are by the Germans, and every American idiot makes not a few of our fellow citizens jump for joy (Pareto, 1914, p. V).

Pareto's harsh criticism concerns the Italian inferiority complex in terms of cultural assessment and aesthetic heritage, along with the tendency to shun and censor every immoral representation, in line the puritan and protestant mindset. No other term than "virtuism" can express the obsession with virtue and its anthropological meaning, in order to debunk the increasing, deceitful attempt to muzzle the aesthetic and communicative complexity of our cultural heritage. This is why Pareto's essay deserves to be framed within his

monumental sociological theory in which culture and communication play a relevant role in the process of understanding the relationship between symbols and human creativity, as in the section of the Treatise of General Sociology focused on Periodicity in Thought and Culture (Chapter 2321-2330). To the fore are the arguments carried forward by derivations in the logical legitimation of human facts, since literature and poetry revolve around the sedimentation and representation of human complexity: "There is talk of a world to be ruled by reason and logic. Old traditions are regarded as outworn prejudice. One has only to glance at literature - Latin literature under the Antonines; European, and especially French literature, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and then again in the latter half of the nineteenth - and the traits described become strikingly apparent" (Pareto, 1935, pp. 1672-1673). One of the most meaningful Paretian insights regards the invitation not to consider the past as a dusty, obsolete heritage, but as an indispensable, fruitful expression of the incessant communicative and social research of human beings, constantly suspended between the logical and illogical dimension, reality and imagination, in line with the strong inclination to construct stereotypes and platitudes useful to explain the unsolvable contradictions of human experience.

2. Truth and derivations: culture as a logicizing process

Pareto's criticism of Catholic "virtuism" deals with the sociological need to debunk cultural stereotypes and rebut the ideological prejudices shaping the social sphere. In this perspective, the relationship of the sociology of knowledge is one of the most significant cornerstones of Pareto's theoretical apparatus, as Brigitte Berger (1967, p. 267) pointed out in a fruitful essay published in 1967: "Through his procedure Pareto developed what could be called a theory of ideology (even though he does not use this term), in the sense of ideology as a distortive interpretation of social reality. However, as Mannheim pointed out, a theory of ideology is only the necessary preamble to the sociology of knowledge". Thanks to Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia (1954), Pareto's sociological research can be placed within the epistemological frame of culture sociology, as his skeptical realism concerns the need to analyze facts without wandering in the unfathomable meanders of imagination and without believing in science as a dogma: "The profound skepticism towards science and especially cultural sciences which arises from the intuitional approach is not difficult to understand. [...] Whereas Marxism placed an almost religious faith in science, Pareto saw in it only a formal social mechanics. Pareto's skepticism towards the knowable is maintained intact, but is supplemented by a faith in the deed as such and in its own vitality" (Mannheim, 1954, pp. 138-139).

The discovery of what is knowable makes it possible to probe the teleological dynamics leading to the display of social facts as they appear and influence human act, as Pareto (1984, p. 33) states in The Transformation of Democracy (1921) "One should avoid the risk of generalizing beyond the boundaries of present experience and roaming in imaginary space". Daily experience is the main research field of the social scientist submerged in the diachronic development of history, in which narrations, reports, symbols, signs and images come together in line with the disordered, unfathomable flow of events, as Pareto highlights while probing class IV of derivations entitled "Verbal Proofs", with specific reference to "Metaphors, allegories, analogies" (IV- δ). Hence follows the need to investigate the literary sphere and retrieve the most reliable representations of human complexity, along with the degree of intellectual creativity at the basis of the most significant artistic creations, from ancient Greece to contemporary avant-garde (Bourdieu, 1996; Becker, 1984). Also considering Pareto's classical knowledge (Atcari, 1970), the relationship of ideology, culture and expressivity may become an inspiring research topic as artists and writers have always coped with the ambiguities of power and politics, or to be more precise, of ideology and censorship.

