Boekbespreking van: Ethics and Foreign Policy

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Karen. E. Smith and Margot Light, Ethics and Foreign Policy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, paperback ISBN 0-521-00930-8, £14.95 (US $21.95), hardback ISBN 0-521-80451-9, £40.00 ($59.95)

As a consequence of the rising tide of armed conflicts over the last decades and an increased media attention for flagrant violations of basic human rights, there has been a revived interest in issues of international justice and ethics of international affairs. An increasing number of politicians and scholars are posing probing and critical questions about these subjects. One of the more intriguing questions concerns the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. Modern technology provides us with the means to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states in order to protect people from human rights abuses, but are we ever justified in doing so? When do we have a legitimate reason to transgress the fundamental rights of states to political sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination? Or put differently, on the basis of which criterion or rule are we able to test the justifiability of humanitarian interventions? Are we, for example, only justified to intervene in the case of genocide and ethnic cleansing, or do we also include large-scale starvation and preventable diseases? Most of the time it remains unclear on the basis of which criteria international organizations, such as the United Nations or NATO, act. And, even if we are convinced that we are allowed to use force in defence of certain global humanitarian norms, should we actually do so? If NATO starts a humanitarian action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, should it also intervene in Burundi and Indonesia? Why intervene in some cases and not in others? The pertinence and resilience with which these questions are being posed seems to contradict the realist claim that moral arguments and moral norms have no place in a discussion of foreign policy and international relations.

The legitimacy of humanitarian intervention is, of course, not the only question that is being raised. On a more limited scale we are confronted with the ethical dimension of the idea of foreign policy. We have to ask ourselves to what extent the foreign policy of states and international actors can and should be in line with certain fundamental ethical concerns. This question can be divided into three sub-questions. First of all, we have to know what ethical foreign policy exactly means. How, for example, should we settle conflicts between national interests and ethics? Should we promote human rights and democracy in China even if this implies that we lose substantial new business opportunities in the lucrative Chinese market? Should we sell arms to Indonesia even if we know that they will be used for internal repression? Second, we should be aware of the specific ethical questions that foreign policy-makers face and the instruments available to deal with them. International actors like the European Union and the United States try to export democracy and human rights on the basis of aid for human rights programmes, political support for internal democratization processes, and diplomatic sanctions. But what other kind of instruments do we have and how effective are they? When, for example, will there be an encompassing consensus on the jurisdiction and authority of the international

criminal court? Finally, we have to ask ourselves to what extent international actors do in fact incorporate moral norms into their foreign policy. If one of the mission statements of Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office includes the promotion of human rights, civil liberties and democracy, we have to ask ourselves to what extent practice is in accordance with this claim, as former foreign secretary, Robin Cook, so eloquently put it in 1997. What kind of problems do Britain and other states face?

These three kinds of questions make up the core of the latest contribution to the Cambridge University Press series on international studies. The genesis of this book lies, according to the introduction, in a conference on 'Ethics and Foreign Policy' that was held in November 1998 by the Department of International Relations of the London School of Economics. Like so many other proceedings that develop into a book, it consists of a mixture of theoretical perspectives, thematic approaches and case studies. The book contains three main parts that coincide with the three kinds of questions we mentioned above. The first part presents three different theoretical perspectives on the idea of ethical foreign policy. The contributions are by Chris Brown, Mervyn Frost and Molly Cochran.

In spite of the fact that two of these authors, notably Brown and Frost, have won their spurs in the field of ethics and international affairs, the overall impression of the first part of the book is not altogether positive. Brown's rejection of the traditional antithesis between foreign policy interests and ethical values is sound and interesting, though not really innovative. Brown is definitely right in claiming that the ethical dimension of foreign policy is part and parcel of the idea of membership in the international society. The primary duty of states to pursue the interests of their peoples is of course not purely interest based. It is a moral obligation that has to be understood in the context "of a set of wider duties towards other states, and, through other states, the rest of humanity" (p.26). But this is not a new claim. Similar, and to some extent better, claims can be found in the work of Beitz, Rawls and Donnelly. In comparison to Brown's exposition on national interests and foreign policy, Cochran's chapter on a pragmatist perspective on ethical foreign policy lacks in clarity and persuasiveness. After reading the text I was still not sure what her analysis of the work of Walter Lippmann, John Dewey and Jane Adams can add to our understanding of ethical foreign policy. Of course, we have to break down the realist/idealist dichotomy (p.68) and conceive of morality as a deliberative and democratic process (p.72), but what does this imply? Frost's contribution makes up for this lack of clarity by giving a clear exposition of the moral justification of humanitarian intervention and the role global civil society plays in this.

