

# A Miracle Mirrored?

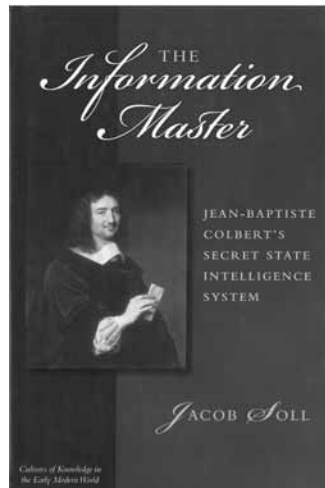
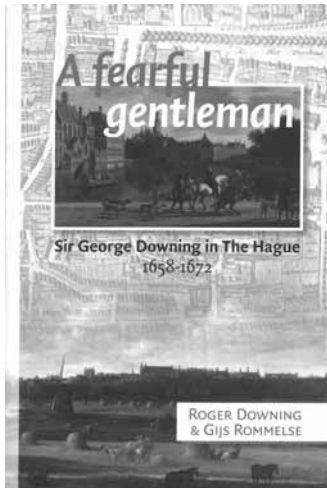
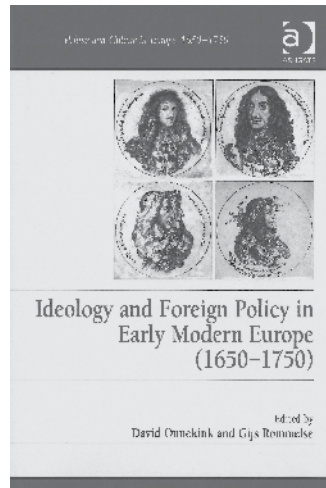
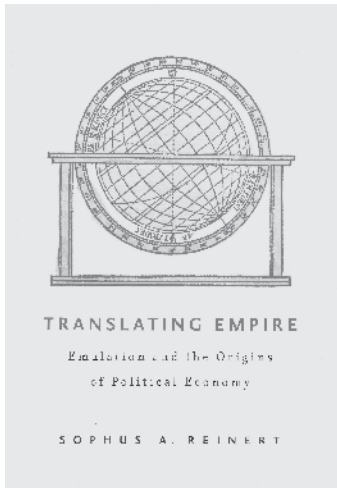
## The Reception of Dutch Economic and Political Thought in Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries<sup>1</sup>

MARTINE JULIA VAN ITTERSUM

83

This review article discusses recent publications by David Onnekink, Sophus Reinert, Gijs Rommelse, Jacob Soll, and Arthur Weststeijn from the perspective of the reception of Dutch economic and political thought in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The Dutch Republic has been called ‘the first modern economy’ by Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude. It looms large in ongoing academic and public policy debates about ‘The Great Divergence’, i.e. the question why the West made the transition to an industrialized economy around 1800, while China did not. Just how innovative the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic were in nearly all aspects of life is well-documented. Less attention has been paid to the reaction of contemporary Europeans. How did they perceive the Dutch example? What did they learn from it? Was the miracle really mirrored elsewhere? These are questions that deserve more attention than they have received in Dutch historiography hitherto.

In the celebrated phrase of Sir William Temple, the United Provinces were ‘the fear of some, the envy of others and the wonder of all their neighbours’.<sup>2</sup> Temple’s verdict has been echoed by a wide variety of twentieth-century historians, ranging from Simon Schama and Jonathan Israel to Immanuel Wallerstein and Kenneth Pomeranz. The inhabitants of the United Provinces walked a lonely road in European, even world history. Although threatened by powerful, centralizing monarchies throughout its existence, the United Provinces managed to hold on to its decentralized, republican form of government until the end of the eighteenth century. This, in combination with a thriving print industry and a lack of effective censorship, spawned seeming religious toleration and a rich tradition of republican political thought.



▲  
Covers of the reviewed books.

The survival of the state was crucially dependent on economic and financial innovation. According to Israel, the Dutch Republic was the only true world-entrepôt in the early modern period, dominating both the bulk and the rich trades. This exceptional achievement was not just based on the vast capacity of the Dutch shipping industry, the extensive financial facilities and the high productivity of the farming and manufacturing sectors, but also on the crucial role of the Dutch state in promoting and protecting industry and trade.

One question left unanswered by *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge 1995) – now a classic in the field – is how other Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reacted to the Dutch example. What were the lessons learned by the allies and enemies of the United Provinces? How did theorizing on the Dutch Golden Age – in the Age of Enlightenment, for example – inform classical economic thought and Western liberalism? There is a strong case to be made for the significance of the United Provinces to a host of themes about the intersection of commerce and government – ideology in foreign policy debates, techniques of information management, et cetera – central to historical scholarship today. However, it is less certain that specialists on seventeenth-century Dutch history are aware of this.

