

Ringrazio anch'io moltissimo il Professor Weintraub e con grande piacere presento questa quarta Antonio de Viti de Marco Lecture, che questa volta, grazie al suo carattere interdisciplinare, ha raccolto un pubblico scelto di studiosi e di studenti di matematica, di economia e di storia; è un'occasione rara e ringrazio tutti voi di essere qui.

Come avrete visto dall'invito, il Professor Weintraub è fondatore del più importante centro di ricerca americano di Storia del Pensiero Economico, nell'Università di Duke. E' editor della maggiore rivista della disciplina, la History of Political Economy. E' stato presidente della Associazione Americana di Storia del Pensiero Economico (la History of Economic Society).

La sua fama internazionale è testimoniata dal fatto che i suoi libri ed articoli sono stati tradotti in diverse lingue di tutto il mondo, e che è stato chiamato ad insegnare in università di tre continenti.

Ma adesso passo all'inglese per introdurre il nostro relatore. I switch to English.

I read in Professor Weintraub's biography that he: "was trained as a mathematician and began his career as a mathematical economist". I also read that he focused "upon the history of the interconnection between mathematics and economics". In particular he studied "the transformation of economics from a historical to a mathematical discipline". I wish to add that in his research he is very much concerned with contextualization, as you will see from this lecture. Incidentally, this is one of the main teachings that Professor Weintraub has transmitted to all of us, scholars in this field: the importance of contextualize economic theories within the frame of intellectual history.

This is the perfect occasion for me to bring up a question that has been on my mind on and off since the beginning of my career.

The question concerns the history of those scholars, like Professor Weintraub, who decided to abandon mathematical economics, and to turn to a different approach, for example historical or sociological.

Actually, he belongs to a long and glorious tradition of mathematicians who started off by being fascinated by the project of mathematizing economics, and then decided to give it up. It would be interesting to investigate their reasons.

For some of them it was a sort of disillusion, or disappointment (like Condorcet with his *Mathématique Sociale*, or Laplace).

Some of them did it for different reasons: I'm thinking to Cournot who wrote the same book twice, the second time without mathematics, maybe because his previous book was not a success, or just because he became blind, or finally because he had adhered to the philosophical doctrine of vitalism.

Some of them gave up when they realized that there was something else beyond those aspects of reality which can be formalized, something too important to be neglected: I'm referring here for example to those who turned to sociology, like the Italian marginalist Pareto, and to a certain extent also Pantaleoni.

I wonder if there are some specific features of economics that, in the whole history of our discipline, drove some mathematicians away, after a phase of attraction to the intellectual project of applying mathematical tools to economic theory.

Of course for most of the history of economic thought this wasn't the case. In fact, the lecture we are going to listen to today is about a successful story of mathematization of economics, a fruitful occasion which shaped economic modeling (I quote) "for several generations of economists to come".

Let's now listen to this rich, "thick", and fascinating story of the birth of linear programming, not before having once again expressed our gratitude to Professor Weintraub for being with us here in Lecce.