

## Public Offices, Personal Demands



Public Offices, Personal Demands:  
Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-  
Century Dutch Republic

Edited by

Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten  
and Michel Reinders

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic, Edited by Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten and Michel Reinders

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-1012-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1012-8

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	vii
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Contributors.....	ix
-------------------	----

1. Introduction	
<i>Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten and Michel Reinders</i> .....	1

## LONG TERM TRENDS

2. Urban Riots and the Perspective of “Qualification for Office”: The Peculiarities of Urban Government and the Case of the 1672 Disturbances in the Netherlands	
<i>Robert von Friedeburg</i> .....	22
3. Capability, Patrimonialism and Bureaucracy in the Urban Administrations of the Low Countries (c.1300-1780)	
<i>Griet Vermeesch</i> .....	53

## SCIENCE AND OFFICE

4. Fit to Measure: ‘Bequamheit’ in Mathematics in the Dutch Republic	
<i>Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis</i> .....	80
5. The Ideal of the Statesman-Historian: The Case of Hugo Grotius	
<i>Jan Waszink</i> .....	101

## CAPABILITY IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

6. Why the Wealthy should rule: Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn’s Defence of Holland’s Aristocratic Mercantile Regime	
<i>Jaap Nieuwstraten</i> .....	126
7. Mercury’s Two Faces: Commercial Candour as the Key to Capability in the Dutch Golden Age	
<i>Arthur Weststeijn</i> .....	150

**CAPABILITY IN PRACTICE**

8. Capability and the Transformation of Dutch Citizenship <i>Michel Reinders</i> .....	176
9. Subservient to the Stadholder: How William III's Interpretation of Capability determined Politics in the Province of Utrecht, 1674-1688 <i>Coen Wilders</i> .....	199

**ENGLISH COMPARISON**

10. Office-Holding, Participation and England's 'Monarchical Republic' <i>Glenn Burgess</i> .....	222
11. Beyond the Republic: Capability and the Ethics of Office <i>Conal Condren</i> .....	237

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank all participants of the two-day conference *Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* held in Rotterdam in June 2007. This collection of essays is for a large part the result of the intense debates that were held during this meeting. Of course, gratitude is due to the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO) for funding the research programme *Conquest, Competition and Ideology: Inventing Governance in the Dutch Golden Age*. We also thank the Vereniging Trustfonds Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam for their generous contribution. The Erasmus Center for Early Modern Studies provided a pleasant and productive scholarly community. Adrie van der Laan and the Rotterdam Library were great hosts. Lastly, we would also like to thank Cambridge Scholars Publishing for giving three young scholars the chance to make their ideas publicly known.

Rotterdam, May 2009

Jan Hartman  
Jaap Nieuwstraten  
Michel Reinders





## CONTRIBUTORS

**Glenn Burgess** is Professor of Early Modern History and Head of the History Department at the University of Hull. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His research and teaching interests lie in the history of Tudor and Stuart England, the history of political thought, and philosophy and theory of history. Author of: *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642* (1992); *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (1996); *British Political Thought, 1500-1660: The Politics of the Post-Reformation* (2009); and, as editor, *The New British History: Founding a Modern State, 1603-1715* (1999); *English Radicalism, 1550-1850* (2007); *European Political Thought, 1450-1700* (2007).

**Conal Condren** is Honorary Professor at the Centre for the History of European Discourses, University of Queensland and Emeritus Scientia Professor at the University of New South Wales. He is a Fellow of both the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. He is also a member of Churchill College and Clare Hall, Cambridge. Among his many publications are *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (1994); *Satire, Lies and Politics: The Case of Dr. Arbuthnot* (1997); *Thomas Hobbes* (2000); *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (2006).

**Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis** is Associate Professor of History of Science at the Centre for Studies of Science and Technology at the University of Twente. He has published a book on the history of optics in the seventeenth century, entitled *Lenses and Waves: Christiaan Huygens and the Mathematical Science of Optics in the Seventeenth Century* (2004). Dijksterhuis is currently working on the cultural history of mathematics in the Dutch Republic and the ways mathematical thinking have become dominant in western society.

**Robert von Friedeburg** is Professor of Early Modern History at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. His main fields of research are the Reformation, early modern statebuilding and religious conflict and political thought in Germany, England and the Netherlands in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries. His published books include *Widerstandsrecht und Konfessionskonflikt: Gemeiner Mann und Notwehr in deutsch-britischen Vergleich, 1530-1669* (1999); *Self-Defence and Religious Strife in Early Modern Europe* (2002); and, as editor, *Murder and Monarchy: Regicide in European History, 1300-1800* (2004); “*Patria*” und “*Patrioten*” vor dem Patriotismus: Plichten, Rechte, Glauben und die Rekonfigurierung europäischer Gemeinwesen im 17. Jahrhundert (2005).

