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The Search for Theory X

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zich', die kunnen worden onderzocht op hun onderlinge relaties zonder de 'bron' van deze uitspraken in de analyse te betrekken. Morgenthau wijst deze mogelijkheid van de hand. Grofweg gezegd is voor hem alle kennis belangenkennis. Dat deze stellingname uiteindelijk inhoudt dat oplossingen voor problemen, zoals het vraagstuk van oorlog en vrede, niet rationeel kunnen worden bediscussieerd, lijkt Morgenthau zich niet te hebben gerealiseerd. Zie: Nobel (1985), 80 & 71, Morgenthau (1946, 1965 edn.), 123-136, 204, 168, 187 & 154-155, en Popper, Karl R., *Conjectures and refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge* (New York 1962, 1968 edn.), 340-341.

32. Nobel (1985), 28.
33. Nobel (1985), 88.
34. Geciteerd in: Morgenthau (1946, 1965 edn.), 220. Morgenthau doelt op hetzelfde wanneer hij opmerkt: '... what one can say in an original way about foreign policy is extremely limited. You can apply the basic principles to new situations, but essentially one says the same thing all over again in a different geographic, political, and military context'. Zie: Nobel (1985), 172.
35. F.A. Hayek, *Studies in philosophy, politics and economics* (Londen 1967), 32-33.
36. Hayek (1967), 10.
37. Nobel (1985), 83.

Literatuur

The search for theory X

Grahame Lock

Naar aanleiding van: D. Parfit, **Reasons and Persons**, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984, xv + 543 p.

Derek Parfit (Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford) has recently published a thick and dense work on *Reasons and Persons*[1] which has been greeted as perhaps the 'greatest work of substantive moral philosophy in the utilitarian tradition' in the past century.[2] The object of the book is a double one: the theory of rationality (what does one have good reason to do?) and ethics (what ought one to do?). These are topics of importance to political science and political theory.

There exists a theory of rationality which holds that it is rational for each person to act so as to maximize either his own interest or the satisfaction of his own desires. By 'interest' or 'desires' can be further understood either present interest/desires of future interest/desires.

The distinction between interest and desire is fundamental here. One can, even though one desires one's own good, also desire things which conflict with one's own good – say, smoking cigarettes. One can therefore desire not only what is not in one's own objective interest, but even what is not in one's subjectively perceived interest. Will it then be *irrational* to allow such a desire any weight? The answer to this question will help determine what kind of theory of rationality one adopts.

The distinction between present and future interest or desire is just as decisive. Someone's present interest may be perceived to lie in earning more money. But this may require an investment of time and nerves which leads to stress, bad health and primature invalidity. Does the problem lie in such cases in a simple misperception by someone of his true interest, or is it rather a matter of a more or less conscious bias towards the present? Both are real possibilities. Is it rational to act on such a bias towards the present? Is it irrational to be less concerned with the prospect of falling ill in 30 years' time than with that of falling ill today?

(We *do* often act on a bias towards the present. But *ought* we to?)

Where desires have to be weighed against one another, the difficulty is even more evident. Take the case of a rational left-wing student, whose greatest desire is revolution. Suppose that he knows (on the basis of reliable sociological data) that the chance is great that, at the age of 40, he will have abandoned his existing political views and have taken up right-wing positions. Should he *now* take that probability into account? Should he attempt so to plan his life that he refrains from actions whose result would be seriously to prejudice the satisfaction of his probable right-wing desires of 20 years hence? (It would be embarrassing for a 40-year-old conservative if he had been arrested at the age of 20 for subversive activities. Should the radical student therefore in any case avoid breaking the law?) But it would be difficult or impossible to calculate in this manner the comparative consequences, for the satisfaction of probable future desires, of alternative lines of action. It would be unreasonable to attempt a calculation of this kind. Is it therefore, on this ground alone, irrational to attempt to base one's actions on a rational consideration of their comprehensive effects.