Pareto wrote during the rise of socialism and anarchism and the rapid diffusion of the Marxist dogma which generated the predictable reaction of the conservative, liberal and Catholic parties, along with populist pressure on public opinion (Bianco, 2021). The role played by journalists, writers and opinion leaders is absolutely prominent, as the proliferation of publishing houses, the diffusion of newspapers and the improvement of telephone connections imply a radical revolution in the management of information strategies (Habermas, 1989). In terms of any possible short circuits, both in ancient and present times, literature is no exception, as Pareto warns in the *Treatise of General Sociology* in chapter 2324, recalling that old traditions are often regarded as "outworn prejudices". This is a specific reference to the French literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, characterized by the permanent debate involving progressists and conservatives and inspiring secular and ecclesiastic perspectives:

Observable, on occasion, is the parallel development of another literature chiefly designed to effect changes in the apportionment of profits between the governing class and its adjutants: in Rome, between patricians and plebeians, Senators and knights, in the matter of war-booty and tributes from the provinces; in our countries, in the apportionment between politicians and speculators, manufacturers and working-men, in the matter of proceeds from economic favouritism and the tributes levied upon possessors of fixed incomes, small stockholders, and producers of savings. The larger

the total to be apportioned, the hotter the battle and the more copious the literature it inspires, a literature that serves to show the merits and deserts, or the crimes and perniciousness, of this class or that, according to the spontaneous or well-paid predilections of the writer. Not a few 'intellectuals' and humanitarians, sincere of faith and poor of spirit, gape in open-mouthed astonishment at such portentous demonstrations, and dream of a world that will some day be ruled by them; while the speculators, well aware of their fatuousness, look on approvingly, certain as they are that while people are engrossed in them and dote on them, they can go leisurely on filling their pockets (Pareto, 1935, p. 1673).

This chapter of the Treatise of General Sociology can be read as a sharp declaration in terms of epistemological premises and teleological implications concerning the analysis of the communicative media and literature as a sociological tool, as Lewis Coser effectively did in Sociology through Literature (1963), maintaining that "The great traditions of sociology are humanistic" (Coser, 1963, p. 3) and "Literary insight cannot replace scientific and analytical knowledge, but it can profit them immensely" (Coser, 1963, p. 4). As a result, the sociological implications of culture and, in particular, of literature, concern the way writers and poets may influence public opinion and interfere with political power and social elites, in line with the dialectic becoming of social complexity and canonical certainties, as Harold Bloom (1994, p. 20) emphasizes: "The Canon, a word religious in its origins, has a choice become among texts struggling with one another for survival". Pareto's theory of social balance and the dialectic of centripetal and centrifugal facts reveal a cultural complexity that cannot be understood without recognizing ancient and contemporary literature and its social meanings, since rational and irrational habits interlace endlessly in social environments, thus inspiring narrations and representations worth telling especially when they seem original, anomalous or weird (Federici, 2016).

Hence the social, political, and religious implications of literary media as in novels, poetry and stories, in the presence of a human diversity that can be portrayed from different points of view. Censorship is often the extreme and predictable antidote to the power of creativity and the freedom of expression, as Pareto sternly denounces in the introduction of *The Virtuist Myth* recalling that Greek and Latin traditions were inherited, for example, by d'Annunzio and Carducci. The "virtuist crusade" hints at the social impact of culture and its expressive variations, in a world constantly projected towards communicative and symbolic circularity (Highley & Pakulski, 2012). In Pareto's insights, "sociology and literature are intentionally intertwined so as to shed a light on the origins and effects of force in social interactions" (Lombardinilo, 2017a, p. 134). Every communicative pathway or informative report focusing on

unspeakable or troublesome facts risks jeopardizing individual or collective interests, as happens when investigative reports shed light on criminal and treacherous happenings. Things are even worse when the artist undermines public morality and decorum and, as a consequence, governments decide to censor or prosecute the attempts to tantalize public opinion and cultural identity.

The Virtuist Myth repeatedly criticized the embarrassingly repressive policies of Luigi Luzzatti's government making authors and publishers liable to prosecution for attacking morality and decorum, policies that totally ignored the universal breadth of art and human creativity. The covering up of ancient Roman statues in the Capitoline Museum in order to spare the blushes of the visiting Iranian president Rohani is only one of the contemporary cases of improvised, typically inquisitorial virtuism that had already involved the immortal genius of Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Machiavelli, Galileo and others. Morality is often used as a lightning rod to legitimate or justify actions out of kilter with acknowledged cultural and aesthetic patterns: "Another important illustration of the ways in which people try to escape the logical consequences of certain principles is the case of morality. Civilized peoples naively imagine that they follow in practice the principles of a certain theoretical ethics. In point of fact, they act very differently indeed and then resort to subtle interpretations and ingenious casuistries to reconcile theory and practice that are ever and anon discordant" (Pareto, 1935, p. 1269).