**Griet Vermeesch** is a researcher at the History Department of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She does research on networks of state officials and entrepreneurs for facilitating warfare, and on urban aspects of the process of early modern state building. In 2006 she completed a PhD at the University of Amsterdam on ‘Oorlog, steden en staatsvorming: de grenssteden Gorinchem en Doesburg tijdens de geboorte-eeuw van de Republiek (1572-1680)’ for which she has received the Professor van Winter Award for best book on local history of the Netherlands of the years 2005-2006.

**Jan Waszink** is researcher of early modern political thought and literature, and editor of 'Bibliotheca Latinitatis Novae' at the University of Utrecht. He translated and edited Hugo Grotius's *De Antiquitate Reipublicae Batavae* (2000) and Justus Lipsius's *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction* (2004). He has published extensively on Grotius's *Annales et historiae de rebus Belgicis*. His current chief research interests are sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tacitism and Reason of State, and the reception of humanist thought and writings in the eighteenth century.

**Arthur Weststeijn** studied at the University of Amsterdam where he received an MA in history (2004) and philosophy (2005). He is currently writing a PhD thesis on the political thought of the seventeenth-century Dutch merchant brothers Johan and Pieter de la Court at the European University Institute, Florence.

**Coen Wilders** studied history at the University of Utrecht, where he graduated Cum Laude in 2005. At the moment he is writing a PhD thesis on the brokerage system of stadholder William III in the province of Utrecht in the period 1674-1702 at the University of Amsterdam

## INTRODUCTION

JAN HARTMAN, JAAP NIEUWSTRATEN  
AND MICHEL REINDERS

The main fruit of True Freedom and untainted liberty consist therein, ... that the highest offices are open to virtue and that never so much is deferred to wealth, ancestry, qualities of ancestors, or other chances of fortune, but to the piety, capability and merit of the Persons themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Grand pensionary Johan de Witt (1625-1672) defended Holland's resolution in the States-General to exclude the prince of Orange from the office of stadholder in his *Deduction* of 1654. He used a frame of reference that his audience understood – the language of capability. Armed with an arsenal of arguments and examples found in the Bible, ancient history and a variety of contemporary literature, De Witt set out to prove that young William III (1650-1702) was not fit to govern. In particular, he attacked the idea that William, because of his noble lineage, had the right to hold the offices his forefathers had held. De Witt wrote: 'In a free Republic, nobody by birth has any right to high offices.'<sup>2</sup>

The exclusion of the prince from his political and military office met with widespread criticism and outrage, as the prince of Orange had played a pivotal role in the Dutch Republic as figurehead 'Father of the Fatherland', as commander-in-chief of the army and the navy, as guardian of the Union, as arbiter in cases of internal strife, as 'special member'

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<sup>1</sup> Johan de Witt, *Deductie ofte Declaratie Van de Staten van Hollandt ende West-Vrieslandt* (Knuttel 7545, The Hague, 1654), II.6,70. '... ende voornaemste vruchten van een rechte vryhey, ende onbevleekte liberteyt, daer inne bestaende, naer het oordeel van haer Ed. Groot Mo. conform 't eenparich gevoelen van alle Politijcque Schrijvers, dat de hoochste digniteyten voor de deucht open staen, ende dat noyt aen Rijckdommen, Gheslachten, qualiteyten van Voor-Ouderen, ofte andere bywerpselen vande fortune soo veel werde ghedefereert, als eende vromicheyt, capaciteyt, ende meriten vande Persoonen selfs.'

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, II.1, 46. 'Dat in een vrye Republijcque niemant door geboorte eenigh recht heeft tot hooghe Digniteyten, &c. ende dat de Seclusie vanden Heere Prince d'Oraigne niet is strijdigh tegens de Vryhey.'