A further complication is that someone may of course desire other things than the satisfaction of his own desires. He may desire the satisfaction of the interests and/or desires of (certain) other people. Does the theory of rationality have nothing to say about these alternatives? Or is it impossible rationally to will what is immoral? Parfit in any case believes that 'we should reject the assumption that compared with the bias in one's own favour, every other desire is less rational'.[3] If someone's desires are not – taken singly and as a set – irrational, yet contradict his self-interest, then given those desires, it would be irrational for him to act in his self-interest.

But might a desire be in itself irrational? It would be irrational, Parfit believes, to desire something which is not worth desiring. In practice there are however few things which are intrinsically not worth desiring. Death might be desirable if it puts an end to pain. Pain might be desirable if it brings pleasure (the case of masochism). Nor is a whim irrational: say, as in Thomas Nagel's example, the desire that there should be parsley on the moon. A pattern of desire may however be irrational: a preference for a greater pain over a lesser pain, as long and only as long as the greater occurs on a Tuesday (where Tuesday has no further significance). For 'it being Tuesday' is no good, relevant reason, therefore no reason at all in such a case. And, unlike a whim, such a pattern of desire has non-negligible injurious consequences.

If there is no good reason to prefer Tuesday over Wednesday (etc.) just

and only because Tuesday is Tuesday, is there any good reason to prefer next year to today – that is, to postpone a pain, other things being equal? Students with whom I have discussed this problem are convinced that, other things being equal, there is no good reason; but that persons who do so postpone a pain – for example, a hospital operation – always do so because other things are *not* equal: because, for example, they hope for a spontaneous improvement in their condition, or because they will have more spare time next year. The students' position is thus that weakness of will is always disguised in the form of rationalization. But they thus accept that, other things being equal, there is no good reason to prefer a pain in the future to a pain today. Parfit believes the same.

We might perhaps succeed in identifying properly irrational desires. Many desires will however remain undisqualified, desires of kinds which we nevertheless find repugnant. We need not *approve* of someone's (even of our own) desire simply on account of its not being disqualified for irrationality. But there is an argument, drawn from the theory of rationality, against that particular pattern of desires which consists in always giving preference to one's own self-interest. This is that it depends on a more fundamental assumption, with whose requirements it only partly complies. This is the assumption of the 'relativity of reasons'. If reasons can be relative to the person (to oneself), that is, to social distance from the agent, then they ought also to be relative to temporal distance from the agent (a pain next year ought to count for less than a pain today). But reasons are not relative to temporal distance. So we should conclude that they are not relative to social distance.

The Self-Interest Theory is in any case inconsistent in its standard version, so Parfit argues, since it does take the future into account, but not other persons. What is fails to comprehend is that the token-reflexive 'now' has the same status in this connexion as the token-reflexive 'I'. So a determined proponent of the theory of self-interest ought to ignore the (agent's own) future. It might of course be said that it is impossible to disentangle the future from the present, since present desires will so often be future-oriented. By the same token, however, it can be argued that it is impossible to disentangle the interest of the individual from the interest of other people.

Why then is the Self-Interest Theory so influential? Why is it so often a spoken or unspoken assumption in the social sciences (for example in the figure of the concept of 'economic rationality')? Parfit's view is that the explanation must lie in the long predominance of Christian culture. Self-Interest has been the norm for two millenia, not of course because Christianity rejects altruism, but because it identifies altruism with self-

interest. It too thus taken as extreme position. For even if self-interest and the interest of others cannot be disentangled, they are different things. But according to Christian writers, 'if wrongdoers know that they will go to Hell, each will know that, in acting wrongly, he is doing what will be worse for himself .... Knaves are fools'.[4] A non-religious ethics, to whose development Parfit hopes to contribute, will need to recognize that a rational knave, who thinks only of himself, may often end up better off than his altruistic fellows.