### Techniques of information management

The digital revolution has made information flows in times past a burgeoning field of inquiry. Currently, there are at least three international, cross-disciplinary e-humanities projects mapping scholarly networks in early modern Europe. Not surprisingly, these projects confirm that the Dutch Republic formed a nexus of intellectual exchange.<sup>3</sup> Historians of science and historians of the book have long been aware of its pivotal role in the production and circulation of knowledge in early modern Europe. Peter Burke examines its role as a major center of translations between European languages in *Lost (and Found) in Translation*. Kees Zandvliet, Harold Cook, and the contributors to *Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* emphasize the importance of Dutch overseas trade and colonization for the fields of

1 The author would like to thank Jaap Jacobs, L.H. Roper and Erik Thomson and the editors of the BMGN - LCHR for their comments on earlier versions of this book review article.

2 As cited by Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.) in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge 1995) 1.

3 'Circulation of Knowledge' at the University of Utrecht and Huygens ING (<http://ckcc.huygens.knaw.nl/>), 'Cultures of Knowledge' at the University of Oxford (<http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/cofk/>) and 'Mapping the Republic of Letters' at Stanford University (<https://republicofletters.stanford.edu/>).

cartography, natural history and medicine in early modern Europe.<sup>4</sup> There are many more examples. Political historians and historians of political thought have been slow to catch on with this new wave of cultural history. For Dutch history, there is nothing as yet that compares with, for example, Jacob Soll's *The Information Master*, a highly original and engaging study of the statecraft of Jean-Baptiste Colbert.

According to Soll, it was Colbert's family background in trade and (government) finance that allowed him to apply new techniques of information management to the French monarchy. Louis XIV became the first king in world history to be taught the rules of accounting. The European Republic of Letters, conveniently centered in Paris, fell victim to this no-nonsense approach. The First Minister's avowed aim was 'to bring the world of learning under the control of the French state' (100). Erstwhile scholars turned informers and *intendants*, and wrote a seemingly endless number of reports on topics of his choice. If we may believe Soll, Colbert created the 'universal state archive'. He understood the signal importance of 'having, or claiming to have, the most complete document bank in Europe, which could be used in questions of international law, precedence, ecclesiastical rights, and theology' (101). Superior information management guaranteed his position of power at the heart of the French monarchy until his death in 1683. Could a similarly riveting study be written of the statecraft of John de Witt?

### The role of diplomats

Collecting and manipulating intelligence has been the core business of Western diplomacy since the days of the Italian Renaissance. A past master of the game was Sir George Downing (1623-1684), whose role in Anglo-Dutch relations in the period 1658-1672 is examined in a monograph co-authored by Roger Downing and Gijs Rommelse. Downing first arrived in The Hague in January 1658, as a point man for John Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State. It was Downing's task to keep an eye on the comings and goings of Royalist supporters at the courts of Elisabeth of Bohemia and Mary Stuart. As the authors note, Downing was hardly a committed Republican, though. He offered his services to Charles II at Breda in May 1660 and went to London to

4 Peter Burke, *Lost (and Found) in Translation: A Cultural History of Translators and Translating in Early Modern Europe* (Wassenaar 2005); Kees Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money: Maps, Plans, and Topographic Paintings and their Role in Dutch Overseas Expansion during the 16th and 17th*

*Centuries* (Amsterdam 1998); Harold Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, CT 2007); Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden 2010).

take his seat in the Cavalier Parliament. He returned to The Hague as royal ambassador in June 1661. At the behest of Charles II and Clarendon, he tracked down three regicides in Delft and successfully put pressure on John de Witt and the States of Holland to issue arrest warrants. As a result, John Barkstead, Miles Corbet and John Okey were hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn in April 1662. Not everybody was impressed by this signal proof of Downing's allegiance to the new regime. Samuel Pepys confided to his diary that Downing had acted 'like a perfidious rogue' (87).

