

away with those more worthy who became their opponents in the drive for unlimited and unconditional power. In Germany, Hegel's path was imitated by the neo-Kantians, who in turn served as model for Durkheim's neopositivistic neo-Kantian academic power politics.

The reassertion of participation as central for social theory, even for understanding rationality, is due to the work of Alessandro Pizzorno, who in a series of articles has shown, starting from inside the tradition of Western rationalism, that considerations of participation and presence cannot be ignored.

Alessandro Pizzorno: Participation as the precondition of rationality

Alessandro Pizzorno (1924–2019) is one of the most distinguished social scientists of the past long half century – certainly without a peer in Italy. Having studied at the University of Torino, as well as in Vienna and Paris, he taught both in Italy and at the University of Teheran before taking up a series of most prestigious appointments at Nuffield College (Oxford University), at Harvard University, where for years he was Head of Department, at the State University of Milan, where he built up the Department, and finally at the European University Institute in Florence, where I had the great privilege of having been his colleague for five years, until his retirement – and where he stayed on as Emeritus professor until 2017. If his work is not as known as it should be, this is partly because it is situated outside the beaten tracks, and partly because he was a perfectionist who had great reluctance in letting any written work out of his hands, especially in English.

Pizzorno's work was woven around the nature of identity and recognition, with a focus on the meaning of rationality. This is also a main reason why his work, in spite of its scope and depth, lacks a decisive book publication, as 'rationality' is a theme that is almost impossible to treat in a full monograph. In the modern world 'rationality' is something inside of which we all exist, and so its specific nature has become invisible for us, can only be studied through a series of short explorations into its depths, much helped by questions from others. Thus, his two arguably most important investigations were a response to his commentators in his 2000 Festschrift, and an almost 100-page-long essay (Pizzorno 2007), though these assume familiarity with his earlier work (see especially Pizzorno 1986, 1987, 1991; also Pizzorno 2008, a shortened English version of the arguments). In these Pizzorno demonstrates, from inside mainstream rationalism, that participation is necessary for any explanation, in particular for assessing whether a particular course of action is rational, so it is of exceptional value.

Pizzorno's ideas on participation and rationality are based on his work on recognition. The starting point is the Hobbesian idea of 'self-preservation', which for him is not a solution but a dilemma. In order to be preserved, the 'self' must be worth preserving. This assumes that it is recognised as valuable. Self-preservation can't be achieved in isolation from others: 'I need other human beings to judge that I am worth preserving' (Pizzorno 1991: 218). Recognition is mutual, circular, shared, providing a mirror for others in which, through the others, the self can be

seen (218–9). In a 1994 conference paper recognition is defined as ‘the will and capacity to enter in communication with somebody else, keeping in mind, even competitively or malevolently, the value of his presence’ (Pizzorno 1994: 6). One accepts the recognition of his/her own worth only from others who are recognised by the self as valuable, and vice versa. ‘The “original resource” a human being can offer to another human being is the capacity to recognize the worth of the other to exist – a resource which cannot be produced if it is not shared’ (Pizzorno 1991: 218). Instead of assuming an ‘original agreement’ that the premises of the theory cannot explain, Pizzorno only assumes the ‘presence of other people’ (221).² The key step is the move from ‘recognition’ to ‘circles’ of recognition. Given their ‘mutual recognition’, human beings ‘have received an identity, and they may count on being recognised by some circles of others. These circles make recognition durable and, hence, trust rational. Individual interests grow out of different positions in the networks and circles of recognition’ (Pizzorno 1991: 219).

Furthermore, acts of recognition (of the worth of others) assume criteria applied in such acts that are shared by others. It is in this way that ‘the process through which reciprocal recognition, giving names, and forming identities produce social stability and continuity’, while at the same time it ‘generates individuation and distinction’ (Pizzorno 1991: 221).