But we might choose for morality, for a degree of concern for other people. This choice does not however eliminate all theoretical problems. Which persons ought we to care about, and how much? And – in this context – what importance should be attribute to the future? These questions can be posed in terms of individual morality (should I care equally about all other human beings, or may I give preference to family and friends? Should I care as much about my grandchildren as about my children, and to how many generations should my concern extend?) But they can also be posed as questions of political morality. Parfit himself provides, in this latter connexion, some imaginary cases which illustrate the difficulties involved.

The first concerns the *population problem*. It tends to show that there is indeed a difficulty about who the 'other people' are with whom one is to reckon in coming to a political decision. Suppose that we – the present population of the earth – are confronted with the question as to whether a massive birth-control programme ought to be launched. The argument for the programme is that, if world population continues to grow, the quality of life will decline for everyone (though, we shall suppose, not noticeably in our own lifetimes). Suppose further that this quality can somehow, for purposes of comparison, be roughly quantified. We now have to choose (for simplicity's sake) between two policies, whose outcomes are dated 300 years from now: (i) a world of 10 billion people with quality of life 100, or (ii) a world of 20 billions with quality of life 80. On a consequentialist Average Principle, the former is the obvious choice. On a Total Principle the latter must be chosen (10 billions $\times$ 100 < 20 billions $\times$ 80). But both criteria suffer from their vulnerability to a reductio argument. Would a world consisting only of Adam and Eve enjoying a quality of life of 101 be preferable to a world of 10 billion people with a quality of 100? Or would on the contrary a world of innumerable billions with a quality of life of 1 be preferable to a world of 10 billions with quality 100? These however are the results of applying the criteria of respectively average and total utility. If these results are unacceptable, where should the line be drawn?

One might for instance adopt a principle to the effect that the value of quantity has an upper limit. This means, in practice, that there will be a limit to population size.[5] But such a view has the drawback that it seems to imply a curious and unacceptable conclusion: that if at any moment, the limit on population size once having been determined, there should come into the world some person in excess of the relevant limit, then we seem to be committed to *regretting* that extra life. We could then say to that person, so it appears: 'It's a pity that you were born'. Does our moral code then tell us that he, in any case, counts for less than his fellows?

An apparently similar difficulty arises in respect of a connected problem. Suppose that, according to some preferred principle, we have indeed decided that a population of 10 billion people with a quality of life 100 is preferable to a population of 20 billions with quality of life 80, and that these are the outcomes of the two available policy alternatives. We might have decided that 10 billions really is the upper limit. Call these alternatives A and B. A is better than B, we have decided. 'Population A' is thus realized, in 300 years' time, the relevant birth control policy having been carried through. This population then has a surprise. It learns that a team of explorers has discovered, somewhere on earth (in the jungle, in the mountains, or wherever), a wholly unknown people, descendents of a people unknown to us 300 years previously. It is a fairly happy and healthy people with a reasonable quality of life, though one substantially lower than that of population A.

The lives of the members of population A are in no way substantially changed by the discovery, we suppose. Nor are those of the members of the newly discovered population N. (No large-scale economic or even cultural exchange takes place). But we seem nevertheless to be required to *regret the existence* of population N. For its existence has taken us far over the population limit which we set, and at the same time has depressed the figure for average quality of life. We should indeed, so it appears, be justified in regretting the existence of population N even were its quality of life to be higher than that of population A: for it is population A which is taken as the original unit, and its size already coincides with the upper limit determined by the principle adopted in the first instance.

If one thinks that it is a curious theory which requires us to draw such a conclusion as that the existence of population N, once discovered, ought to be regretted, then this is presumably because we think that the state of affairs now (after the discovery), considered in moral terms, is *no worse* than the state of affairs which had been thought to exist. But if it is no worse, it could equally well have been chosen by us, the 20th century population which in fact made the policy decision so to control births

that population size 300 years hence would be limited to 10 billions. So we could, whatever principle we had adopted in order to determine maximum population size, have decided to allow the evolution of a larger population size than that required by the principle: for a larger population size is *no worse*, we now believe. And this even when the average quality of life is thereby reduced!