Unfortunately, the authors do not give us much of a sense of the Dutch reaction to Downing. Allegedly, he enjoyed the services of 'paid friends' in the States General, including 'the Utrecht delegate Johan van Reede' (133). Yet it remains unclear what game these 'paid friends' thought they were playing. Attempted counter moves on the part of the States of Holland and States General receive little attention from the authors. De Witt was quite capable of outmaneuvering Downing and his 'paid friends', witness the secret orders sent to Michiel de Ruyter in August 1664 to retaliate against English depredations on the west coast of Africa. It would have been helpful for the authors to refer to Guido de Bruin's 1991 doctoral dissertation, *Geheimhouding en verraad. De geheimhouding van staatszaken ten tijde van de Republiek (1600-1750)* [Secrecy and treason: Confidentiality in political decision-making in the Dutch Republic (1600-1750)].<sup>5</sup> Since the authors tell their story largely from Downing's perspective, his Dutch interlocutors remain cardboard figures, seemingly moved around like pieces on a chessboard. That is how Downing made it appear in his own writings, of course. The reality must have been very different.

Downing was an acknowledged expert on the Dutch economy and government finance in the English Parliament. The authors are right to conclude that his lasting legacy was: a) his contribution to English financial reform, particularly the management of the national debt, and b) his advocacy of measures explicitly aimed against Dutch manufacturing, trade and shipping, such as the tightening of the 1651 Act of Navigation. This reviewer should have liked to see a greater elaboration of these points. Which lessons

5 Guido de Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad. De geheimhouding van staatszaken ten tijde van de Republiek, 1600-1750* (Den Haag 1991); see also Paul Knevel, *Het Haagse bureau. Zeventiende-eeuwse ambtenaren tussen staatsbelang en eigenbelang* (Amsterdam 2001) and T.H.P.M. Thomassen, *Instrumenten van de macht. De Staten-Generaal en hun archieven, 1576-1796* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009; available at <http://dare.uva.nl/record/327196>).

did Downing think he had learnt in The Hague? What were his sources of information? The question how other states in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe sought to copy the Dutch example deserves greater attention than it has received in the historiography hitherto.<sup>6</sup>

### Ideology in foreign policy

Gijs Rommelse has teamed up with David Onnekink to produce the essay collection *Ideology and Foreign Policy in Early Modern Europe (1650-1750)*, which includes thirteen contributions from scholars in the US, UK, France, Spain, and The Netherlands. Since it is not a conference volume, the contributors may not have had an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about, for example, the larger questions raised in the editors' introduction. Was the century after the Peace of Westphalia one of 'de-ideologisation' in international politics, a claim frequently made in International Relations (IR) textbooks? If not, what was the role of ideology in foreign policy? Who constructed it, and for which purpose?

According to Rommelse and Onnekink, there are a number of reasons why ideology became important in foreign policy in Western Europe in the century that followed the Peace of Westphalia (1648). They contend, for example, that 'new theories on political economy [...] most notably mercantilism' resulted in 'active meddling of the state with the economy' (5) and, consequently, a willingness to wage war for the sake of trade and navigation. Yet how novel was it to use force to obtain or protect (potential) sources of tax revenue? The second phase of the Eighty Years War (i.e. the period 1621-1648) can best be understood as a war for empire, pitting the Iberian colonial powers against the United Provinces, which established the Dutch East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC), complete with 'free trade' ideologies, for no other reason than to fight the war overseas.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, the editors accept the outdated IR interpretation of the Peace of Westphalia as a treaty that allegedly gave birth to 'a European-wide international system', consisting of 'sovereign states and non-interventionist principles' (6). 'The myth of 1648' has long been exploded by intellectual

6 A notable exception are Erik Thomson's publications, such as 'The Dutch Miracle, Modified: Hugo Grotius' *Mare Liberum*, Commercial Governance and Imperial War in the Early Seventeenth Century', *Grotiana* 30 (2009) 107-130. See also Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus (eds.), *Double Agents: Cultural and Political*

*Brokerage in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2011) and Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus (eds.), *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe* (Hilversum 2006).

7 Martine van Ittersum, 'The Long Goodbye: Hugo Grotius and the Justification of Dutch Expansion Overseas (1604-1645)', *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010) 386-411.

historians, legal historians and political scientists.<sup>8</sup> The editors are right, of course, to question the supposed ‘withering-away’ of religion as a factor in foreign policy in the second half of the seventeenth century, another article of faith among IR specialists. But it seems odd for the editors to argue that ideologically inflected foreign policies were something new in North-Western Europe at this time. Contemporaries had no means of distinguishing between what we now call ‘religion’ and ‘ideology’. As Linda Colley shows in *Britons*<sup>9</sup>, Protestantism was at the heart of the British national identity forged in the eighteenth century. The editors are on firmer ground when they posit ‘a growth of the public sphere’ in the mid-seventeenth century, meaning ‘a steep rise in the number and frequency of newspapers, pamphlets and mercuries’ (6-7). However, no comparison is attempted with earlier or later time periods, which makes it difficult to evaluate the editors’ claim that it enhanced the role of ideology in foreign policy. This reviewer has a creeping suspicion that the editors failed to develop a clear set of intellectual priorities. A few excellent individual contributions notwithstanding – this reviewer particularly enjoyed reading Henk van Nierop’s essay on Romeyn de Hooghe – *Ideology and Foreign Policy in Early Modern Europe* suffers from a lack of coherence. It does not seem to bother the editors, however. They seek to ‘challenge existing ideas and kindle a debate’ (7). A laudable aim, to be sure. But this goal is better served by a tightly argued monograph, such as Sophus Reinert’s *Translating Empire*.

