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Boekbespreking van: Power in Contemporary Politics. Theories, Practices, Globalizations

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Henri Goverde, Philip G. Cerny, Mark Haugaard and Howard Lentner (eds.), *Power in Contemporary Politics. Theories, Practices, Globalizations*. London: Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: SAGE, 2000, 272 p., ISBN 0-761-96677-3, USD 27.95

What has political science to offer to our knowledge of social phenomena, compared with other sciences such as sociology, law, economics, psychology and anthropology? In my view, the contribution of political science is directly related to its special relationship with the aspect of power and influence. In decision-making theory, for example, this is very apparent: an economist points at the costs and benefits of the decision and decision-making. A psychologist protests when the personalities involved are ignored (e.g., in management styles). A lawyer explains the outcome by analysing the procedures and rules. An anthropologist uses the existing values, norms and perceptions (culture) as the core of an explanatory framework, whereas a sociologist often focuses on the environment of the actors involved in the game. The political scientist, however, is the one who defines decision-making in terms of power, influence, and resources and (inter) dependencies. In other words, what we can offer science is directly related to power and influence. At the same time there is a remarkable reluctance in the field to address this central issue. For example, the research committee on political power of the International Political Science Association is very small considering the centrality of its object. This research group, chaired by Henri Goverde of Nijmegen University, has put together *Power in Contemporary Politics*. The book, which encompasses the committee members' latest work aims to offer a state-of-the-art overview of the theory and practice of the most central concept in political science, power. It therefore deserves some attention.

The volume is divided into three parts, each of which professes to tackle controversial contemporary issues about power. The first part considers the current state of theorizing about the nature of power. Part 2 discusses the attempts by some empirical scientists to reformulate the problem. The third part asks whether the international and transnational context, and globalization in particular, has to lead to a re-conceptualization of power.

The general introduction to *Power in Contemporary Politics*, which is 33 pages long, stresses the importance of focusing on power and powerlessness to understand society (as a prejudice as well as a hypothesis). It also poses the fundamental question: what is power? Debates on political power have been virtually continuous and had many different perspectives. Some of the issues discussed are: power as a contested concept, the relationship between and debate about structure and agency in power analysis, the debate on globalization, and the relationship between power and democratic decision-making. The main claim of the book is that the renaissance of (neo-) liberalism constitutes the dominant theme cutting across all power debates today.

Since Lukes wrote *Power: A Radical View* (1974), there have been many new theories, especially concerning the relationship between knowledge and power. This

is reflected in the attention that is paid to authors like Foucault and Bourdieu in Part 1. Here, Goehler analyses conceptualizations of power, starting with Hannah Arendt and Max Weber, who represent the consensual and the conflictual faces of power, respectively. Arendt defines power as the human capacity to act in common with others, whereas Weber conceives power as the achievement of one's own will in a social relationship. Goehler combines both views into a 'single comprehensive view of power' and distinguishes two forms of power in social relationships: transitive power, which is 'power over' (and refers to others; a zero-sum game), and interactive power, which is 'power to' (and refers to itself; not a zero-sum game). Both forms have to be taken into consideration and are fundamental to the study and practice of politics. Haugaard looks at another issue: the issue of ideology and legitimacy. He analyses two processes of sustaining relations of domination through perceptions of social actors. New forms of (expert) domination are emerging (replacing legal/bureaucratic domination) in what he sees as a process of transition from modernity to post-modernity. Clegg writes about the power/knowledge relation as central to the relations of power and the related aspect of consciousness. His main claim is that neither resistance nor legitimacy are endemic, nor can they be taken for granted: they occur through the discursive expressions of existing conditions of existence that are socially framed.

Part II looks at power in practice: how has the balance of power shifted among state institutions, civil society and markets? Goverde and Van Tatenhove point out that power is an underexposed phenomenon in the network approach. They argue that the application of a multilayered concept, with power as a capacity (first layer), power as a relational phenomenon (second layer) and power as a structural phenomenon (third layer) would improve the situation. Following this chapter, which is more theoretical than empirical, two researchers present some results of power research. Rommetvedt is interested in private and public power at the national level and how private interests operate in order to influence public authorities. Data are presented on lobbying and its impact on government and parliament. Arts has carried out research on the influence of NGO's on international environmental issues and sketches a method that can be used to measure the influence of actors.

The third part of the book contains four papers about globalization and international relations. The papers present different interpretations of globalization, although a common theme is the reflection on the renaissance of political and economic liberal ideology, particularly in its American manifestation. A good thing might be that the papers stimulate reflection on globalization; disappointing, however, is that this part of the book does not address crucial questions about power in an international context (for instance, how can we discover or measure changing power relations in international relations; how can the present division of power be characterized; and what is globalization in terms of changing power relations?).