The aim of social research is to explain what is going on in social life, what actions are taken and why, and who are those acting. Explanation thus must start with the assignment of identities to social actors, through some classificatory schema, naming and identifying actors. Such identification, however, claims Pizzorno – and perhaps this is the best way to introduce his ideas – is always arbitrary (2000: 235). Who tells us who is actually acting? In what capacity? For Pizzorno, there are three such possibilities – three modalities of arbitrariness, which must first be identified, so that we can start our search to reduce arbitrariness. First, such identities are assigned by the actors themselves – but this, while certainly important, cannot be accepted at face value. The second option, assigning such identity by the researcher, however, is equally unacceptable – and the importance of this point cannot be exaggerated, as Pizzorno throws into the wastebasket any neo-positivist, neo-Kantian, or neo-Marxist mode of social research and theorising. This is because, and fully in line with Weber and Mauss, main sources Pizzorno’s sociology, the central aim of social research is to assign meaning to the acts performed, so starting with preconceived categories precludes a serious study of meaning. One must search for a third way, outside full involvement and complete detachment.³ This is offered by others who are also present, so also participate, thus can assist us assigning meaning to the actions by reconstructing the situation in which the acts took place, and also to assign a meaningful identity to the actors.

In order to explain what is going on it is not enough to give an account in terms of intentions, which only the actors can offer, in case they are honest; and neither is it sufficient to be well-versed in theoretical frameworks – this would only enclose the researcher inside his/her pre-existing mental framework. Explanation must start with mapping the situation in which the actors find themselves, so must prepare a map of experiences, akin to Koselleck’s ‘horizon of experiences’. This is

because – and here comes one of Pizzorno’s masterstrokes valorising participation – social research has a particular possibility, and duty: the investigator cannot be satisfied with finding an explanation to the events with which one is happy, but must test his ideas by explaining them to those who carried out the acts. This does not mean that we must repeat their explanation. The researcher’s explanation must be different from familiar accounts. But it must be *linked* to internal meanings, opening them to a broader area of participation (243).⁴ The researcher cannot remain outside, coming up from the height of his theoretical sophistication or critical position with a supposedly objective, universalistic explanation; must come down,⁵ become involved, gain the meaning of the events in concrete situations and contexts; and furthermore, once this understanding gained, must test whether he can explain to participants this understanding, making them face how their actions look to somebody who took the trouble of trying to understand what was going on. The corollary is that social research, instead of enforcing a supposedly ‘omnipresent rationality’ (243), rather opens up and comes to recognise and valorise diversity. Genuine explanation lies both beyond taken for granted familiarity and external objectivity; it offers the risk, and also the pleasure, of a kind of understanding that previously was not accessible, either to the participants or the researcher.

Pizzorno took the theme further in the most important essay of his 2007 collection, that had ‘diversity’ in its title, while the essay title is ‘Rationality and recognition’ (2007: 109–197). This is the only chapter of the second part entitled ‘The difficulty of rationality’; while the first part, containing three chapters, has the much-related title ‘Explaining in front of an audience’. All this alludes to the central theme of this long essay, fundamental for questions of method in social research: what it means to explain a particular set of social acts in terms of its ‘rationality’. While for an economist, and those influenced by theories of ‘rational choice’, it is plainly evident what rationality means, for Pizzorno this is by no means the case. This is not a refusal or criticism of rationality: what he demonstrates is that the standard, taken for granted meaning of rationality is based on accepting the meaning of a situation given by partisans of economic rationality, participants of a certain sector of academic life, the ‘natives’; but if we start to scratch the surface and go beyond the unquestioned acceptance of such rationality, we soon are forced to realise that the emperor is without clothes; the theory of rational choice cannot give an account of itself, so it is by no means ‘rational’. Or, as Pizzorno claims in the title of the first and longest section of the chapter, this theory is nothing else but ‘common sense [meaning: what in our modern societies has become (mis)taken as the common sense] theorised’; and so it is simply an ‘insufficient theory’ (109).

The 2007 chapter goes into further details concerning the meaning of participating in a given situation as a precondition of understanding the meaning of what is going on, especially in so far as the assessment of the ‘rationality’ of a particular course of action is concerned. Even further, such clarification, while still staying inside the modern European tradition of rationalism, not only manages to pin down the social foundations on which such an idea of rationality is based, but also, and beyond the

concrete concerns of Pizzorno, exposes the bases of such tradition in theatricality. So, while modern rationalism has social foundations, such foundations are rooted not in genuine social life, but its theatricalisation.