### Political economy and the circulation of knowledge

Reinert’s monograph – based on his Cambridge doctoral dissertation – is a model study of the circulation of economic and political ideas in early modern Europe. Reinert focuses on the *Essay on the State of England* (1695) of the Bristol merchant John Cary (1649-1720), and its many afterlives in French, Italian and German ‘translation’, or rather, adaptation. A supporter of the Glorious Revolution, Cary offered eminently practical advice on how to achieve economic growth and collect more tax revenues in England, all for

8 Andreas Osiander, ‘Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth’, *International Organization* 55 (2001) 251-287; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London 2003); Stéphane Beaulac, *The Power of Language in the Making of International Law: The Word ‘Sovereignty’ in Bodin and Vattel and the Myth of Westphalia* (Leiden 2004); Benjamin Straumann, ‘The Peace of Westphalia

as a Secular Constitution’, *Constellations* 15 (2008) 173-188; Pärtel Piirimäe, ‘The Westphalian Myth of Sovereignty and the Idea of External Sovereignty’, in: Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge 2010) 64-80.

9 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT 1992).



▲  
Godfried Schalken, Pieter de la Court  
(1618-1685), 1679.  
Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden.



the sake of winning the Nine Years War against Louis XIV of France and thus saving ‘the Protestant Interest in Europe’ (79). Written in the midst of the so-called ‘recoinage crisis’, the *Essay* was considered by John Locke to be ‘the best discourse I ever read on that subject’ (97), not least because it advocated an aggressive policy of commercial governance. In Reinert’s words, ‘by force of arms where necessary, England was to achieve a monopoly of the world’s manufactures, acquiring primacy in international trade by differentiating tariffs to encourage the importation of raw materials and the exportation of finished goods’ (95).

Through his contacts with Locke, Cary became one of the progenitors of the Board of Trade, a government body that took control of English colonial and economic policy in the 1690s. Yet the story did not end there. The *Essay* acquired new meanings – and grew prodigiously in size – in French, Italian and German translation in the eighteenth century. For example, the French translator of the *Essay* belonged to the intellectual entourage of Jacques-Claude-Marie-Vincent de Gournay, a merchant who became *intendant du commerce* in the decade leading up to the Seven Years War (1756-1763). Emulation of British commercial governance was at the heart of the anti-physiocrat agenda of the Gournay circle. Stripped of its anti-Popish sentiments, the *Essay* became a blueprint for modernizing the French economy, all for the sake of the worldwide competition for empire. The French translation of the *Essay* was in turn translated and adapted for an Italian reading public by Antonio Genovesi, who taught political economy at the University of Naples from 1754 until his death in 1769. Genovesi had a different set of priorities than his French source. He sought to develop a strategy for managing or reversing Naples’ perceived economic decline. However, he realized that Naples was no match for the states in North-Western Europe, which brought superior military and naval means to bear on commercial governance. Finally, Christian August Wichmann – a Leipzig magister of philosophy and Cameralist – translated and adapted Genovesi’s rendition of Cary for a German reading public in the 1780s. Wichmann committed the legerdemain of incorporating Cary into the canon of economic liberalism. Referencing Cary – but not reading him – Wichmann concluded that ‘freedom, unshackled freedom, is unfailingly the most certain rule – a rule that never requires any exception under any circumstances’ (267-268). As Reinert notes, the construction of the Western canon has been a complex process, riddled with obfuscation. At the end of the eighteenth century, Cary’s message became overshadowed by new waves of British political economy, written after the British Empire itself had matured. It explains Wichmann’s emphasis on free trade, rather than manufacturing and industry (in the sense of industriousness), championed by Cary in the original *Essay*.