The principle of the difficulty having been identified[6], let us note that it is of quite general bearing. If we accept the objection just discussed, we seem to be committed to the position that, having established according to 'rational' principles that a certain population policy ought to be adopted, we cannot regret that it fails, even when the result is that many more people are born than planned, and that the extra people have a lower quality of life than the rest of the population. The difficulty can be described in various terms. One is to say that it arises from the fact that, once we have decided to care morally for other people than ourselves, we are obliged to care for them all: that 'extra' people are people no less.

Is it then the actuality of people, as opposed to their mere potentiality, which makes the crucial difference? Is its the simple fact that, once having been born, a person thereby comes to have the relevant moral significance? Let us look at another argument and case invoked by Parfit, where he throws doubt on this idea. It is not only the *size* of a future population which is affected by a birth-control policy, but also the *identity* of the members of that future population. This is in fact true of many policies of sufficiently large scale. Parfit writes in this connexion:

> 'Given the effects of two such policies on the details of our lives, it would increasingly over time be true that, on the different policies, people married different people. And, even in the same marriages, the children would increasingly over time be conceived at different times . . . Children conceived more than a month earlier or later would in fact be different children. Since the choice between our two policies would affect the timing of later conceptions, some of the people who are later born would owe their existence to our choice of one of the two policies. If we had chosen the other policy, these particular people would never have existed. And the proportion of those later born who owe their existence to our choice would, like ripples in a pool, steadily grow. We can plausibly assume that, after three centuries, there would be no one living in our community who would have been born whichever policy we chose.'[7]

The consequence is that, whatever population policy we now adopt, the people who live in 300 years' time would not have existed if we had not adopted that policy. Whatever their quality of life, they cannot complain either about the level of that quality (however low) or about the numbers of people in the world (however over-crowded). That is, they cannot complain about our decision. For their only alternative would be not to have existed at all. The 'other people' – the other actual rather than potential people – whom we have to take account of in making a politico-moral choice of this kind are, in this sense, 'manufactured' by the choice itself.

Parfit considers the consequences of applying a similar argument to the case of resource conservation (say, of oil). Suppose that we are faced with the two simple alternatives, conservation and depletion (we need not fill in any precise figures). If we choose for depletion, we shall all be better off in the short term. Indeed, all mankind will be better off for a period of 300 years, after which it will be worse off (than it otherwise would have been). But the individuals who make up the population of the future of 300 years and more hence will, in the above-mentioned sense, have been 'manufactured' by the policy choice which we now make.[8] There will therefore be no-one, in 300 years' time, who will be able to claim that he or she could have had a better life if the alternative policy had been chosen. For he or she would in that case never have existed. On the view that 'what is bad must be bad for *someone*', that is, for an actual individual, there is no objection to a policy choice of depletion, even on the most altruistic view.

We are intuitively inclined to reject the notion that there is no objection to depletion. How might we support this intuition? Perhaps by arguing that the future people concerned, at least from the moment when they do exist, have a *right* to their fair share of natural resources; and that since they will have such a right we should already take account of it. Thus we should choose for a policy of conservation.

It is however not quite sure that this argument clinches the point. For, supposing that the future people do indeed possess such a right, it is still not shown that they would insist on the exercise of that right. A relevant parallel, which would illustrate the point at issue, is the case, cited by Parfit[9], of the man who was upset by a politician's suggestion to the effect that it was a good thing that there were ever fewer unwanted pregnancies among teenagers (perhaps because of the growing use of contraceptives). The man in question had been born of such an unwanted pregnancy, and wanted to know if the politician was suggesting that it would have been better if he had never existed! The politician's suggestion was that children born of mothers later in their lives (when the latter had married and become economically and psychologically better capable of raising children) would have been better off. The angry man, however,

was not in fact claiming that he had *both* a right to exist *and* a right to a better life than he in fact enjoyed (having been somewhat disadvantaged by being the unwanted child of a teenage mother). He energetically defended his right to exist, and implicitly *waived the right* to a better life – one as good as the lives of the majority of members of the population, who had mature mothers.