The chapter starts by an extended critique of rational choice theories, a slightly modified version of the 2007 Handbook article against 'rational choice'. The central argument is presented at the end of the second section where Pizzorno, after discussing, through nine quite different cases, whether the behaviour of participants could be considered as rational, draws the theoretical inferences. The perhaps most important, highly Platonic inference – recalling the *Theaetetus* – is that there is no universally valid criterion of rationality; rationality simply cannot be defined: 'we are not enabled to give a definition of rationality that is valid for every case' (171). The observer does not have a privileged, universal, Kantian position from which it can assess and evaluate, from the outside, whether a certain action is rational or not. But this does not mean that the actor is in full control, as rationality is irreducible to intentions. Here Pizzorno offers, if not a paradoxical definition of rationality, after claiming it impossible, but a specification of what it means when one assesses the rationality of an action: it is a judgment (171); moreover, it is primarily a judgment over a person, and not just an action (176); a judgment that can be safely made only once the observer controlled this judgment through its reception by the participants; and, even more, that such assessment of rationality itself is judged by an audience that moves beyond the circle of concrete participants, and which possibly involves – introducing another key term – a new 'grammatic of the situation' (171–2).

The argument is summed up in the penultimate paragraph of the 'excursus' that must be quoted almost in full and commented extensively:

the judgment of the rationality of an acting is relative until the observer, reconstructing the grammatic of the situation observed, transmits to the audience the interpretation of the participants and opens the discourse which the circle that posed the question of the need for an explanation expected.

(172)

The assessment of rationality is thus negotiated between two circles: the circle of the actor and the other participants of the action (context of the action, locals or 'natives'); and the circle of the observer and his colleagues, or a broader, second order audience, who at the end assesses the rationality of the actions, and also the rationality of the explanation, but only after incorporating the assessment, in so far as it is possible, of the first order audience. In this way 'a new conception of rationality is born, which can offer itself as valid only once the modifications in the expectations of this second circle are taken into consideration' (172). However, the validity of an assessment beyond that cannot be decided in advance, as that depends 'on another event, and thus on another theoretical investigation that will again pose the question of what was meant there by rationality'. Beyond such limits, it makes no sense to assert rationality – any such claim will be merely ideological.

This is as far as the thinking of Pizzorno goes in problematising the theory of rational choice and the connected idea of instrumental rationality, perspectives that simply regurgitate as universally valid explanation the contemporary common-sense attribution of intentions to participants, and which are thus woefully inadequate as scholarly explanation. At this point, and in the spirit of his inferences, in the third section entitled 'Recognition as sociality' Pizzorno spells out in further detail the meaning of the two circles introduced above: the meaning of the situation or context of the participants, or the social nature of rationality; and the situatedness of one's own arguments, or the researcher inside the broader tradition of social theoretical understanding. While incorporating classical social theory, the central figures are Hobbes, Adam Smith, Rousseau, and Hegel. The discussion on Hegel adds little new to his previous, sustained discussions in his articles on recognition, but his ideas on Hobbes go well beyond his classic 1991 article, as while there Hobbes was considered a methodological individualist, focusing on self-preservation, here Hobbes is presented as a theorist of recognition.⁶ However, the most important part of the section is its discussion of Adam Smith and Rousseau, both in terms of Pizzorno's analysis of their ideas about the inherently social aspects of recognition, but also by implication, in bringing out the inherently theatrical character of modern sociality as a problem. This adds a further layer of problematisation to that of positivism, instrumental rationality, and analytical philosophy: these approaches not simply reproduce the 'common-sense' practices of modernity, but such practices are inherently theatrical, thus deeply unreal. The real, effective, social bases of instrumental rationality unearthed by Pizzorno at the level of foundations, using the most classic figures of modern political and social philosophy, are themselves unreal, merely theatrical.

His position is expressed in the title of first subsection, 'Recognition as sociality' (172). The social basis of instrumental rationality can be traced to the works of Adam Smith, who therefore was 'the first modern thinker who emphasised the importance of the judgment of others for the individual choices' (177) – strangely enough, the same thinker most associated with modern economics. Given that Adam Smith is considered for well over two centuries as the undisputed founding father of modern economic thinking, it is difficult to say something new about his ideas and work. The last time this happened in the late 1970s, when his Glasgow lectures were rediscovered, and in this context his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was revalorised, especially concerning his ideas on sympathy, as the foundation of his economic theory.