(*praecipuum membrum*) of the Reformed public church and nobility, and – especially during the reign of Frederik Hendrik (1584-1647) – as a dynastic figure in international affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, De Witt's arguments were of a rhetorical nature. After excluding the prince of Orange from office, the *regenten* (as the leading Dutch office-holders were called) did not practice what they preached. The distribution of political offices was based on an intricate system of patronage based on family ties, adherence to 'proper maxims' and local factions. In fact, much of the outrage of 1672 targeted the excesses of this system, including blatant nepotism. During the fierce debates of 1672, capability was again the central argument of a widespread political dispute. 'Capability' was highly contested, as illustrated by a response to the *Deduction* in a contemporary pamphlet that demonstrates that the view of capability preached by De Witt was all but commonly accepted. The pamphleteer wrote: 'It is certain that not birth alone, but also virtues render someone capable to rule. But the question is always where those virtues are more apparent, in princes or in the children of menial labourers? For as the children of princes descend from their father's body and soul, so it is beyond doubt that in the soul of these princely children many of their father's virtues are instilled. In the case of the children of menial labourers, this is not likely to happen, just as one does not see monkeys giving birth to lions or pigeons bearing hawks. And since the young prince [i.e. William III] descends from such eminent parents, who have always shown their virtues, is it not apparent that he will have more of those virtues – being born and raised into them – than the children of common and poor folk who never receive these virtues either by birth or education?'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Heinz Schilling, "Dutch Republicanism in Its Historical Context", in *ibidem*, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden/New York/Cologne, 1992), 415.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, *Bedenckingen op de Deductie* (Knuttel 7551, 1654), 99-100. "t Is seker dat niet alleen de geboorte maer de deughden yemandt maken bequaem om te Regeren/ maer de questie is altydt, waret apparenter is dat die deughden sullen zijn in Princen ofte Ambachts-lieden kinderen? want alsoo de Princen kinderen zijn af komstigh van haer Vaders Lichaem ende Ziele, so isset niet te twijffelen, of in de Ziele der Princen kinderen werden vele vande Vaders deughden geboren, dat inde Ambachts-luyden kinderen soo licht niet geschiedt, even gelijkmen niet en siet dat van Apen, Leeuwen, ofte van Duyven Arenden komen; ende alsoo den Jongen Prins, van soo treffelijcke ouders afgekomen is, die altyts hare deughden hebben laten blijcken, isset niet apparenter dat in hem die deugden sullen zijn, daer toe geboren en opgebracht zijnde, als in gemeene ende slechte luyden kinderen? daer noch de geboorte noch de educatie tot die deugden wert gestreckt.'

The central question underlying this collection of articles is: What made a person capable of performing a public office in early modern Europe, particularly in the Dutch Republic?<sup>5</sup> As the example from De Witt's *Deduction* signifies, this issue stood at the heart of seventeenth-century European political life. In general, the answer to the question 'who is fit to govern?' seemed remarkably simple: Europe's ruling elite, the monarchs, princes and noblemen, were capable to govern because of their lineage, their socialisation in an elite culture and their cardinal Christian virtues, prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance. These features gave them the appropriate ethics. They therefore had a natural right to rule. Most of the common people, accordingly, were deemed unsuitable for lack of resources and appropriate ethics.<sup>6</sup> In the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, however, the ruling elite consisted to a large degree of urban magistrates. There was no monarch, while the influence of noblemen, although they were highly esteemed, varied from province to province and was least prominent in the province that counted the most – Holland. Since there was no monarch, Dutch urban magistrates lacked royal authority that could sanctify and support their rule.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, Dutch urban magistrates also lacked a military monopoly by which obedience could be enforced, a problem that was further complicated by the fact that there was no strict legal demarcation between magistrates and citizens (i.e. between those who ruled and those who obeyed or who were at least supposed to

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<sup>5</sup> This publication is the result of a two-day conference called *Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* held in Rotterdam in June 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The list of commonplaces Lipsius could present to his readers about the common people was anything out of the ordinary. 'The many are diverse and changeable, and their changes of opinion are as frequent as the changes of the weather.' The populace 'is devoid of judgement' and 'decides many things on the basis of opinion, few on the basis of truth'. Most importantly, 'it is unruly' because 'the crowd is eager for every new disturbance'. Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*. Edited, with translation and introduction by Jan Waszink (Assen, 2004), IV.5, 403-9.

<sup>7</sup> A possible exception was the prince of Orange, who has been described as a semi-monarch in modern historiography, although there has also been a tendency to stress his subordinate political role towards the provincial States. Compare, for example, Herbert H. Rowen, "Neither Fish nor Fowl: The Stadholderate in the Dutch Republic", in Herbert H. Rowen and Andrew Lossky, *Political Ideas & Institutions in the Dutch Republic* (Los Angeles, 1985), 3-31 with Olaf Mörke, "Stadtholder" oder "Staetholder"? : die Funktion des Hauses Oranien und seines Hofes in der politischen Kultur der Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande im 17. Jahrhundert (Münster, 1997).

obey).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the capability of magistrates to rule – whether real or propagated – was the single most important quality to justify their policy. This volume of articles hopes to contribute to an understanding of how seventeenth-century contemporaries perceived capability and public office.