By analogy, the future persons who – according to our earlier assumption – possess a *right* to their fair share of natural resources[10], would on reflection *waive that right*. That would be their rational reaction. The appeal to rights therefore does not solve the problem (the problem was why we have a moral reason to choose conservation rather than depletion). In the case of policy choices where the alternatives involve, as a goal or as a side-effect, the 'manufacture' not only, as in this case, of different people, but also, as in the first case discussed, of different numbers of people, the difficulties are even greater.

The peculiarity of moral theory, including normative political theory, is that one sometimes knows the answer to a question without being able to provide that answer with a satisfactory theoretical foundation. This does not necessarily stamp us as irrational creatures. Parfit knows that we should choose conservation over depletion; he knows that, in the case of problems of population control, quantity must somehow be weighed against quality and a balance found. In his book he is looking not so much for an answer to particular questions of what we ought to do, but rather for the moral theory – he calls it 'Theory X' – which would legitimate the positions which we take. But, he writes, 'I have not yet found this theory'. And 'since I failed to find the principle to which we should appeal, I cannot explain the objection to our choice of the [wrong] policies'.[11]

A new difficulty now emerges. Parfit is determined that moral theory shall be more than meta-ethics; that it shall play a practical role. But he is unable, on his own admission, to find the theory which would condemn certain objectionable choices. This fact – that the theory is lacking – should, he concludes, for practical reasons, *be concealed from the decision-makers*. If these have false beliefs 'they would be more likely to reach the right decision'.[12] At this point we enter directly into the world of politics.

Parfit is concerned to show that the Self-Interest Theory of rational behaviour cannot be defended against an attack on two fronts, from the Present Aim Theory (which teaches that one should always aim to satisfy one's current goals or desires) and Common Sense Morality, which is a (rather eclectic) combination of consequentialist and non-

consequentialist principles, even if these theories are themselves not entirely satisfactory. A 'pure' theory of rationality based on self-interest is impossible for various reasons. One lies in the notorious problem of collective rationality, which Parfit discusses at some length (throwing a new light on prisoners' dilemmas). Another reason lies in the role played in the life of human beings by their dispositions. It might, if we take the role of dispositions seriously, turn out to be rational to acquire an irrational disposition. This claim is illustrated by one of the more curious of the many stories told by Parfit. It is drawn from T. Schelling, and concerns how I might rationally respond to an armed intruder, who breaks into my house and threatens to kill all my children unless I open my safe. I realize that it would be irrational to open the safe, since, once having got what he wants, the robber could kill me and my children anyway, to avoid identification. But he will also kill us if I refuse. Having read Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict*, I have kept a special drug close at hand, in case of just such a robbery. I swallow the drug. It has the effect of making people, for a limited period, quite irrational. I become crazy. The robber threatens me with my children's death. I answer that he should go ahead and kill them because I love them so much. He tortures me and I beg him to continue the torture. And so on. Neither threats nor torture can influence me in my irrational state. The robber gives up and goes home. This, says Parfit, is a case of *rational irrationality*.

Could this idea be transposed up to the political level? Might one for example speculate that a similar kind of mechanism is at work when one nation creates the impression, in the eyes of another, that it is led by 'madmen'? This could be, for reasons comparable to those sketched above, a considerable advantage to a small or weak land confronted with the threats of a great power.