Pizzorno takes this development further in two significant respects. According to him, the central issue concerning sociality for Adam Smith was not simply sympathy as an internal, inner, psychological predisposition shared by every human being, but that the aim of an action was not just 'to satisfy one's own autonomously formed needs, rather to obtain a favourable judgment from the others' (177). The second is the character of those others who were supposed to provide such judgment. These were not 'the usual *everyday spectators* whose gaze is upon us for a thousand reasons in every second', rather the proper judge of our actions, whose approval we desperately need, must be an 'impartial spectator' (178–9). Thus,

‘Smith built an entire system of “moral sentiments” on this concept of an “impartial spectator” whose judgment the actor would keep in mind while making his choices, and which would reinforce him in his capacity of *self-command* [sic in original]’ (177). It is thus this ‘impartial spectator’ which, through its gaze, assures the stable identity of the self over time, leading Smith to an ‘unexpected “*anti-robinsonade*” ’ (177–8). The resulting ‘I’, or ‘self’, however, will not just be ‘social’, in the sense of incorporating the others through the judgment of the ‘impartial spectator’, playing a ‘role’ according to the judgments and expectations of such an omnipotent spectator, but his mind, and even the person himself, will also be inherently schismatic, split between the judge and the actor. We can add that it is this position and perspective of the ‘impartial spectator’ that will be taken over by Kant and placed at the heart of his moral philosophy as the very foundation of personal autonomy.

It is also the same problem, in particular the terror of being judged, the fear of the gaze of the others, that is a main driving force of Rousseau’s thinking, leading him to a dramatic fight against the powers of that gaze (179–81), and so a similarly schismatic vision of the self.

In the previous pages, following Pizzorno’s thinking, we have travelled across a rather peculiar path. It was started by problematising the modern ‘scientific’ perspective excluding the idea of participation, which was transmitted to the social sciences through the logic specific to economics, instrumental rationality. It was then shown that the very assessment of the rationality of a particular act assumes incorporating the perspective of participants, as from the outside it is impossible to adjudicate whether a particular action was rational or not. One must know the identity participants attribute to themselves, through those who participate in the concrete situation, understanding the role they play. However, then, through Pizzorno’s reading of Adam Smith, it was shown that participants themselves, at least in so far as the modern world goes, incorporate an external judgment – not of ‘observers’, rather spectators, especially the ‘impartial spectator’.

In this process it became increasingly evident that the terminology used is theatrical. This is quite surprising, as the starting concerns were not theatrical. ‘Participation’ is not a theatrical category, and neither is ‘rationality’. Still, when trying to demonstrate the untenability of a purely external, rationalistic perspective, and the need to incorporate the perspective of the participants, Pizzorno was forced through his own approach, as if surreptitiously, to take up a theatrical language. The method-logical implications will be discussed in Chapter 10.

Conclusion

Through the work of Alessandro Pizzorno it was shown that neither the attribution of identity, nor the assessment of the rationality of an act can be done without paying attention to participation. However, inside the tradition of modern rationalism, participation is inherently tied to theatricality and theatricalisation. We need to go back to square one and reconstruct the meaning of participation.

Most evidently, participation means that any scholarly investigation and search for understanding must start by situating the subject matter, and the object of study, on the field to which they belong, or where their protagonists participate. Such participation is both manifold and structured. It is manifold, as everyone participates in a series of fields, networks or realms: family, relatives, friends, colleagues, native language, village, town, city, region, country, continent; ultimately, planet Earth, and then the solar system, our galaxy, the entire universe. It is also structured, taking cues from Norbert Elias (1978), as a series of concentric circles: at the core is the family, relatives, friends, and then the broader surroundings, in an ever widening circle. One's own circles are intermingled with the circles of others, in an ever more complex but still fundamentally structured manner. Networks of workplace and profession add further, 'non-linear' complexity.

For a further investigation of participation, the book will turn to hermeneutics.

Notes

- 1 For details, see Szakolczai and Thomassen (2019).
- 2 On the importance of 'presence' for political theory, see Hoppen (2021).
- 3 This implies close affinities with the approach of Norbert Elias.
- 4 Pizzorno's ideas were developed further, in the direction of the experience of 'home', by Paul O'Connor (2018).
- 5 This is the meaning of Nietzsche's famous *Untergang* in his *Zarathustra*.
- 6 The emphasis is on Chapter 16 of *Leviathan*, about the person and the mask, and on Hobbes' interest in theatre, centre of Pizzorno's great unfinished book on Hobbes, on which he worked until his last years.