The different explanations offered to account for the rule of Dutch urban magistrates reflect the different historiographical and methodological approaches used to explain early modern government and its relation to society. Since the 1960s and 1970s, socio-economic theories of modernisation and state-building have played a crucial role in understanding the workings of Dutch politics, the Republic's military and financial success, and the role played by the cities and their ruling elites.<sup>9</sup> Alongside these socio-economic theories, a structure-of-politics approach became fashionable that downplayed the role of ideas and ideology and instead stressed the importance of factionalism and patronage amongst the ruling elites.<sup>10</sup> Although this approach has been influential for a long time, the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, while every magistrate had to be a citizen, not every citizen could be a magistrate. If we concentrate on the city council (*vroedschap*), we see that several Dutch cities (e.g. Delft) possessed ancient charters that clearly defined that only the most wise and wealthy citizens could hold a seat in the city council and that from among those only the wealthiest and most honourable could be an alderman (*schepen*) or a burgomaster (*burgemeester*). In other cities, the charters were less clear. Generally, new members of the city council were elected through a system of patronage and co-optation, while the city council also elected the alderman or burgomaster, as was the case in Haarlem. In Dordrecht, however, the *Achten* (Eights), representatives of the guilds, had a say in the nomination and election of the burgomasters. See Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, *Theatrum sive Hollandiae comitatus et urbium nova descriptio* (Amsterdam, 1632), 91ff. For Dordrecht, see Willem Frijhoff, Hubert Nusteling and Marijke Spies (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht van 1572 tot 1813* (Hilversum, 1998), 15-23, 211-16. For Haarlem, see Gabriëlle Dorren, *Eenheid en verscheidenheid: de burgers van Haarlem in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2001), 26-29.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the influential works of Wim Blockmans, Marjolein 't Hart, Charles Tilly and James Tracy.

<sup>10</sup> In the Dutch context, the most influential work has been Daan J. Roorda, *Partij en factie: de oproeren van 1672 in de steden van Holland en Zeeland, een krachtmeting tussen partijen en facties* (Groningen, 1961); Martinus A.M. Franken, *Coenraad van Beuningen's politieke en diplomatieke activiteiten in de jaren 1667-1684* (Groningen, 1966); Guido de Bruin, "De geschiedschrijving over de Gouden Eeuw", in Wijnand W. Mijnhardt *Kantelend geschiedbeeld: Nederlandse historiografie sinds 1945* (Utrecht, 1983); Joop de Jong, *Met goed fatsoen: de elite in een Hollandse stad, Gouda 1700-1780* (The Hague, 1985); A.J.C.M. Gabriëls, "Het onderzoek naar het stedelijk regentenpatriciaat tijdens de

last two decades have seen the rise of different approaches. A heavier emphasis on legal and cultural history has caused scholars to broaden their view by not only looking at the elites, but also at citizens and lower segments of society, as well as the interaction between these sometimes different strata of society. For the Dutch Republic, the outcomes have brought to the fore the important role Dutch citizens played in culture, economics and politics during the seventeenth century and the relatively open and egalitarian character of Dutch society.<sup>11</sup> This has brought some scholars to speak of the Dutch Republic as a ‘discussion culture’, in which citizens communicated with their magistrates through pamphlets and petitions and consequently exercised or at least tried to exercise influence on the decision making process.<sup>12</sup> Others have combined socio-economic theories of modernisation and state-forming with instruments borrowed from anthropological studies, while another line of research has stressed the importance of looking at the roles people fulfilled in early modern society as offices that came paired with certain rights and duties.<sup>13</sup> As will become clear from the articles in this volume, offices and their associated rights and duties are indeed important to understand the functioning of government in early modern Europe and the Dutch Republic, but they do not tell the entire story. How did a person obtain an office? When was someone considered qualified? How was a person’s capability for office

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republiek: een historiografische schets”, in *Leidschrift*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (1987), 71-98; Simon Groenvelde, *Evidente factiën in den staet: sociaal-politieke verhoudingen in de 17e-eeuwse Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden* (Hilversum, 1990); Wout Troost, *Stadhouder-koning Willem III: een politieke biografie* (Hilversum, 2001); Gijs Rommelse, *The Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667): Reason d’État, Mercantilism and Maritime Strife* (Hilversum, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Dekker, *Holland in beroering: oproeren in de 17<sup>de</sup> en 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw* (Baarn, 1982); Paul Knevel, *Schutters in het geweer: de schutterijen in Holland, 1550-1700* (Hilversum, 1994); Henk van Nierop, “Popular Participation in Politics in the Dutch Republic”, in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (Oxford, 1997), 272-90; Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2005), 153-98.