Reinert’s magisterial book raises a question or two about the reception of Dutch economic and political thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although Reinert fails to comment on this, Cary deftly

analyzed the reasons for Dutch economic success in his *Essay*. For example, when Cary discusses logwood – ‘a commodity much used in dying’ – he emphasizes that the Dutch obtain logwood at a cheaper rate than their English competitors and prohibit the importation of dyed cloth in order that ‘they may thereby give employment to their own people, and increase their navigation by the consumption of dye-stuff’. In Cary’s view, Parliament should adopt this policy wholesale for England and Wales.<sup>10</sup> Dutch political economy does not seem to have lost any of its attractions by the mid-eighteenth century. Reinert’s quotations from the French and Italian renditions of Cary show that these also abound with references to the economic prowess of the United Provinces. Again, Reinert fails to discuss this. But it does make one wonder: who was emulating whom? Could French and Italian readers distinguish between Dutch and English commercial governance? If so, what were the perceived differences? And at which point did the *topos* of Dutch decline enter European debates on political economy?<sup>11</sup>

As Wyger Velema has shown, Dutch Spectatorial writers conceptualized the weakening of the United Provinces’ position in eighteenth-century international politics as essentially a moral problem. Justus van Effen (1684-1735), editor of the *Hollandsche Spectator* (1731-1735), claimed that his compatriots had fallen away from the ‘national manners, liberty, and free and equal way of life’ of a century earlier.<sup>12</sup> In this train of thought, only a renewal of political virtue could revive the Dutch Golden Age. Did similar arguments play a role in debates on political economy in other countries as well – Naples, for example? If so, is there a connection with classical economic theory and the canon of Western liberalism?

### Political economy in Holland

Johan (1618-1660) and Pieter (1618-1685) de la Court, cloth merchants in Leiden, have long been considered pivotal to Dutch political economy in the seventeenth century. Their most famous work, *Interest of Holland* (1662), appeared in both English and French translation in the eighteenth century. Arthur Weststeijn is the author of *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age*, a wide-ranging study of the brothers’ political thought. It is based on his

10 John Cary, *A Discourse on Trade* (third edition; London 1745) 23-24.

11 ‘Dutch Decline in Eighteenth-Century Europe’, a special issue of *History of European Ideas* 36:2 (June 2010), edited by Koen Stapelbroek.

12 Justus van Effen, *Hollandsche Spectator* (second edition, 6 volumes; Amsterdam 1756) volume III, part 2, 480, as cited by Wyger R.E. Velema, *Republicans: Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought* (Leiden 2007) 88; on the Dutch Spectatorial writers and their interpretation of Dutch history, see Velema, *Republicans*, 77-91, 185-188.

doctoral dissertation, which he defended at the European University Institute in Florence in 2010. *Commercial Republicanism* takes aim at John Pocock's conceptualization of classical republicanism as 'highly critical of, if not openly antagonistic to, the rise of commercial society' (10).<sup>13</sup> Weststeijn realizes, of course, that Pocock's notion of a unitary republican language of Machiavellian *virtù* has been criticized and revised extensively in historiographical debate in the last thirty years. Hans Blom, Eco Haitsma Mulier and Ernst Kossmann<sup>14</sup> have pointed out that Dutch republicans, most notably Spinoza and the De la Court brothers, made eclectic use of a range of internationally constituted political languages, combining, for example, a natural law discourse with the Machiavellian language of virtue. What does Weststeijn have to add to this discussion?

*Commercial Republicanism* examines the political thought of the brothers De la Court 'through the prism of morals, commerce and rhetoric' (18), a sorely neglected perspective according to Weststeijn. Allegedly, Blom, Haitsma Mulier and Kossmann have concentrated too much on 'the institutional dimension' of the brothers' political thought, and thus constructed a 'teleological narrative' culminating, inevitably, in Spinoza (18). Moreover, Jonathan Israel has been too hasty in discussing the brothers' impact in eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>15</sup> In Weststeijn's view, 'the reception of a body of thought' cannot be fully assessed without a comprehensive analysis of its 'roots and range' (20). His stated aim is to reveal 'how the De la Courts employed existing vocabularies to arrive at an innovative argument that can only be explained in the context of their own times, the context of late humanist European culture and seventeenth-century Dutch political debate' (20).

Has Weststeijn accomplished what he set out to do? Yes and no. Weststeijn provides his readers with an impressive analysis of the important role played by classical rhetoric in the publications of the De la Court brothers (69-140), particularly the brothers' use of figures of speech like *parrhèsia* – outspokenness. A case in point is the Aesopian fable of the frogs that desired a king and its explication in the emblem book *Sinryke Fabulen* [Meaningful

13 J.G.A. Pocock, 'Spinoza and Harrington: An Exercise in Comparison', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 102 (1987) 435-449 and idem, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ 1975, reprinted 2003).

