

# Professor Stigler's Report on "Alfred Marshall's Lectures on Progress and Poverty". An Addendum(\*)

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references

In the 1969 volume of *The Journal of Law and Economics*, George Stigler published the newspaper accounts of Alfred Marshall's 1883 lectures delivered in response to Henry George's most famous work (Stigler 1969). In addition to Professor Stigler's introduction to these lectures, we now have the very fine Peter Groenewegen biography of Marshall which devotes a section to Marshall's debate with George (and with Alfred Russel Wallace who held similar views) (Groenewegen 1995, pp. 581-87).

Up to this point, one assumed that the newspaper accounts were complete (apart from the usual misprints and minor omissions one would expect). Indeed, Stigler reported that it was "[...] possible to have considerable confidence in the reliability of the text as now published" (Stigler 1969, p. 184).

However, while rummaging through some containers of Marshall's papers in the Marshall Library of Cambridge University, I uncovered another set of newspaper accounts of the lectures that were clipped by Mary Paley Marshall. According to Alexandra Saunders, Marshall archivist, these were a "[...] precursor to the very large volume of press cuttings she kept from 1883-1927" (private correspondence, October 1, 1995) and which are housed in the library (the clippings, along with the addendum are filed as Marshall 3/9).

This "precursor" set of clippings contains an addendum to the second, February 27 lecture not found in the newspaper account that might be viewed as significant by some. Following a comparison of the writing style of the note with that of other examples of Mary Marshall's penmanship, Ms. Saunders is quite certain, though not absolutely so, that the addendum is in her hand. To my (perhaps less cautious) eye, there are enough stylistic similarities between the note and other examples of her hand to remove any doubts. And, as it was she who preserved the clippings, it is logical that it would be Mary Marshall who actually did write the added lines. This would indicate that the additional commentary was an accurate account of what was actually said.

The addendum reads:

Mr. Jones, Secretary of the Trades Council, in Seconding the vote of thanks to the Lecturer, said that working men wd [would] have been saved many blunders in the past if they had been familiar with such instruction as they had heard to-night.

Mr. Marshall in reply said he would like to sum up what Mr. Jones had said in two words. First, that it would be good for working men to study political economy, and second, that it would be good for political economy for working men to study it. Political Economy had been too much studied from the side of the capitalists: even impartial students like himself found it easier to learn the capitalists side than the working man. The best hope of the progress of the science was in its being taken up by working men.

What one should make of this is uncertain. One interpretation could be that, as the lectures were organized under the auspices of the Evening Class Extension Committee of Bristol University College and were addressed to a largely working class audience, Marshall's remarks were nothing more than a sop to the assembly. Another view, representing perhaps the opposite end of the interpretative spectrum might be that here Marshall admits to a capitalist class bias in economic theory, one that he sees as requiring correction by the introduction of a working class bias. If correct, then it must be concluded that Marshall saw no possibility for a "scientific" economics that would stand apart from the underlying social relations comprising capitalism.

I suspect that given Marshall's early concerns for reform and the fate of workers (though from a rather paternalistic point of view) – the period in which he expressed some socialist (with a very small "s") sympathies – these closing remarks are rather an expression of Marshall's early and continuing efforts to broaden the scope of economic theory beyond that predicated upon the standard view of the individualist "economic man" that continues to pervade the economic literature (on which, see Groenewegen, pp. 570-617, *passim*). Given recent developments where such a "man" is less pervasive, perhaps Marshall's campaign has achieved some limited success.

\*. This note was written while I was Visiting Scholar, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge. I wish to thank Roland Thomas and Alexandra Saunders of the Marshall library, Cambridge, for their most kind and generous assistance.

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#### REFERENCES

- Groenewegen P. (1995), *A Soaring Eagle: Alfred Marshall 1842-1924*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar.
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