<sup>12</sup> Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective*, Vol. 1. *1650: Hard-Won Unity* (Basingstoke, 2004), passim.

<sup>13</sup> Conal Condren, “Liberty of Office and Its Defence in Seventeenth Century Political Argument”, in *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 18 (1997), 460-82; Ibidem, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge, 2006), passim. For an alternative approach to office-holding, see Mark Goldie, “The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England”, in Tim Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850* (New York/Basingstoke, 2001), 153-94.

measured? These are questions that need to be incorporated into our research for understanding early modern politics.

The highly fragmented political infrastructure of the Dutch Republic and the rather unique feature that power rested in the hands of relatively small groups of magistrates who lived in the cities among their fellow citizens without any protection is a fact that bedazzled and amazed contemporaries as much as modern observers. During times of vigorous political debate, the distinction between magistrates and citizens seemed to virtually disappear. An amazed E.W. Seymour, for example, reported to Lord Conway (1623-1683) about his visit to the Dutch Republic in July 1672 that ‘the lowest mechnick thinks himselfe an egall for the best stadholder’.<sup>14</sup>

Although we should bear in mind that (foreign) commentators had and still have a tendency to exaggerate their claims, the Dutch Republic was an anomaly in many ways. It was a republic in a time of monarchies, and it was a quilt of cities in a world of peasants. While its *ratio status* was commercial gain, that of France in particular was territorial expansion. Within the Republic’s borders, news and print travelled with an unparalleled speed and in staggeringly high numbers.<sup>15</sup> Did all these characteristics, however, also lead to a unique take on the matter of capability?

The explanations given by modern scholars on this issue are as diverse as they are lucid. Many historians have recognised the fact that the *regenten* embodied the dominance of the propertied class of Dutch urban society.<sup>16</sup> In Holland, some ancient city charters explicitly singled out the

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<sup>14</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Bescheiden uit vreemde archieven omtrent de groote Nederlandsche zeeoorlogen, 1652-1676* (The Hague, 1919), 150. Modern scholars have described the Dutch Republic in terms of a ‘miracle’, a ‘mystery’ or an ‘enigma’. See, for example, Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge, 1995); Maarten Prak, *Gouden Eeuw: het raadsel van de Republiek* (Nijmegen/Amsterdam, 2002); Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca/London, 2005), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, 1987); Marjolein ’t Hart, “Town and Country in the Dutch Republic, 1550-1800”, in Stephan R. Epstein (ed.), *Town and Country in Europe, 1300-1800* (Cambridge, 2001); Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>16</sup> Most clearly in J.L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford, 1994), 35-49; Jonathan I. Israel,



‘best’ and the ‘wealthiest’ members of the community to serve on the city council and to hold the key public offices.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Dutch magistrates could count on history to legitimise their rule as they had been doing ever since the beginning of their revolt against the Spanish king.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the fact that wealth provided the necessary ‘freedom, time, and means if one was to devote oneself seriously to public affairs’,<sup>19</sup> some scholars have also emphasised that wealth and good lineage formed part of one’s ‘social capital’ and that these two aspects contributed to the creation amongst the elite of an ‘ethos’ of responsibility to take care of one’s family and the community.<sup>20</sup> Recently, scholars have combined these socio-economic elements with a more anthropological approach. They stress the importance of patronage, family networks, gender and the paternal rule of family heads, which made the Dutch Republic, according to some, a ‘patriarchal patrimonial formation’ or a ‘familial state’.<sup>21</sup> Finally, it has also been pointed out that contemporaries saw wealth and high birth as safeguards against corruption in a Godly ordained world where some were predestined to rule and others to obey.<sup>22</sup>

### Capable for office or capable in office?

The most capable person should rule. While this statement may sound like a truism, the moment we start to define what makes a person capable we land in a quagmire. Capability (*bequamheit*) was and still is the yardstick used for determining whether someone is eligible for political office. The term ‘office’ comes from the Latin word *officium*, which is a contraction of *opificium*. *Officium* denotes work (*opus*) one does (*facio*) either for

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*The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995, 1998), 125-28.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the contribution by Jaap Nieuwstraten about Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555-1590* (Cambridge, 1992), passim; Ivo Schöffer, “The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in *Britain and the Netherlands*, Vol. 5 (1975), 78-101.