14 Hans W. Blom, *Morality and Causality in Politics: The Rise of Naturalism in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Political Thought* (Ph.D. thesis, Utrecht

University, 1995); E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Assen 1980) and idem, 'J.G.A. Pocock and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republicanism: A Reconsideration', *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 9 (1982) 24-29; E.H. Kossmann, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic: Three Studies* (Amsterdam 2000).

15 Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford 2006) 240-263.



The frogs and a log.

Pieter de la Court, *Sinryke Fabulen* (Amsterdam 1685)

89.

National library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

Fables] (1685).<sup>16</sup> Unhappy with their useful but uninspiring leader – a log – the frogs turn to Jupiter and demand a new overlord, who materializes in the form of a hungry stork. For Pieter de la Court, author of *Sinryke Fabulen*, the message is crystal clear: free republics perish when military power is concentrated in the hands of one man. For it does not just allow the latter to ‘wage wars against the Republic’s foreign enemies, but also to tyrannize the inhabitants and lawful magistrates [*wettige regenten*]’ (122, footnote 156). Whether this makes *parrhèsia* a characteristic feature of ‘the rhetoric of the market’ – the title of chapter 2 – is another question, of course.

Following in the footsteps of Haitsma Mulier, Weststeijn deftly analyzes the De la Court brothers’ creative reworking of the political thought of the Italian Renaissance. Yet his attempt to situate the brothers in the context of late humanist European culture is not entirely convincing. He pays insufficient attention to the literary genres invented in the Italian Renaissance. The brothers’ reading habits and working methods receive short shrift as well. Where did the brothers obtain their information? Which manuscripts or printed books were available to them? How did they use these? One needs to carefully check Weststeijn’s footnotes in order to discover whether a text quoted by the brothers was available in the library of Pieter de la Court’s son, Pieter de la Court van der Voort (see, for example, page 28 footnote 16). Weststeijn could also have made better use of the manuscript materials in Amsterdam University Library and the National library of the Netherlands in The Hague, consisting of reading notes, unpublished treatises, and revisions of printed texts, all in the hand of Pieter de la Court. Weststeijn mentions this material only in chapter 1. It plays no role in his subsequent argument.

‘The Commercial Commonwealth’ is the subject of chapter 4. Weststeijn situates the brothers’ political thought both in late-humanist culture and seventeenth-century Dutch political debate. For example, he contends that the brothers modeled their ideal republic ‘on the experience of Leiden, whose fate as a mercantile, self-contained and pacifist city reflected the example of ancient Athens’ (206). They voiced their criticism of the Leiden guilds and the city government’s regulation of the cloth trade in two unpublished manuscripts – completed in 1659 and 1662, respectively (55, 206–213) – and in *Interest van Holland* [Interest of Holland], published in Amsterdam

16 On a side note, it seems silly, as Weststeijn does, to claim that Johan and Pieter de la Court coauthored *Sinryke Fabulen*. Johan had been dead for twenty-five years by the time the emblem book appeared in print. *Sinryke Fabulen*’s explication of the fable of the frogs that desired a king contains the significant phrase ‘as we

have seen in our times’ (122, footnote 156). It is a little veiled reference to the regime change of 1672, i.e. the fall of John de Witt’s regime and the elevation of William III of Orange to the Stadtholderate. *Sinryke Fabulen* was Pieter’s handiwork, not his late brother’s.

in 1662.<sup>17</sup> Weststeijn's analysis is deficient in one important respect: we do not learn how inhabitants of Leiden and Amsterdam responded to the brothers' strong advocacy of 'free trade'. Who supported their policy proposals? Who did not? And for which reasons?