The way social actors try to match theory and practice belongs to the sphere of cultural dominion and the behavioral mindset, as George Herbert Mead (1934) would outline about the relationship of *Mind, Self and Society*. Every social action is influenced by the grasp of stereotypes and commonplaces anchoring the individual act to the unavoidable becoming of cultural complexity, assuming that, as Weber (1949, p. 81) did, culture is "a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance". The juxtaposition of theory and practice is profoundly influenced by the identity paradigms built by shared traditions and common practices, especially when individual and collective spheres have to comply with each other. As Goffman (1963, p. 1) pointed out, stigma is the direct or indirect result of the mismatch of the stereotype and attributes from which several forms of discriminations derive, in order to probe "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance".

Morality is one of the meaningful forms of cultural heritage capable of conditioning an array of aspects of daily life. In Pareto's perspective, social actors ought to take into account the prominent role played by morality across the centuries as it is usually acknowledged: a set of socially shared values introduced and stabilized by rituals and popular beliefs. In this view, it does not

matter what is true, but what is considered true according to the collective identification in common signs and symbols (McIntyre, 2018). Despite the strength of our beliefs, the way we comply with our cultural patterns fluctuates: "The social scientist has to probe reality through the analysis of facts reflecting social tendencies and economic dynamics. Nevertheless, history teaches us that human beings are often influenced by irrational motivations shrouded by rationality" (Lombardinilo, 2021a, p. 117).

The tenet of "virtusm" stems from such a psychological and cultural fallout supported by the need to logically legitimate actions and choices obeying irrational and non-logic dynamics. The logicizing process that characterizes social actors gains a pivotal importance in Pareto's sociology, the merit of which is in the attention paid to the verbal and nonverbal dimension of social acting communicatively suspended between reality and imagination. The distance between residues and derivations regards the logicizing instinct that human actors bolster without consideration of real need (D'Andrea, 2021; Garzia, 2006). This is why, according to Coser (1977, p. 388), "Pareto searched for a rational accounting of the prevalence of human irrationality", thus shedding light on the concealed psychological insights leading to false, and deceptive argumentations. Furthermore, "Pareto argued that although men most often fail to engage in logical action, they have a strong tendency to 'logicalize' their behavior, that is, to make it appear as the logical result of a set of ideas" (Coser, 1977, p. 389).

Since derivations concern our argumentative skills and self-persuasive reliability, the logicizing process that Pareto investigates is inextricably connected to the communicative proficiency that every actor tries to exploit to logicize actions, intentions, thought and behavior. The narration of truth is rarely free from distortions or changes provoked by the difficulties in the process of information transmission and factual description, as writers, historians and reporters attest. This is what Pareto emphasizes about the complexity of historical truth as preserved by ancient and modern historians, also considering the metaphorical and allegorical meanings provided by legends, prophecies and tales, as in the case of Aladdin's marvelous lamp recalled in chapter 1578 of the *Treatise*: "Some of these stories may have, if one will, a 'higher' truth than experimental truth - that is not the question. What is important is that that truth, however superior it may be, should have a name to distinguish it from our modest, inferior, commonplace, 'experimental truth'" (Pareto, 1935, p. 1024).