<sup>19</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Arie Th. van Deursen, *Last van veel geluk: de geschiedenis van Nederland, 1555-1702* (Amsterdam, 2004), 145-46.

<sup>21</sup> Luuc Kooijmans, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1997); Adams, *The Familial State*, 1-105.

<sup>22</sup> Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 49; Paul Knevel, “Een kwestie van overleven: de kunst van het samenleven”, in Thimo A.H. de Nijs and Eelco Beukers (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Holland*, Vol. 2 (Hilversum, 2002), 224-25.

someone else or for society at large, voluntarily or out of necessity and obligation, as a magistrate or even in a non-governmental profession.<sup>23</sup> A word used commonly for political office in the Dutch Republic was *dignity* (*digniteyt*). This word comes close to the modern Dutch terms *ere-ambt* or *honorarium*. In order to receive such a dignity, a person needed to be perceived by his peers as dignified. The Dutch term for ‘dignified’ in the seventeenth century was *aensienlijck*. Someone could have *aensien* (respectability, prestige) by virtue of a noble title, trustworthiness, eloquence or natural leadership. However, the question was not always as straightforward as the issue of whether a person could be trusted with an office. The events in the Dutch Republic also led to a thorough redefinition and ongoing contestation of what it meant to be capable to be elected to public office, hold public office and perform one’s office. It was one thing to be deemed capable *for* office based on a set of qualities, such as virtue or family ties, but it was another thing to be capable *in* office – to perform well in the opinion of the general public.

Moreover, the preferred qualities for capability *for* and *in* office changed over time and differed from place to place. The answer to the question ‘who is fit to govern and why?’ came to be redefined significantly in the Dutch Republic. First, in the aftermath of the abjuration of the Spanish king in 1581. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Republic’s semi-aristocratic, semi-democratic nature came to be seen as a lasting reality. The death of prince William II of Orange (1626-1650) brought a temporary end to the stadholderate in several Dutch provinces and offered the opportunity to conceive new ways of organising the Republic’s political infrastructure and of determining who were capable enough to govern it. In 1672, when the carefully constructed stadholderless government came to a bloody fall and prince William III of Orange was reinstituted to the position held by his ancestors, capability was once again re-evaluated. This process was constantly repeated during the many upheavals in the eighteenth century.

Where does this leave the historian? As this collection of essays shows, the concept of capability can offer a new perspective in various fields. Take for example the field of state-making and social history. In a comparison between Flanders, Brabant and Holland from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Griet Vermeesch weighs the increase or decrease in the importance of capability in urban administrations in accordance with the growth of cities, the increasing activities and responsibilities of urban

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<sup>23</sup> Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England*, *passim*.

governments and the processes of oligarchisation. She uses Max Weber's concepts of patrimonialisation and bureaucratisation as a yardstick to measure capability and comes to the conclusion that modern notions of capability (rational and legal principles such as education) were already apparent in the fourteenth-century Low Countries, while patrimonial notions of capability (personal bonds and tradition) increased even during the eighteenth century. We should not, argues Vermeesch, see the two ideal types as consecutive stages in history. Governance did not move in a linear fashion from patrimonialism to bureaucracy. Vermeesch subsequently looks at six characteristics of government that tell us something about capability: how administrators were selected, monitoring capacity, remuneration, specialisation, hierarchy and controlling the functioning of officials, distinction between public and private, and the formalisation of administrative deeds. Her conclusions offer a thoroughly historical explanation of the development of capability in the early modern Low Countries. Processes of patrimonialisation and processes of bureaucratisation differed from time to time and from place to place. Specific political and historical contexts determined these developments. Consequently, it cannot be said that 'capability' became more important for office-holders or their appointment in this period. On the contrary, as Vermeesch reminds us, claims for capability could develop in a direction that had nothing to do with the path to modern notions of governance. Patrimonial practices, for example, 'did not necessarily have a negative connotation in specific historical contexts. In Flanders and probably in Brabant as well, the argument arose among some groups that those who were not able to pay high sums for an office could not be honest office-holders'.