Regrettably, *Commercial Republicanism* teaches us little about Dutch political economy in the seventeenth century. For example, Weststeijn makes no effort to compare and contrast Pieter de la Court's conceptualization of 'free trade' with that of Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612-1653). This is a strange omission. As Weststeijn notes, Pieter de la Court inherited from his brother a manuscript version of Boxhorn's *Commentariolus de statu Confoederatorum Provinciarum Belgii* (1649), which he annotated in his own hand (32-33, particularly footnote 33). *Commentariolus* was based on a series of private lectures, probably attended by Johan de la Court, in which Boxhorn (among other things) defended chartered trading companies as the most effective means to win the war against Philip IV of Spain.<sup>18</sup> On a related point, Weststeijn never seems to have asked himself the question whether the De la Court brothers had any contacts among the directors of the Dutch East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC). Johannes de Laet (1581-1649) is only mentioned in passing as a major contributor to the 'Republics' series of the Elzevier printing press (40). Yet De Laet was so much more than that: this prominent Leiden merchant attended the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) and, not coincidentally, became a founding director of the WIC two years later. Extremely knowledgeable about the New World, De Laet propagated Dutch colonization in North and South America in numerous publications in the 1630s and 1640s. His overarching aim was to convert Indians to the true Protestant religion and wipe the Habsburg universal monarchy from the face of the earth.<sup>19</sup> The blueprints for aggressive, Calvinist empire-building were available right on the brothers' doorstep in 'pacifist' Leiden. Did they know about these? In which respect(s) is their theorizing on commercial governance different from De Laet's a generation earlier? And how does it relate to the aggressive economic policies formulated by the States of Holland and Dutch States General? *Commercial Republicanism* provides no answers to these questions, and, in fact, does not even raise them.

17 Pieter de la Court, *Interest van Holland, ofte gronden van Hollands-Welveren* (Amsterdam 1662) chapter XV ('Dat beslote Compagnien en Gildens voor Holland zeer schadelijk zijn').

18 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 32-33, particularly footnote 33, and Jaap Nieuwstraten, *Historical and Political Thought in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic: The Case of Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, 1612-1653* (Ph.D. thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam 2012) 87-88.

19 J.A. Jacobs, 'Johannes de Laet en de Nieuwe Wereld', *Jaarboek van het Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* 50 (1996) 109-130; Benjamin Schmidt, 'Space, Time, Travel: Hugo de Groot, Johannes de Laet, and the Advancement of Geographic Learning', *LIAS* 25 (1998) 177-199; Christian Laes and Toon van Houdt, 'Over Goten, Germanen en Indianen. De controverse Grotius-De Laet', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 25 (2009) 120-135.

Weststeijn's preoccupation with early modern republicanism – at the expense of political economy – is evidenced by his treatment of Pieter de la Court's critique of chartered trading companies. Weststeijn alludes in chapter 4 to De la Court's failed attempt to obtain permission from the States General to search for a Northeast Passage in summer 1664. Curiously, this incident is used as a wedge to distinguish between De la Court's republicanism and the natural rights theories of Hugo Grotius. For De la Court, free trade was not 'a matter of right, but of interest' (236). Weststeijn's targets are, of course, Pocock, Blom, Haitsma Mulier and Kossmann. His aim is to prove that, thanks to the discourse of interest, De la Court could both be a merchant and a committed republican in the vein of James Harrington, John Milton, and Algernon Sidney. There can be no doubt that De la Court masterfully reworked the legacy of the Italian Renaissance to fit his own needs. Yet the historiographical debate about early modern republicanism – as conducted by Pocock, Quentin Skinner and their followers – has narrowed Weststeijn's field of vision, to the detriment of his understanding of the larger historical context of the life and work of the De la Court brothers.

Weststeijn's most egregious error is to take at face value the De la Court brothers' abhorrence of offensive warfare as the death knell of commercial republics (220). Weststeijn admits that their alleged pacifism had its limits. According to *Politike Discoursen* [Political Discourses] (1662), there was nothing wrong with territorial expansion overseas. Yet Weststeijn ignores a second, perhaps even more important qualification of the brothers' supposed pacifism. Three chapters in *Interest of Holland* argue that, in the words of the 1746 English translation, 'an open and free navigation ought carefully to be kept and defended, against all pirates and enemies'.<sup>20</sup> That, indeed, was an article of faith for most merchants and magistrates in seventeenth-century Holland, including the De Witt brothers. Yet 'defensive measures' taken in The Hague to safeguard Dutch primacy in world trade were viewed very differently in other European capitals – witness the correspondence of George Downing. In the annals of history, there has never been a commercial republic that was by its very nature 'pacifist'. If anything, Athens in the fifth century BCE and the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic are notable examples to the contrary.

20 Pieter de la Court, *Interest van Holland, ofte gronden van Hollands-Welveren* (Amsterdam 1662) chapters XXIII, XXIV and XXV, which are reworked in the 1746 English translation as Part 1, chapter 26: 'That it would be very advantageous for the rulers and people of Holland, and for traffick and commerce, as well as navigation,

to erect Dutch colonies in foreign countries' (117-131) and Part 2, Chapter 1: 'That an open and free navigation ought carefully to be kept and defended, against all pirates and enemies. How this may be put in practice; and after what manner heretofore it has been done or omitted' (132-195).