The intermingling of reality and imagination is the cornerstone of every aesthetic narration, not to mention the poetical and artistic representation of human facts as they happen and can be transfigured through the filter of signs and symbols. In this sense, truth gains a semiotic dimension that overcomes purely informative implications and envelops a wider communicative significance, the one provided by the rhetorical complexity of allegorical and metaphorical writings (Simonson, 2014; Brown, 1987; Edmondson, 1984; Burke, 1955). This aspect is further explained in the long footnote to chapter 1578 of the *Treatise*: "There are many other 'truths', and very pretty ones" (Pareto, 1935, p. 1024). The reference is, of course, to the distinctness of scientific truth that cannot shed light on the astonishing activity of the human brain especially when social phenomena are influenced by cultural and aesthetic factors. Pareto's long reflection on Antonio Fogazzaro's article about Lev Tolstoy, published in 1910 in the Corriere della Sera, is cleverly focused on the principle of moral truth and moral good. The footnote deserves to be entirely quoted:

Writing of Tolstov in the Corriere della Sera, Nov. 21, 1910, Antonio Fogazzaro, the novelist, savs: 'He created truth and never seemed to care about creating beauty. He seemed almost to disdain Art as something inferior, as something human and not divine. But of the whole Truth he was the voice, as it were, and the flame, not only of the truth that the artist pantingly pursues, but also of that moral truth which glows resplendent in the soul that it has permeated. The True and the Good were one with Tolstoy. Not everything, to be sure, that seemed Good and True to him seems Good and True to me, or to numberless others who feel the passion of the Good and the True.' Fogazzaro prints the word 'true' sometimes with a capital, sometimes with a small letter. Whether there be a difference, and just what, in the two cases is not very clear. Dame Truth has a voice and a flame. That seems to be very consoling to Fogazzaro. To us it is merely obscure. There is a certain 'moral truth which glows resplendent in the soul that it has permeated.' That is understandable. Everybody finds resplendent a truth with which he has been 'permeated.' The trouble is, not everyone is permeated. And what does it mean to 'create truth'? Truth ordinarily is discovered, asserted, proclaimed. Fairy-stories and old wives' tales are 'created' and very easily. It might be objected that such criticisms miss the point in Fogazzaro's article in that they approach from a logico-experimental point of view a paragraph designed exclusively to act upon sentiment. And that would be true. Our criticisms aim at nothing else than at demonstrating the sentimental value of the passage. Writings of that kind are ridiculous from the logico-experimental standpoint. They may be very effective as appeals to sentiment. In that appeal the value of derivations resides (Pareto, 1935, pp. 1024-1025).

What does it mean to 'create truth'? What does it mean being 'permeated' by truth? How long does it take to match 'Good and True'? Fogazzaro's article emphasizes the relevant role played by sentimental values in the representation of human deeds and the construction of reliable narrative pathways, especially

when the boundary between reality and imagination is blurred and indefinite. Good and true may be differently perceived according to the religious and cultural values shaping individual and collective identity. Moral truths do not have anything to do with the "logico-experimental standpoint" of science; they revolve around the irrational impulses, the non-logical premises and sentimental inputs so frequently supporting human deeds (Meyer, 1974; Susca, 2005). This is the power of literature, art and creativity, as the immortal novels of Lev Tolstoy show in reference to the search for good and truth in social life through the construction of a literary pathway combining good and evil, moral and immoral. "The value of derivations resides" in the appeal to sentiments and their non-logical fascination, in line with the need to logicize that occasionally risks undermining the shining but controversial beauty of art.

3. Virtuism as a derivation, between sophistries and prejudices

In Pareto's perspective, the juxtaposition of logical and non-logical actions implies the construction of argumentative and representative techniques aimed at individually and collectively logicizing all the non-logical thoughts and behaviors that risk stigmatizing the subject. In this perspective, Pareto's epistemological insights contributed to the development of the theory of social action as implemented by Talcott Parsons, as Ferrant cleverly analyzes in reference to the avant-garde character of Pareto's theories. Furthermore, the dialectics of residues and derivations concern not only the cultural dominion but also the education sphere, since the reliability of every representation depends on the actorial skills of every single person. In other words, every logicizing process must comply with the dramaturgic patterns of everyday life so closely related to communicative and media techniques. This is also true of the rise of international regimes investigated by Stephen Krasner (1991, p. 337) who dwells on the economic impact of media industry: "Without regimes all parties would have been worse off. There are, however, many points along the Pareto frontier: the nature of institutional arrangements is better explained by the distribution of national power capabilities than by efforts to solve problems of market failure".