The point of Parfit's argument is however that it shows that 'on any plausible theory about morality, it would be irrational for me not to make myself very irrational. But [in that case] I cannot avoid acting irrationally. On both alternatives, at least one of my acts would be irrational'.[13] This is a difficulty for any theory of rationality. But applied to the Self-Interest Theory, it can have interesting consequences.

Suppose that I believe in this theory. I am concerned only with my own interest. This consideration leads me to reflect that I should be better off if I could trust other people. I realize that they may be thinking the same thing about me. We discuss the question, and all agree to employ hypnotists to cause us to forget *why* each of us believes that he should behave in a trustworthy manner. We now all behave in a (minimally) moral way, for we now all of us keep faith, and none of us does so because

he (now) believes that this is the way to serve his self-interest. If this argument were a good one, it would show that it is often 'rational to act morally, even when we believe that this will be worse for us'.[14]

But the argument has no foundation. The question is whether it is rational to keep faith in a particular case, *even when* to keep faith in that particular case is against one's interest (why pay on the bus if one knows that one will not be caught?). According to the Self-Interest Theory, it is of course not rational to keep faith in such a case. If someone who holds this theory does keep faith, it is because he has had himself hypnotized, so that he can no longer, with respect to this case, think rationally. It is not rational to keep faith, according to the Self-Interest Theory, when to keep faith is against one's self-interest. So it is not rational to act morally. If it were rational to act morally, then the Self-Interest Theory of morality would be false. If it is false, it cannot serve as the foundation for the argument in question.

Parfit's position is that the Self-Interest Theory must finally be abandoned. But Scheffler points out, in his critique of Parfit, that 'although the defeat of the Self-Interest Theory is an important achievement, it represents a limited victory for morality. It means that it is not irrational to do what morality requires if one wants to, but it leaves entirely open the question whether one has any reason to behave morally if one *doesn't* want to'.

There must, claims Parfit, be a moral objection to choices like that for depletion over conservation of natural resources. He is not, as Scheffler appears to be, a moral sceptic. Moral secptics deny that a moral theory could simply be true. One way to counter this argument would, suggests the author, be to find the true moral theory, the Unified Theory which would remove our disagreements. This theory must also include a satisfactory account of personal identity (a subject to which he devotes a large part of the book). For persons, Parfit believes, are 'not fundamental' – and this not merely in a moral, but in an ontological sense. So there are more reasons, and of other kinds than we might suspect, for rejecting egoism. Persons exist, but 'only in the way which nations exist'.

Parfit must therefore believe that a rational nation state will understand that it too ought to behave morally. It ought indeed to go so far as to refuse priority to its own citizens, just as we ought often 'to ignore our relations to our own children' and treat all children impartially. What matters most, says Parfit, 'would be the *highest* achievements' of mankind in the sciences, in the arts, and in the continued advance towards a '*wholly just world-wide community*'.[15] The general tenor of these ideas – inspired by Henry Sidgwick – is perhaps also, in one respect, anticipated

by Kant, who also remarks that politicians will typically believe that they can solve their political problems 'empirically, ignoring the idea of reason and drawing on experience of how the (largely unlawful) constitutions which have hitherto survived best were organised'.[16] The idea of *reason* in human behaviour and in politics is, for Parfit as for Kant, to a large extent the idea of *morality*.

Parfit does not however believe that there are no specifically political solutions to practical problems. An example would be those problems known as Contributor's Dilemmas, where if each person is disposed to do what will be better for himself (family, friends), the outcome will be worse for everyone. The existence of such problems, he says, is one of the chief reasons why we need more than laissez-faire economics, why we need in fact both morality and politics.

