

**Tiziano Raffaelli, Eugenio Biagini, Rita McWilliams
Tullberg, (eds.), *Alfred Marshall's Lectures to Women. Some
Economic Questions Directly Connected to the Welfare of
the Laborer, with a foreword by Giacomo Becattini***

Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995, pp. xv + 198.

Antonella Picchio

Alfred Marshall's Lectures to Women is indeed a thought-provoking book that leaves scope for several possible readings of the different dimensions of Marshall's social thought. As a reader, I was continuously induced to react to the text: with curiosity for Marshall as a young lecturer and intellectual; with patience for the heavy preaching tone of his lectures; with rage for discrimination against women in education; with feminist pride, to counterbalance his increasing chauvinism; and last, but by no means least, with genuine involvement in the intellectual challenge that the social question poses to theories and theorists whenever they face it directly.

The book contains six lectures delivered by Marshall at Cambridge during Easter Term 1873. It also includes a set of outlines of the lectures, and the two articles *The Future of the Working Classes* and *The Bee-Hive Debate*.

The final product is a well-constructed open box whereby what the lectures deliver, how, when, to whom and why all become relevant questions. It also succeeds in giving a flavour of the intellectual and moral mood of the times, and some insights into Victorian Cambridge and the movement in favour of higher education for women. It is easy to sympathize with the young girls who were preparing the ground for the entrance of women into such an exclusive and chauvinist institution as Cambridge University: so exclusive that it would take until 1948 for women's degrees to be fully recognized, while full equality of opportunities in the profession of academic economists has not yet been granted, either at Cambridge or elsewhere.

There are many threads which can be unravelled with great enjoyment, and the contributors offer good guidance for doing so. In the foreword, Becattini introduces Marshall as a young scholar, praising his commitment to the improvement of the working classes and his ability in avoiding the trap of fashionable radical ideologies of "progressive statism". Indeed, I would say that Marshall's repeated praises of Octavia Hill and her work in the Charity Organization Society reveal that the progressive Marshall rather leaned on a Christian social tradition, as is made clear in Lecture VI. Raffaelli speculates on Marshall's analytical method based on a continuous adjusting of focus to see both the complexity of the system and abstract visions. Qualitatively speaking, microscopes and telescopes see different things: while the complexity of social conditions requires moral judgements, scientific abstractions are assumed to be ethically neutral, and as such cannot deal with the question of social justice. Biagini, for his part, digs his knife into this Victorian moral enthusiast. He does the job cleanly and effectively. McWilliams Tullberg, for her part, tells the story of discrimination against women in higher education at Cambridge: nothing is more effective in disclosing male bias than putting it into an historical perspective. She is puzzled by Marshall's change of attitude, from supporter to opponent of women's higher education. I think that the quotation on page 67 indicates that marriage, rather than career, is the real turning point. I imagine that the hypochondriac Marshall quite liked Mrs. Marshall "keeping the household in harmony and making it possible for her husband to be cheered and soothed in his evenings at home".

All contributions are highly refined, and greatly enrich the book and the pleasure of reading it. They would deserve a more detailed reviewing.

The first thread that I unravelled is that of Marshall as a young and excellent lecturer. It is nice to intrude in

somebody's else teaching through outlines, lectures notes and reading lists (weighted on the basis of progressive difficulties and according to audience). The topic – the conditions of the working classes – connotes teaching with passion and commitment. It is not difficult to imagine the emotional impact on the young Mary Paley who is the student taking and editing the notes.

None of the contributors attempts to analyze method, women and the social question all together. They infer from the lectures what Marshall thought of women, the conditions of the working classes and method, and keep them separate as if gender had nothing to do with the other two sides of the triangle. In fact, I am quite convinced that one of the most interesting aspects of the book lies in the link between these three elements.

With regard to the conditions of the "proletariat", Marshall showed optimism in regard to the evolution and improvement of the race (a classical term that he did not use). Education is the active factor, a kind of alchemic element capable of transforming destitution and degradation into a self-sustained process of individual and social human development. In his romantic humanism, he mentioned the "poetry of the multiplication table" and advanced a curious concept of "the vivifying power of joy" which acts as a social multiplier. In such moral enthusiasm he even quoted Greek lyrics that Marx, too, had quoted.

Social cooperation in the labour market, moral rules, beauty and imagination become the effective tools to relieve the conditions of the working classes. The institutional framework of this virtuous process is not so much the central State, but a fair labour market, the family, the various churches, and some help from the local government.

With regard to women, Marshall was right in seeing them as "pillars of society", as Beveridge later put it. Recognition of their indispensable roles was then used to seclude them in their reproductive role, at home and in society. Middle-class women – who are seen as idle – can be educated to perform their social role in a professional way. The "Women's Lectures" were designed to teach them to do so.

What he could not have imagined was that, in the XXth century, women would challenge their destiny as social reproducers, not only to enter the labour market which they had never abandoned, but to pose the social question in new terms, starting precisely from their reproductive experience and its inherent ethical content. In this context, the methodological separation between the "science" of markets and the ethics of social reproduction is also challenged. Marshall would be appalled to discover that, nowadays, there is an academic journal called "Feminist Economics" in which the intellectual great-grand-daughters of Mary Paley and her classmates are daring to attempt to put economic theory, women and the social question on a different basis. With the change in views *on* women into views *by* women, analytical perspectives also change and social responsibilities are searched for within the core of scientific abstractions, as well as in social policy.

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