Krasner's approach to Pareto's sociological theory deals with the level of education and media literacy influencing the way every single actor figures out how to cope with the stereotypes and prejudices producing unstable and provisional opinions. To the fore are the ambiguities and blunders engendered by the misinterpretation of facts determined by the distortions of our cultural background. In this view, virtuism is a form of derivation concerning our ability to promote the argumentative sophistication required to contrast ideological, cultural and religious centripetal phenomena. Historically, the quest for morality has often overcome the simple search for decorum and common sense, as in the Middle Ages with witch-hunts, and in modern times with the Holy Inquisition. In these and other cases, denounced by Pareto in The Virtuist Myth, the level of rhetorical sophistication is directly proportional to the educational skills of the actors in their attempt to endow illogical deeds with a coat of logical paint (Lombardinilo, 2017b). The protection of children from the alleged invasion of obscene writings and images seems a merely political and religious justification, powerful enough to legitimate governmental decision to prosecute writers and artists: "The measures that the government wants to carry out are not new: they have been put to the test in every time and in all countries. What did they produce? Nothing, absolutely nothing but a support to hypocrisy. Augustus founded the Roman Empire and he had the chance to change to political constitution of his country; but all his efforts to reform the costumes of his citizens were totally vain. Emperors' virtuism is limited to the praise that Martial bestows upon the modest virtues of a Domitian" (Pareto, 1914, p. 174).

The emperor's "harsh virtuism", as it was described by Cassius Dio, was in line with Augustus's attempt to restore the ancient mores and Marcus Aurelius's wish to intertwine power and philosophy. The exile imposed on Ovid for his licentious poems and Domitian's attempt to censor pantomimes and dancing did not lead to the ethical and moral purification of Roman society, in the same way – Pareto argues – that Luigi Luzzatti's laws against writers and publishers served only to support Catholic and conservative hypocrisy. Any ideological attempt to legitimate censorship and forbid the circulation of knowledge is destined to failure, as demonstrated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's condemnation of Fogazzaro and d'Annunzio's writings.

Nonetheless, the practice of power may assume the most varied forms, especially when it is used to silence opposers, dissenters and agitators. Can the artist belong to the category of political enemies and religious dissenters? Can a government persecute and prosecute writers and poets considered to be free and autonomous? The list of banned writers might be too long, starting from the exile of Ovid, Cicero and Dante Alighieri to that of Niccolò Machiavelli, Ugo Foscolo, Gabriele Rossetti, Milan Kundera, Theodor Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, Isabel Allende and Salman Rushdie. The more educated the people, the more sophisticated the techniques of social control introduced by governors, unless dictatorship prevails over democracy. In any case, the logicizing process aimed at silencing or removing any troublesome content from the public sphere deals with the ideological interpretation of culture and the mismatching of freedom of speech and institutionalized censorship. In this specific field of human action, logicizing implies misleading propaganda, mystifying argumentations and rhetorical proficiency, as Pareto seems to assert in *The*

Treatise, chapter *1737*, focused on the influence of residues in the construction of logicizing pathways:

1737. Discordant residues and their derivations. Contradictory derivations expressing residues that are also contradictory are often-times observable in one same person, who either fails to notice the contradiction or tries to remove it by resorting to more or less transparent sophistries. Of that we have given many proofs, but further elucidation will not come amiss in view of the importance of having the fact clearly appreciated. Let us take a number of groups of residues, each group corresponding to certain complexes of sentiments. It will be found that the reciprocal influence of the groups, when they are not in accord, is generally slight in everybody if there is any at all, mutual effects appearing only in educated people in sophistical efforts to reconcile derivations arising from the groups. Uneducated people for the most part are not worried at all by such contradiction (Pareto, 1935, p. 1197).