The second part of the book contains four different contributions on the ethical issues that states and international actors face in their foreign affairs and the instruments they use to promote certain global humanitarian norms. The topics that are being treated are: the export of democracy as a foreign policy goal; the dilemmas that non-governmental organizations face in promoting human rights; the history of the International Criminal Court; and finally a discussion of ethical foreign policy from the perspective of a former peace movement activist. Although the different

contributions are reasonably well argued, they lack a clear link to the theoretical perspectives that were presented in the first part of the book. An exception to this rule is the contribution by K.M. Fierke. Her exposition on the possibility of an ethical foreign policy gives a very nice reflection on the way in which both theory and practice can come together in constructing and evaluating such a policy.

The last part of the book contains critical studies of the foreign policies of the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. All three chapters consider the extent to which these states and international actors conduct foreign policy with an ethical dimension. Are they really consistent in the way they approach the ethical issues that they have tried to put on the foreign policy agenda? Take, for example, the various principles and fundamental values that underlie the different conventions and basic documents of the European Union. Among these are the indivisibility of civil and political rights, and the interdependency of democracy and human rights. A good example of this can be found in the preamble to the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (1950) in which the different members of the Council of Europe reaffirm their belief that democracy and the rule of law are essential for ensuring respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of every individual. European Union membership is even conditional on satisfying these criteria. The same line of thought, with the same human rights clause, can be found in different trade agreements of the European Union, like for example Article 96 of the Cotonou agreement (the former Lomé Convention), and the Code of Conduct on Arms Export (1998). All these different conventions and codes of conduct point to the fact that the European Union tries to incorporate human rights considerations into its foreign policy. But the real question, of course, remains the same. How consistent has the EU been in incorporating these considerations? "Is it a good international citizen; does it forsake commercial and political advantages where they conflict with human rights?" (p.193) The same question applies of course to the United States and the United Kingdom. Especially intriguing is the chapter by Dunne and Wheeler on Great Britain under Tony Blair. Their contribution makes up for some of the weaker parts of the rest of the book. One is left with the overall impression that *Ethics and Foreign Policy* is worth reading, but could have been better.

Ronald Tinnevelt

Mei Li Vos, International Cooperation Between Politics and Practice: How Dutch Cooperation Changed Remarkably Little After a Diplomatic Rupture. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2001, ISBN 9-05589-201-7, Euro 29.50.

Much of the literature on foreign aid and development cooperation focuses on donor motivation or on the consequences for the recipient state. Mei Li Vos's dissertation charts a welcome alternative course: she investigates the implementation of

development cooperation and, more specifically, the change – or lack thereof – in the relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia after the latter's government cancelled all projects conducted with the former in March 1992. Vos's research approximates what Alexander George has termed process tracing, except that the latter was interested in the *decision-making* process while Vos is interested primarily in *implementation*. Such close investigation of policy implementation is common in other sub-fields of political science, but has been done only rarely in foreign aid policy. This makes Vos's dissertation an innovative and worthwhile project.

The research is centred on a comparative case study design. Building on Putnam's work on two-level games and borrowing from the literature on policy networks, Vos utilizes Laurence Lynn's three level game metaphor, which focuses on the political, policy management and implementation games (pp. 32-35). The first two levels are the common focus of the study of foreign policy, while the last is rarely represented. The book's case studies are designed to provide a structured, focused comparison of thirteen aid projects in three different policy areas: cultural, industrial/technical and legal cooperation. Interestingly, Vos references Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' (p. 47) in her explanation of her methodology, but never refers to either Arend Lijphart's or Alexander George's work on the case study method in comparative and foreign policy research, respectively.

In each of the case studies, Vos's quest is to determine whether or not the diplomatic rupture of 1992 resulted in a change in the project – i.e., whether it was ended, reformulated, or whether it continued unaffected. In addition, she seeks to determine the relative importance of, and interactions between, decision-making in each of the three games. Of course, the expectation is that the diplomatic rupture will have had a significant impact. Vos's subtitle indicates her conclusion that there has in fact been little change. Her most intriguing conclusions do not pertain to the (lack of) policy change, but to the relative importance of each of the three policy games.

It seems that Vos cannot always decide whether there was or was not significant change: in the conclusion to the first case study, concerning the Department of Dutch Language and Culture at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, she writes that "the decision of 1992 altered the objectives of the department in a subtle way" (p. 94), suggesting that only minor and insignificant change took place. However, in the preceding paragraphs Vos describes how the department changed from one dominated by Dutch senior personnel, who controlled the structure of the curriculum, to one which is now a "completely Indonesian affair", with a curriculum that better suits the needs of its Indonesian student body (p. 93). That seems a rather substantial change: while the department continued to provide courses for those who wished to learn the Dutch language, the nature of those courses and the learning objectives which guided them had changed markedly. Vos eventually recognizes this in her conclusions (p. 236). At the very least, the interpretation in the case study and the concluding chapters should have been reconciled better.