

“Beyond the State”: Pluralist Political Theory in the Thirties

by Pietro Costa

The essay points out some aspects of the “pluralistic” theory, a political and legal doctrine which spreads out in the first decades of Twentieth century. Pluralism grows up as a critic of the Nineteenth century doctrine of sovereignty. In a “pluralistic” perspective social order is not the effect of the absolute will of the sovereign State, but depends on the interaction of individuals and social groups. The essay mainly refers to the theories of the Russian-French sociologist Gurvitch, to the English pluralists (Laski and Cole), to the founders of legal “institutionalism” (Hauriou and Romano) and finally touches on the influence pluralism had on the antitotalitarian debate during the Thirties.

Beyond Citizenship: What are Civic Associations Good For?

by Paul Lichterman

Many social scientists have argued that civic associations make people better citizens. In fact, we need a concept of “social membership”, separate from citizenship, to understand what civic associations contribute to civic life. A group that practices social membership has a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, the wider community outside the group. Drawing on Tocqueville, Parsons, and others, this essay develops the concept of social membership, contrasting it with concepts of citizenship. Examples from an ethnographic study of American volunteer groups show that only some civic associations cultivate social membership. To strengthen civil society, it is not enough for civic associations to have a good political imagination; they need to practice social membership.

Dilemmas of Democracy in *Participatory Technology Assessment*

by Luigi Pellizzoni

The paper deals with some implications of radical uncertainty for participatory democracy, and more precisely for Participatory Technology Assessment (Pta). Two main forms of Pta are singled out. One is aimed at involving lay citizen and highlighting a public opinion. The other is addressed to stakeholder groups and organisations, in terms of interest mediation and inclusion of their own insight into a problem. Radical uncertainty makes “intractable” many issues. Its consequences

are explored from the viewpoint of new science, deliberative democracy, and network governance. It calls for a rethinking of the aims of public deliberation, and a reinterpretation of the dilemma between opinion- and position-oriented Pta. When facts and values overlap, and are deeply controversial, the only opportunity for mutual understanding may be to look for practical, «local» answers based on different positional insights, while the threat of fragmentation may be contrasted only by keeping participatory processes open to other contexts, problem-definitions and concerns.

Activism without Politics

by Nina Eliasoph

One imagines activists to be people who introduce specifically political ideas into the public arena. But this ethnographic study shows how and why some US activists sound more public-spirited behind the scenes than they sound in the public arena. When gathering informally, these anti-toxics activists could carry on thoughtful discussions about a range of issues. But when they spoke at demonstrations or other public events, they spoke as self-interested property owners and moms, leaving their more general political analyses unsaid. Once in a while, the activists would voice political ideas in public, but then the press would ignore them. Through this cycle of political evaporation, Americans construct an empty public sphere.

Voluntary Organizations and Political Attitudes

by Giorgio Osti

The paper uses the European Value Study-1999 database in order to analyse the relationship between membership in civil society associations and political attitudes. The former is declined according to a list of fifteen kinds of voluntary organizations. The distinction between “formal members” and “volunteers” is specified, too. The latter are summed up in some dimensions: the importance and interest in politics, the confidence on institutions, the justification of antisocial behaviour, opinions on democracy, attention to marginalized persons. People attending associations are usually more sensible to politics in every corner of Europe. Those doing unpaid work (volunteers) are even more sensible. However, there is a neat cleavage between Eastern and Western countries. In the first ones the ratio of association’s membership is much lower and the trust in democracy and in institutions is very weak. The differences between Northern and Southern European countries are smaller, but they suggests many interesting considerations.