Sophistries are usually used not only to persuade others but also to convince ourselves of the properness of our deeds, words and choices. It is no coincidence that sophistication and education are two fundamental keywords of Pareto's reflection on the permanent need to match derivations and their residues, assuming that only through culture and knowledge is it possible to distinguish what is logical from what is not and, as a consequence, to endow actions and behaviors inspired by sentiments and not by reason with a logical veneer. Contradictions are socially relevant when social systems are highly refined and possess an inner equilibrium deriving from individual and collective legitimation. Giovanni Busino clearly explains how residues can shape social environments and how derivations can influence specific human spheres, especially from a communicative and symbolic point of view: "Insofar as residues are transformed slowly, societies also change. The thesis according to which reason has an ever greater share in human activity gives rise to several errors. Progress comes about by following an undulatory or rhythmic movement. The oscillations or rhythms have different ranges, durations and intensities. When a phenomenon reaches its highest intensity, it is the oscillation in the opposite direction which is generally close. This makes it impossible to explain social phenomena by using simply linear causality or a more or less rigid determinism. Political, social or religious revolutions are just, right, necessary to some, and unjust, wrong, unnecessary to others. However, to science, there is no sense in that" (Busino, 2000, p. 224).

The oscillation of residues produces an undulatory rhythm attuned to the symbolic pressures that permeate every single human aggregation. Discordances in the interpretation of residues and the construction of derivations engender failing representations and narrations that do not comply with the highly sophisticated relational patterns going on in formal and institutionalized contexts. This is true not only for every kind of language that needs to be formalized in society, as Berger and Luckmann point out in reference to the sub-universes of meaning that are objectivated by our communicative efforts to make our experiences readily transmittable: "In principle, any sign system would do. Normally, of course, the decisive sign system is linguistic. Language objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within the linguistic community, thus becoming both the basis and the instrument of the collective stock of knowledge. Furthermore, language provides the means for objectifying new experiences, allowing their incorporation into the already existing stock of knowledge, and it is the most important means by which the objectivated and objectified sedimentations are transmitted in the tradition of the collectivity in question" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 85-86).

In accordance with such an epistemological approach belonging to the sphere of knowledge sociology, language is the most important medium that human actors possess to objectivate thoughts and cope with the "collective stock of knowledge" that includes myths, legends, prophecies, symbols (Castoriadis, 2007, pp. 71-90). In this view, derivations are the products of such an objectivating inclination that human actors support in order to comply with the social sedimentations of deeds and behaviors influenced by symbolic, psychological and cultural factors. This is why virtuism can be considered a special sort of cultural counter-objectivation regarding the tendency of writers and artists to deal with realistic aspects of life. Judicial persecution tends to be the worst solution when it is supported by cultural ignorance and opinionated blindness, as Pareto harshly points out in The Virtuist Myth: "The errors of virtuists mainly spring from two causes: the first concerns the lack of frankness; the second stems from the folly that usually hits those persons who want to catch up with the impossible and then are irritated by their failed efforts" (Pareto, 1914, p. 184). The imposition of creed and thought is triggered by the ambition for supremacy and uniformity, especially when freedom of thought and speech risks causing embarrassment. It is the case – as Pareto reminds us in The Virtuist Myth - of those writers considered immoral or licentious, such as Baudelaire and Flaubert, both prosecuted and condemned, respectively, for Madame Bovary and Les Fleurs du Mal. The same fate awaited Proudhon's La Justice dans l'Eglise et la Révolution: "However unjustifiable, the trials against Baudelaire and Flaubert were not an attack on freedom, because the violation of social ethics cannot be considered a purely intellectual activity... The one carried out against Proudhon was a deliberate attack on research freedom..." (Pareto, 1914, p. 28).

What is the difference between a work of art and a work of intellect? Can art be considered an intellectual expression of human creativity and universal breath? Poetry and novels, like historiography, sociology, psychology and other scientific disciplines, belong to the sphere of intellectual creativity which often requires research commitment and communicative effort. In this sense, the defense of social ethics and research freedom is to be considered a feature of autonomy and a declaration of civilization, especially when great authors and thinkers are prosecuted for not being in line with the moral patterns of society. French censorship in the nineteenth century was highly representative of the conservative grasp on public opinion and government, as Pareto emphasizes in *The Treatise*, chapter 1715:

As a result of that undulating movement in social phenomena to which we have had frequent occasion to allude, one notes at the present time a return to the state of mind that prevailed in France at the time when Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and other 'immoral' books were being prosecuted, and in Italy too one notes a recrudescence of prosecutions of that type. The criticisms being made in France of literary productions styled 'immoral' recall, though in a much less marked degree, the attacks that were made on the *Camille (La dame aux camélias)* of Alexandre Dumas the younger. In England a bishop rose up to criticize the songs of Gaby Deslys, and would have them kept from the public. These, at bottom, are all expressions of one same sentiment: an inclination on the part of certain individuals to force their own 'morality' upon others. Among such are many hypocrites, but also many persons who are acting in all good faith (Pareto, 1935, pp. 1169-1170).