The solutions might be of the following four types: (a) people become inclined to do what is better for all because (for instance) they come to derive pleasure from so doing; thus it is now in their own interest so to behave; (b) people become inclined to do what is better for all because they become genuinely altruistic, for example by becoming Kantians; (c) people are rewarded by the government for doing what is better for all – again, it is then in their own interest so to behave; or (d) people are forced by the government to do what is better for all, for example through a system of taxation. Solutions (a) and (b) require a change in people; solutions (c) and (d) change people's situation by political means.[17] Political solutions require co-operation, which may not be too difficult in 'well-organized democracies'. The difficulty is in any case greater where there is no government, says Parfit. 'This is what worried Hobbes. It should now worry nations. On example is the spread of nuclear weapons. Without world-government, it may be hard to achieve a solution.' The problem is greatest, he adds, when its solution is opposed by some ruling group. This is the *Dilemma of the Oppressed*. But the discussion of such a problem would go beyond the scope and intent of the book.

Notes

1. I have restricted myself for the greatest part to a sketch of a number of Parfit's arguments, which attempts to convey their flavour. I have modified his examples in some cases for the sake of simplicity. The arguments themselves can be challenged on the ground of their philosophical assumptions, most obviously in connexion with his conceptions of will, decision, belief, action and so on, and with his ignoring of many antirationalist objections to approaches like his own. But what will concern us here is where his assumptions take him.

2. Samuel Scheffler, 'Ergo: Less Ego', in: *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 4, 1984.
3. Parfit, p. 194.
4. p. 130.
5. See Parfit, p. 402.
6. One might of course try to resolve it in various ways, for example by the use of tense-logic.
7. p. 361.
8. Simply in the sense that this policy choice is a necessary condition of their existence (together of course with countless other factors).
9. p. 364.
10. The question is in fact rather complicated, if it is taken to concern the principle of inter-generational justice. The future people might enjoy a better life than us, even if they possess fewer natural resources, because a more advanced technology enables them to make more efficient use of the limited raw materials available – though not such a good life as they would have had if we had chosen for conservation. Should we perhaps 'means-test' future generations?
11. p. 451.
12. p. 452.
13. p. 16.
14. p. 19.
15. pp. 444-5.
16. See H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge, 1977, p. 119.
17. See Parfit, pp. 62-65.

De case-study als methode van onderzoek naar besluitvormingsprocessen; een methodologische beschouwing

H. 't Hart

Naar aanleiding van: Prof. dr. U. Rosenthal, **Rampen, rellen, gijzelingen – Crisisbesluitvorming in Nederland.** De Bataafse Leeuw, Amsterdam/Dieren 1984, 592 p.

Inleiding

In dit artikel wordt ingegaan op de door Rosenthal in zijn studie gevolgde methode. Het is een kritische beschouwing. Voorop zij gesteld dat het boek in velerlei opzicht imposant is en interessante gezichtspunten biedt. De kritiek is dan ook niet bedoeld om het werk af te breken maar poogt aan te geven hoe verder gebouwd zou kunnen worden.

Rosenthal geeft in zijn boek een beschrijving van een aantal grootschalige naoorlogse crisissituaties. Vooral de besluitvormingsprocessen worden erin aan de orde gesteld. Het bevat zeven case-studies. Het gebruik van het woord 'case-study' duidt erop dat niet volstaan wordt met een overzicht van de besluitvormingsprocessen tijdens de crises maar dat aan de gebeurtenissen conclusies worden verbonden met een algemeen karakter. Een dergelijke opzet onderscheidt zich van een historische studie door een aantal kenmerken:

1. de selectie van de gebeurtenissen wordt bepaald door de veronderstelde mogelijkheid zulke conclusies te trekken; in dit geval wordt een typologie van cases gehanteerd als 'theoretisch uitgangspunt voor een wetenschappelijk gefundeerde keuze' (p. 11);
2. de selectie en representatie van de informatie over de crises wordt geleid door de wens tot bepaalde generalisaties te komen;
3. de beschrijvingen van de afzonderlijke crises worden voorafgegaan door een probleemstelling en een theoretische beschouwing en gevolgd door de conclusies; leidraad bij dit alles is dat de geconstateerde verschijnselen als concretiseringen van algemene mechanismen worden beschouwd.