



## THE PORTABLE VAN REENEN



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### WHO IS PIET VAN REENEN?

On 2 September 2013, the Dutch Police Academy organised a seminar to honour the work of Dutch Professor of Sociology, Piet van Reenen. Mr van Reenen began his professional career as a police officer in Rotterdam in 1964. He always had a special interest in the legitimacy of police work. In order to learn more about this topic he decided to go to university and study sociology. After finishing his studies he set out to research questions and problems with regard to the police. Because of this he became one of the first pioneers in early Dutch police research. In 1974, Van Reenen wrote for the first time about the legitimacy of police work and this was also the first time that a police officer scientifically researched and published on the organisation he belonged to. This article started his long and distinguished career, both within the police and the world of science, in which legitimacy was often the focal point. As Director of the Dutch Police Academy he tried to integrate science and scientific research into the curriculum of future high ranking police officers. After retiring from the police he stayed in the academic world. At present he is Professor of Human Rights and Police at Utrecht University.

### HOW TO HONOUR PROFESSOR VAN REENEN?

The initiative to look back on Van Reenen's career came from Dr Guus Meershoek and Professor Bob Hoogenboom. Meershoek is Lecturer in Police History at the Dutch Police

Academy and Hoogenboom is Professor for Police and Safety studies at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Both came to the conclusion that the best way to show the importance and impact of Van Reenen's work, was to produce a book containing important articles by his hand. This became the book the title of this article refers to: *De draagbare Van Reenen* or, in English, *The portable Van Reenen*. The presentation of the book took place in the form of a seminar. In the seminar the key questions were: 'What influence has scientific research had on police work in general?' And, 'What was its impact on the down-to-earth police work?' This report is an extract of the topics discussed during the seminar.

### INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR PIETER TOPS

Professor Tops, Member of the Board for the Dutch Police Academy, opened the seminar by stating that Van Reenen belonged to the group of the first four policemen who started scientific police studies. The other three were, C. Fijnaut, J. Naeyé and K. van der Vijver, who all became university professors. According to Tops, this phenomenon signalled the beginning of a deepening interest in police science by and for police officers. Hitherto, this was certainly not common amongst leading policemen although they often showed curiosity. He characterised Van Reenen as a man with a certain stubbornness, strong opinions and eagerness to know and explain. These character traits made Van Reenen almost predestined to become a police researcher. He combined



his work as a policeman with the quest for academic knowledge. Van Reenen's academic achievements can best be typified by the constant question of what legitimises the police and its work. Is the police an instrument of and for the state or does its *raison d'être* lie in being there for the citizens who are the sum of a state? This fundamental question can create dilemmas for the individual policeman — and policewoman. In a democratic society, force used by the police should always be used proportionally. Another feature of his work is that he has always had a keen eye for long-term developments and how they affect the practice of police work; a view which historians often call the *période de longue durée*.

## THE MAIN THEME EXPLAINED BY PROFESSOR HOOGENBOOM AND DR MEERSHOEK

According to Hoogenboom and Meershoek, Piet van Reenen is something like a 'Bob Dylan of police science'. Some of the themes that preoccupied Van Reenen might now appear a little outdated and have gathered some dust. It's time to get rid of the dust and emphasise that the questions he formulated were fundamental and have in essence not lost any of their validity or actuality; the seminar was a chance to prove this. Furthermore, Van Reenen's enthusiasm is an inspiration to future researchers which should be passed on. From his work it is clear that he is fascinated by the monopoly of force that is the predominant feature of the police. The police should use force proportionally and there should always be transparency when force is used; transparency is the central theme in the book, *De draagbare Van Reenen*.

## WHERE DO WE STAND CURRENTLY?

One of the earlier-mentioned founding fathers of applied police science, Professor Kees van der Vijver, gave an abstract of what impact 40 years of police research has had on the police and on police education. At first glance, the effect seems almost negligible. It should be noted

that the studies of universities in this field have been few and far between. Still, there are some positive examples that have to be mentioned. From 1973 onwards, the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice (WODC) sent out researchers to try and get explanations for trends in police work, and so to add to practical efficiency. It can therefore be concluded that Ministries under whose authority the police operated made their mark in promoting research. After the initial push by the WODC, private consultancy firms and universities tried to make their mark, but their efforts were at best limited. Nowadays, the Dutch Police Academy is trying its best to give scientific research a strong enough basis to achieve continuity.

If one tries to typify the police research of the last decades, one has to conclude that it is for the most part dominated by sociology and only modestly influenced by psychology and technology. The most common reason is that research had to be practically applicable and was financed by police organisations and ministries.

According to Professor Van der Vijver, it is strange that universities were unable to create continuity in the field of police research. Financial cuts put an end to ambitions in that direction. However, after the collapse in the 70s and 80s there has been an upswing that began in the 90s.

Looking at the long-term impact of police research, there are more or less four themes that are of particular interest. First, there is the attention the police have for the population and the individual citizen. The hunger for knowledge of how interactions between police and citizens work is still present. Beginning in the 70s, mostly by bigger municipal police forces, it now manifests itself in, for example, the family detective (who coaches families of victims); feedback when somebody informs the police about a crime; visibility on the streets through community-based policing; and interest in feelings of insecurity. The second theme is use of force. During the middle of the 70s, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior became more interested in the consequences of the use of force by the police. Research commenced in the use of firearms, and Piet van Reenen was awarded his PhD for his dissertation on strategies for large-scale police deployment. A third theme worth mentioning is that research was seen as a boost for innovation. New developments



were stimulated and legitimacy and community policing supported by research. The last point to be made concerns 'problem-orientated policing': however important the idea, it has never gained any notable support.