Bad faith usually prevails on good faith every time hypocrisy rules social relationships. The outdated persecution of novels and poetry considered immoral reveals the atavistic tendency of the powerful to impose a partisan "morality" thus forbidding the free expression of sentiments and the accurate representation of life in all its various aspects and so outlining a possible "logic of emotions" (Mutti, 1994, pp. 157-160) This is why virtuism can be interpreted as a deceitful derivation stemming from the need to logicize non-logical sophistries and counter-objectivate the psychological obsessions connected to the dogmas of cultural and religious legacies. In the background is the permanent conflict between logical and non-logical actions, virtuists and antivirtuists, in a world influenced by ideological, transcendent and metaphysical factors. Science and imagination are not juxtaposed in the social environment, but they ought to co-exist within the symbolic complexity shaping human history. That is why Brigitte Berger emphasized the central role played by knowledge in Pareto's theory: "Society is thus more a fabric of fantasy and folly than either an ideational design or a functioning system. Indeed, men's ideas are

generally the products of irrationality and the society defined by these ideas functions precisely because men are foolish enough to believe their own irrationalities. It is this image of society that Pareto's sociology of knowledge evokes. Pareto's work is useful because the preservation of this image in sociological theory is important" (Berger, 1967, p. 280).

4. Conclusions

"In every religion, levels of faith and commitment differ from one person to another. Expressions of faith can be sincere and fervent, moderately strong, rather poor and somewhat skeptical, mere pretense, completely absent, or clearly hypocritical" (Pareto, 1984, p. 64). In Transformations of Democracy, published soon after the conclusion of World War I, Pareto analyses the social dynamics related to the theory of elites and the "plutocratic cycle", at a time characterized by the frightening unrest emerging after the Versailles Treaty. A number of the cultural shifts leading to this precarious situation are described and predicted in The Virtuist Myth and Immoral Literature, published the same year as the outbreak of the Italian-Turkish war (1911). The historical approach chosen by Pareto sheds light on the evolution of the social tenet of culture from an epistemological perspective which combines literature and communication in order to denounce the ideological distortions leading to legalized censorship provisions. The juxtaposition was not only between the conservatives and the progressives, but also between the Apocalyptics and the Integrated as Umberto Eco would call them, especially in reference to the artist's duty which should be to describe life in all its complexity (Alexander, 2003, pp. 245-267).

To the fore is the everchanging dialectics between sentiments and legitimations concerning the mismatching of logical and non-logical actions, residues and derivations, in line with the symbolic and communicative impact of images, contents and narrations (Vaccarini, 2013; Acqueci, 1991). This is why freedom of speech and thought represents for Pareto a pivotal social cornerstone to be unconditionally proclaimed without further undermining the unstable equilibrium ruling human co-existence: "Both in the present and the past, says Pareto, social equilibrium is constantly being upset by the accumulation of spineless decadents in the upper classes and energetic upstarts in the lower. When the upper classes no longer possess leaders with the attitudes necessary for governing, and the lower classes have such leaders, revolution is the unavoidable outcome. No society can maintain itself by persuasion; oligarchies using force rule *de facto* if not *de jure*" (Becker, 1968, p. 176).

Past and present times provide a countless number of censorial provisions proving the social impact of culture and governmental attempts to avoid its

diffusion. Even though fancy and imagination do not deal with scientific evidence, social imaginaries play an essential role in the construction of those symbolic patterns that frame every social aggregation within its specific historical and environmental dimension. Not only religion, but also art, music, literature and dance belong to the sphere of human creativity expressing the unfathomable beauty of life depicted in its perpetual becoming: "Pareto's contrast between real and imaginary might be confusing by suggesting, what is clearly not his meaning, that the effectiveness of the latter as a subjective end is imaginary. Both types may be real in this sense. The line of distinction Pareto has in mind is not this, but is based, on the criterion whether or not the observer can state a determinate objective end to compare with the subjective" (Parsons, 1949, p. 256).