The contributions by Jan Waszink and Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis make clear that there existed some close connections between the world of science and the world of politics in the Dutch Republic and that the concept of capability plays a crucial role in understanding these connections. Waszink demonstrates that Leiden University functioned 'culturally speaking, as a kind of court near the centre of government in The Hague', which had as its specific goal to educate servants for the public church and the state. He points out the intense and intimate contacts between a host of scholars and politicians, a 'network, which indeed reminds one of a miniature court'. An exceptional product of and later a key participant in this network was the great scholar and politician Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). With his concept of the 'statesman-historian' as the ideal politician, Grotius gave expression to the close connection between science and politics. According to Grotius, a public office-holder had to be

a good scholar. Through a close analysis of Grotius's history of the Dutch Revolt, the *Annales et historiae*, Waszink shows how Grotius, inspired by the Roman historian Tacitus, tried to express this ideal in practice. During the turbulent Twelve Years' Truce, however, Grotius, who had rallied to the cause of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619) and had written several works in defence of his patron and his patron's masters, the States of Holland, failed to convince his audience of the righteousness of the position of the States of Holland and ended up sentenced to lifelong imprisonment. Measured against the merits of his own ideal of the statesman-historian, this was not only a political, but also a scholarly failure. Grotius thus proved himself incapable on two accounts. Furthermore, his case also illustrates the consequences of what happens if one deviates too much from what is acceptable to one's peers and the majority of the public in a country with a fragmented political structure and no clear locus of power.

The same observation is made by Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis in his article about surveyors and mathematicians in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century. A surveyor was a mathematician whose tasks consisted of measuring and demarcating land. Fulfilling a public office, a surveyor was officially appointed by the local public authorities who, after a candidate was appointed, paid the surveyor for his services. Since his decisions influenced the ownership of property, the office of a surveyor sometimes involved great judicial and political responsibilities. Accordingly, it was essential that a candidate for the office of surveyor be a good mathematician, capable of measuring and calculating accurately. This, however, is where the matter becomes problematic. Although some *academiae* offered formal maths education and although Dutch public authorities, who employed the surveyors, laid down the surveyor's rights and duties in the oath a surveyor had to swear on admission, mathematicians had to define their capability themselves 'because of the lack of institutional structures to establish mathematical capability'. This sometimes led to bitter disputes between mathematicians who questioned each others expertise and, consequently, each others capability of fulfilling their respective public offices. However, as Dijksterhuis convincingly argues, 'mathematical "bequamheit" was measured in terms of expertise as well as civility'. A surveyor not only had to be a good mathematician, but also, as all other men who held or aspired to hold a public office, 'a respectable citizen and an honourable man'. If he transgressed the boundaries of civility, his peers were supposed to bring him into line. If that did not help, a wider public was sought to pass judgement. In this

sense, the world of science and the world of politics resembled each other to a large degree.

While Grotius defended and tried to embody the renaissance ideal of the ‘statesman-historian’, other Dutch scholars came up with the ideal of the *mercator sapiens* (wise merchant), who combined the mercantile virtues of the tradesman, such as diligence, honesty and persuasive, but truthful speech with scientific knowledge and philosophical insight. The contribution by Arthur Weststeijn draws our attention to these rhetorical devices used by seventeenth-century Dutch scholars and thinkers and the role these devices played in determining who was capable of holding a public office. Two Dutch thinkers who ‘cherished this matrimony between speech and trade’ were the brothers Johan (1622-1660) and Pieter de la Court (1618-1685). Their work reveals a frequent and conscious employment of a full range of rhetorical devices (metaphors, *sententiae*, *exempla*, fables and rhetorical questions) to discredit their opponents’ ideas and to increase the credibility of their own. Of particular importance is that the De la Courts declared ‘the need for bold and straightforward rhetoric, comparable to the ancient Greek *parrhesia*, the candid telling of the truth in an unveiled, outspoken way, even in the face of danger’, a manner of speech that they believed only to be possible in what they called ‘free republics’. Free republics, however, can only exist where people, unhindered by the bridle of monarchical masters or by their own ignorance, are free and capable to speak their mind and thus able to participate in politics. Rhetoric and politics, then, are closely intertwined in the works of the De la Court brothers and in more than one way. For just as only the wise merchant who possessed the virtue of truthful, persuasive speech should have the right to participate in politics in a free republic (as the De la Court brothers believed Holland to be after the death of stadholder William II), so the form of their work and the rhetorical devices employed in them proved to their audience that the De la Court brothers were such wise merchants and hence that their political message was true. With this insight Weststeijn points out a key aspect of the work of the De la Court brothers that until thus far has hardly received any attention.