The relationship of this third part of the book with the rest is limited, as is its contribution to what are, in my opinion, the central questions in the theory and methodology of power research. The fact that the last part was so limited in its relevance

probably contributed to the disappointment and ambivalence that remained after reading the book. The disappointment arises from the fact that so little progress has been made since Lukes' *Power: A Radical View* (1974) and Clegg's *Frameworks of Power* (1989). Although I realize that my judgement is biased, because my primary interest lies in empirical research into power and influence, it is more than clear that a lot of work remains to be done on conceptual, theoretical and methodological clarification. On the other hand, this reaction is not entirely fair. Instead of pointing a finger at the few who are bringing progress in our understanding of power and influence, it seems much more appropriate to be grateful for the work the research committee does on power and to criticize the rest of the academic world of political science and public administration. We are ignoring the questions that should be dominating the discipline.

Leo Huberts

Charles C. Ragin, *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, 353 p., ISBN 0-226-70277-4, USD 20.00.

Charles Ragin has become well known for his plea to move beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies in comparative social research. The main objective against the case-oriented qualitative comparative method is that it is too particularizing in identifying invariate patterns common to one case or a small set of cases. The weakness of the variable-oriented approach is its tendency toward generalizations, which makes it case-blind. In his earlier work, Ragin proposed a synthetic comparative strategy, the Boolean method, which is based on the use of binary data on causal conditions and one outcome. It is used as an instrument to identify patterns of multiple-conjunctural causation by means of Boolean statements.

In his newest book, Charles Ragin makes an interesting step that goes beyond Boolean analysis. Instead of binary scores, fuzzy membership scores are assigned to cases. A fuzzy-set includes cases that are 'fully in' the set (fuzzy membership = 1.0), some that are 'almost fully in' the set, some that are neither 'more in' nor 'more out' of the set (membership = .5, the so-called cross-over point) some that are 'barely more out than in' and so on down to those that are 'fully out' the set (membership=0). Cases are not viewed as collections of distinct variables, as in the quantitative approach, but as configurations of set memberships, being combinations of aspects and conditions.

The focus of the book is on the specification of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome that cannot be identified with conventional quantitative or qualitative techniques, but which are, at the same time, indispensable for social research that aims to explain variations in a dependent variable. In case of necessity, every instance of an outcome should involve the presence of a causal factor X_i , however, this does not always hold the other way around, as X_i can be necessary without being sufficient. Whenever a causal condition is necessary but not sufficient for an outcome,

instances of the outcome will form a subset of instances of the causal condition (the 'subset principle'). In that case, the value of the outcome will be less than, or equal to, the value of the cause. Sufficiency means, when a combination of causal conditions is present, there are a number of cases with the outcome, but there are mostly also cases with the same outcome when this combination is absent, meaning that other combinations are relevant too. The situation may become even more complex when different combinations of conditions are linked to the presence of the outcome (the so-called multiple conjunctural causation).

Ragin adds an important element to fuzzy-sets, which strengthens its relevance for social science. Because the measurement of membership scores can be imprecise, these imprecisions are taken into account by incorporating an 'adjustment factor'. In order to constitute a violation, a case's membership in the outcome must exceed its membership in the causal condition by more than a fixed number of fuzzy-membership points as specified by the researcher. In doing so, the assessment of causal combinations often involves quasi-sufficiency and quasi-necessity. In addition, statistical tests are used that use benchmark proportions. As it is plausible that there are exceptions to the rule, a benchmark of (for example) .80 means that a causal combination is claimed to be 'almost always' sufficient when 80 % of the cases where the causal combination applies the outcome is observed. The lower the benchmark, the greater the analytical distance to the concepts of necessity and sufficiency. With an adjustment of .17 fuzzy-membership unit, a causal condition can be interpreted as a necessary condition for an outcome if $Y_i \leq X_i + .17$. In case of a sufficient condition this equation is $X_i - .17 \leq Y_i$.

What is the significance of this new approach? In my opinion, the fuzzy-set approach is potentially a major step forward in the social sciences, but only if this step is actually taken. Many theories in the social sciences are still explicitly or implicitly based on dichotomies like old versus new, rich versus poor, majoritarian versus consensual, proportional versus majoritarian, national versus international, open versus closed economies, left versus right, state versus market, etcetera. But more and more entities, groups and systems are becoming integrated and interdependent and are – in the long run – becoming a mix of elements that originally stemmed from different ideal types. Fuzzy-set social science is useful because social reality itself is becoming fuzzy or 'post-modern'. Fuzzy realities are difficult to fathom and the fuzzy-set approach offers a valuable tool to trace the causal conditions of complex phenomena.

The value of the fuzzy-set logic depends not so much on its potential (i.e., what it could possibly mean for the social sciences), but how (much) it is actually used and with what results. Although the fuzzy-set approach originated in the mid-1960s, it took a long time before it was introduced into the social sciences and even today very few applications have been made. One possible reason why there is not much eagerness to apply this new logic is that most social researchers are trained in either qualitative or quantitative techniques. To make a shift from quantitative or qualitative to fuzzy-