As Talcott Parsons argues, the juxtaposition of objective and subjective facts determines the "persistence of aggregates" and the "instinct of combinations" – to use Paretian terms – in the same way that "contradictory derivations" expressing contradictory residues often deal with the argumentative aporias characterizing the processes of collective communication (Ferrant, 2019). In this sense, virtuist hypocrisies reveal the influence of ideological and religious stereotypes in times of social and economic innovation and technological revolution. From a sociological perspective, Pareto stigmatizes every attempt to turn culture into a political battlefield inspired by sterile, deceptive juxtapositions. The irony inspiring Pareto's essay aims to shatter the governmental censorship provisions used to prosecute authors and artists engaged in their aesthetic and creative research. The second part of the introduction to *The Virtuist Myth* is stunningly blunt:

So! If regrettably you need not to be *yourselves* but to imitate others, why don't you imitate our great authors? Why do you forget that the legacy of Greek-Latin culture is pivotal in Italy? Why do you forget that starting from Lucian of Samosata and Horace, through Boccaccio and Machiavelli, it reaches Carducci and d'Annunzio? And if the hypocritical barbarians, among those 'who give importance much more to facts than words', flare up in the presence of the title of *Decameron*, why do you follow them like puppy-dogs, rather than laughing them to scorn? Is it in any way possible that xenofilia has spoiled your mind to the point that you decided to veil Michelangelo's statues, you suggested suing d'Annunzio, you dress up as inquisitors of public evil in Milan in order to sue writers considered guilty only of having used Biblical phrases today found all over the place? Good people, if you are really in good faith, then you lack red blood cells; try taking ferrous or arsenic-based pills, perhaps containing glycerol-phosphates; maybe they will make you happy. Finally, everyone has to follow his own way and may express his opinion; I want to utter mine and I don't care for *virtuist* rage, threats, revenge (Pareto, 1914, p. 2).

The practice of freedom implies facing risks and hostility, as the long series of journalists wounded or killed demonstrates. But freedom of speech and thought is not on up for sale, as Pareto claims reinforcing the principle of the Italian cultural identity and autonomy. Not only d'Annunzio, but many other writers underwent prosecution and trials for their allegedly immoral writing. It happened to the Belgian writer and journalist Camille Lemonnier for his novel L'homme en amour (1897), as Scipio Sighele denounced in a long article published in "L'illustrazione italiana" (11 May 1902) entitled La città morta as a tribute to d'Annunzio's well-known play staged in 1896. Lemonnier recounted his autobiographical experience in a novel, Les deux consciences (1902), whose protagonist, a famous writer sued for his allegedly immoral novel, commits suicide due to the isolation, however familiar, that he undergoes because of the social stigma caused by his 'immoral' work. Like Pareto, Sighele emphasized the juxtaposition of the conscience of the artist and the reactionary behavior of the judiciary that rarely takes into account the universal power of culture in all its manifold forms. Old and new forms of censorship demonstrate that the innumerable attempts to restrict human creativity are destined to become communicative issues behind the strategy to turn irrational perspectives into rational pathways (Lombardinilo, 2020, pp. 115-156).

The covered ancient Roman statues in the Capitoline Museum in Rome and the removal of Franz Sneyder's painting from the dining hall at Hughes Hall, Cambridge, emphasize the never-ending attacks on art and human creativity, despite the achievement of cultural globalization in our digitalized post-modernity (Barth, 2021; Beck, 2016; Couldry, 2012). In the forefront is the incessant struggle between sentiments and facts connected to the symbolic action carried out by imagination on reality and sociality: "In every society one can observe contrasts among the social classes. Displays of sentiment follow the general law of rhythm. They increase and they diminish" (Pareto, 1984, p. 65). This is one of the most significant epistemological legacies of Pareto's analysis of the transformations ongoing in democracy soon after the conclusion of World War I, in line with the political, economic and virtuist backdrop of our risky modernity (Furedi, 2018, pp. 35-69).

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