In short, according to Van der Vijver, there is still a lot missing. Our knowledge might be considerable on a lot of themes, but the problem is that we are not really able to expand. The rift between street cops and management cops is very large indeed.

What is important to keep in mind in order to reach the best results? Research has to comply with four criteria: it has to be original; it cannot be trivial; it needs patience and stamina; and it has to interact with the police organisation. Even if the research is sound, there are a few major problems, which are: interpreting police practice, the professionalism of the police; and the limitations of scientific research.

## PETER NEYROUD AND HIS ARGUMENT FOR POLICE RESEARCH

Next in line to offer his thoughts with regard to police research was Peter Neyroud from the United Kingdom. Neyroud studied history and afterwards joined the British police. He was Chief Constable and Chief Executive at the National Policing Improvement Agency. In 2011, he wrote an article, together with David Weisburd, with the title: 'Police science: Towards a new paradigm'. In this article he argues that science should be an integral and important part of the police. However: 'Science is not an essential part of this police world. At best it is a luxury that can be useful but can also be done without. The police do not regard social science as essential to the work of police agencies. Furthermore, the police do not evaluate how new technologies affect policing and if they make the police more efficient. This can be contrasted with fields like medicine and public health and, to a lesser extent education, which have come to view science as an essential component of their efforts to provide public services.' Neyroud further argues, that the police fail to realise that science is extremely important in legitimising and underpinning its *raison d'être* and this will become even more important in the future.

Still, according to Neyroud, not everything is gloom and doom. There has been steady progress in the last 30 years. In his speech, he referred to the fact that evidence-based policing is gaining ground but there is still a long way to go. In the last 25 years, hot-spot and place-based strategies have borne fruit, as did 'TARE' and 'DARE' education programmes and, last but not least, restorative justice has made its mark.

A lot has been achieved but there is still a lot to gain. The focus has to be on the translation of science to the ordinary policeman and policewoman in the street. What do we teach the police? Sociology is at first glance far removed from day-to-day police practice. Knowledge of the law, of procedures and self-protection would be more useful to a police officer; the rest is more or less a matter of interpersonal skills. Is policing a craft or a profession with a set of values and a body of knowledge? Neyroud is strongly convinced that the latter is true.

A professional police needs an education to match. The best solution for the police, according to him, would be to adopt the model which is used by university medical centres. There, doctors are trained in a practical environment. This way, a body of knowledge is created based on scientific research that improves people's competence. In this model or paradigm scientists are right at the heart of policing. It's a challenge to transform this model or format into practice and train managers.

## A SHORT DISCUSSION

After Neyroud's contribution, there was time for a short discussion centring on the question of how to position police research. According to Piet van Reenen, politicians should be made aware of the cost of research. It should be made clear that better education makes for more diversity. Structure is in the long run less important than professionalism. Van der Vijver points out that innovation has to come from within the police itself. Politics and politicians are not the prime obstacle but police managers are. Universities should also be more active with regard to police-related research. The Dutch Police Academy is trying its best but cannot fill the entire existing gap. Van Reenen reacts to Neyroud by pointing out that 'scientification' is something akin to a religious dogma. He warns that one should be critical; for the onlooker



everything seems clear and deceptively easy. What kind of research do police chiefs want and can they work with research partners? One has to test out what works!

## A LAUDATION BY PROFESSOR CYRILLE FIJNAUT

Cyrille Fijnaut remembered meeting Piet van Reenen for the first time, in 1971, in Apeldoorn. They exchanged views about the future and the legitimacy of the Dutch police. Both had a special interest in international police cooperation and both were convinced that the Dutch police was not adequately prepared to take an active part in this cooperation. Again, in this discussion, legitimacy and proportionality was the central point. According to Fijnaut this has always been central in Van Reenen's work. There were some objective reasons for this, upon which Fijnaut wanted to briefly elaborate. Van Reenen once wrote an article about what happened to his father and uncle during the war. Both acted as policemen against collaborators breaking the peace. The result was a prison term for the brothers, who both returned to the police force after the war. This example shows what Van Reenen is really interested in, namely the real and practical keeping of the rule of law and the preservation of norms and values. He has never lost sight of this central point which is the thread running through all his work. Typical of Van Reenen's work is also his unshakable loyalty

towards the police. In contrast to several British scientists and colleagues, he is no iconoclast. He wants to gain inside knowledge whilst not falling for any form of blind identification with the police and losing critical reflection. This choice of position has resulted in very meaningful analyses. He still gets irritated when people talk about the police without basing themselves on real facts. He tries to balance empirical knowledge with practice.

But what happened after Van Reenen, Fijnaut, Van der Vijver and Naeyé made their contribution? Nationally, and also internationally, they made an impact. The police has always remained open to them and also prepared to give them a chance. Fijnaut also refers to Maurice Punch, the Englishman who made a career as a police researcher in the Netherlands. But Fijnaut has doubts for the future. After many years of political squabbling, the Netherlands have established a national police. Fijnaut is anxious as to whether this development is a potential threat to police science and police research. Does a less centralised organisation offer not more chances? In the future there should be enough space and money to ensure that research can continue. At this point, Fijnaut agrees with Peter Neyroud. Research is crucial for the Police Academy and should not be handed over to the whims of politicians without a fight. Fijnaut is not an advocate for a monopoly for the academy, but he urges for a robust field of research that guarantees continuity. The Dutch Police Academy should grab this chance and take Piet van Reenen as an example.