In his conclusion, Weststeijn cites Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's damning verdict on Pieter de la Court. The author of *Essais de Théodicée* (1710) deplored the fact that a recent French translation of De la Court's work had been attributed to John de Witt. It was an affront to the memory of Holland's greatest statesman.

As if the thoughts of a private man, who belonged to De Witt's party, [...] but who did not have sufficient knowledge of public affairs, let alone the capacity to write like that great statesman, could pass for the thoughts of one of the prime men of his age (345, footnote 2).

Weststeijn concludes in a rather overdramatic fashion that, 'with this posthumous blow', Pieter de la Court ended up on the 'scrapheap of history' (345). If only! The eighteenth-century French and English translations established an indelible connection between De la Court's political thought and De Witt's statecraft. Consequently, *Interest of Holland* entered the canon of Western liberalism and political economy. Translated at a time when the United Provinces were no longer able to rule the waves, *Interest of Holland* did much to create the mythical notion that commercial republics eschewed offensive warfare and expansive foreign policies for the sake of 'free trade'.

### Rethinking mercantilism?

The recent *William and Mary Quarterly* forum on 'Rethinking Mercantilism'<sup>21</sup> suggests that the international debate on the nexus of empire and political economy in early modern Europe is alive and well. Steve Pincus' far-from-shocking conclusion that 'debates about the political economy of empire' should be put 'at the heart of party political struggles about empire'<sup>22</sup> applies just as much to the case of the Dutch Republic as to that of Stuart England and Hanoverian Britain. The 'Rethinking Mercantilism' forum also reveals that, for all the talk of Atlantic History in recent decades, the debate is still dominated by historians of the British Empire. That needs to change. Dutch ways of understanding empire were crucially important to neighboring imperial powers, particularly the French and British. Why would Colbert otherwise have acquired a copy of *Interest of Holland* as soon as it appeared in 1662?<sup>23</sup> As Reinert shows in *Translating Empire*, the making of classic economic theory

21 Steve Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 69:1 (January 2012) 3-34, followed by the

responses of Cathy Matson, Christian J. Koot, Susan D. Amussen, Trevor Burnard, and Margaret Ellen Newell, and final comments by Steve Pincus.

22 Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism', 34.

23 Personal communication from Jacob Soll.



has been far less straightforward than many academics in the UK and North America would care to believe. David Armitage's forthcoming *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge 2013) suggests that a similar caveat is warranted in the case of modern international law and international relations theory. We need to search for the cracks in the gleaming façade of Western liberalism, and recover what lies behind it, i.e. the forgotten ideological moves and dirty politics of times past. We have gotten the canon wrong. In order to get it right, we would be well-advised to trace the story of empire across many different political, mercantile and religious communities in early modern Europe, paying special attention to the spread of new theories and practices of commercial governance. ◀

**Martine Julia van Ittersum** (1968) is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Dundee. She served as Erasmus Lecturer in the History and Civilization of The Netherlands and Flanders at Harvard University in autumn 2011. Her main research interest is the interrelationship of politics and political theory in the early modern period, in particular the justification of Dutch expansion overseas. She has recently broadened her research to include the materiality of texts and archaeology of archives. Her recent publications include: Martine J. van Ittersum, 'Confronting Grotius' Legacy in an Age of Revolution: The Cornets de Groot Family in Rotterdam, 1748-1798', *English Historical Review* CXXVII no. 529 (December 2012) 1367-1403; Martine J. van Ittersum, 'Knowledge Production in the Dutch Republic: The Household Academy of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72:4 (October 2011) 523-548 and Martine J. van Ittersum, 'The Long Goodbye: Hugo Grotius and the Justification of Dutch Expansion Overseas (1604-1645)', *History of European Ideas* (2010) 386-411. Email: M.J.Vanittersum@dundee.ac.uk.

### List of reviewed publications

Roger Downing, Gijs Rommelse, *A Fearful Gentleman:*

*Sir George Downing in The Hague, 1658-1672* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011, 248 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 251 6).

David Onnekink, Gijs Rommelse (eds.), *Ideology and Foreign Policy in Early Modern Europe (1650-1750)* (Politics and Culture in Europe 1650-1750; Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, xi + 320 pp., ISBN 978 1 409419 13 6).

Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA [etc.]: Harvard University Press, 2011, 438 pp., ISBN 978 0 67406 151 4).

Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste*

*Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Cultures and Knowledge in the Early Modern World; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009, xi + 277 pp., ISBN 978 0 47203 464 2).

Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Studies in the History of Political Thought 7; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, xiv + 395 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 22139 0).