Jaap Nieuwstraten focuses on the political thought of the teacher of the De la Court brothers in Leiden, Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612-1653). In his contribution, Nieuwstraten explicates how Boxhorn’s work was symptomatic of a break with the past in the 1640s, further developed by his students Johan and Pieter de la Court a decade later. Boxhorn, according to Nieuwstraten, ‘came up with a defence of Holland’s “aristocratic” mercantile regime that shows a close resemblance to the

ideas later put forward by the De la Court brothers. The issue of capability played a central role in this defence'. Boxhorn's argument begins with a claim that ancestry was of less importance in the consideration for political capability than virtue. The far-reaching consequence of this claim was that in theory everyone should have access to office. Boxhorn, however, did not claim that all were equally fit to govern. On the contrary, he excluded foreigners and 'the infamous' from any realistic attempt to be endowed with an office. Furthermore, he preferred the rich over the poor, since the rich had more to lose if the 'commonwealth' (*res publica*) were harmed. With the incorporation of this interest theory, Boxhorn differed from predecessors, such as Grotius and Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), who had argued that some men, 'because of their noble birth or through good education, were able to rise above the depravities of human nature; to these virtuous men, they held, the rudder of the state could be entrusted safely'. Boxhorn had a more negative view of mankind. Man, Boxhorn believed, is inherently bad and will always be inclined to see to his own personal interests. As a consequence, the interests of the ruler should be in accordance with the shared interests of the commonwealth. Boxhorn saw it as a central problem in the capability debate how to recognise these shared interests. His answer was a thorough knowledge of history. As it turned out, the shared interests of the Dutch Republic were closely linked to its economic growth, which meant that it should be ruled by merchants.

As several contributions in this volume make clear, the importance of the calamitous events of the year 1672 for the Dutch Republic and the course of its history cannot be underestimated (Von Friedeburg, Reinders, Wilders). In the spring of that year, the Republic was attacked and partially run over by the armies of France, Cologne and Munster, while a combined Anglo-French naval force was on its way to destroy the Dutch at sea. The desperate situation of the country caused great and widespread political upheaval in the provinces Holland, Zeeland and Friesland, which, although not yet occupied themselves, feared total destruction. These feelings led to a massive flood of pamphlets and petitions that debated the dire current state of affairs and possible solutions that could save the Republic. Central themes in these debates were the question of what to do with those *regenten*, who had proven themselves incapable of leading and protecting the country and the search for men capable enough to replace them.

Robert von Friedeburg takes the pamphlets that appeared in the Dutch Republic in 1672 as a test case to demonstrate that the capability claims of

Dutch citizens had a foundation in late medieval European legal and political thought. ‘The “more wise and weightier part” (*sanior, valentior pars*) of society, the elite, endowed with the right passions and thus relatively resistant to dangerous vices, had to remain in leadership’, argues Von Friedeburg, while ‘legitimacy for any action did not so much hinge on subjective rights, but on holding an office with certain duties, and among those duties, the duty to defend, for instance, the true religion and its only true church, the fatherland and its laws, the prince’. Von Friedeburg links the arguments of Dutch pro-Orangist pamphlet propaganda with the nature of urban rule in contemporary European political thought. He argues that there is a need to examine the role of the citizen as subject (*cives subiecti*). As it turns out, capability played a central role in this concept. ‘Citizens were meant to fulfil an office, no matter how humble and limited, within a hierarchical order of offices manned by persons with adequate skills and, most important, proper motives.’ The two most important ideas that functioned as the foundation of urban government, argues Von Friedeburg, were competency and accountability: the previously mentioned capability *for* and *in* office.

Even citizens in the Dutch Republic, which differed from its surrounding states in such a profound manner, were not out to rule themselves. With his argument, Von Friedeburg challenges the two current historiographical traditions that explain the nature of urban disorders: those of ritualistic aspects of crowd behaviour and republican citizenship. Using the example of Mas Aniello (1620-1647), Von Friedeburg shows how ritual and symbolism played a much smaller role than contemporaries suggested. Mas Aniello, for example, appeared to have played his most important role in propaganda, not so much in the actual events. Emphasising civic participation in government by placing urban disturbances in the context of ‘political republicanism’, however, implies an incorrect story of self-rule. Even in Dutch and Italian early modern cities, civic participation had been severely curtailed ever since the later Middle Ages. The casuistry on degrees of citizenship that came from commentaries on Aristotle prevented unbridled civic participation. ‘Not the exercise of the power of rule by citizens, but the integration of a socially diverse body of men under laws, the protection of property against arbitrary government and the maintenance of order were the focus of late medieval thought on citizens.’ As such, all offices – even minor ones – were important. When there was some sort of participation present, there was not the slightest doubt about the difference between *sapientes*, *maiores*, and *prudentes* citizens on the one hand and the mediocre citizens

on the other, while both groups of citizens were firmly separated from the people.

Capability thus held a central place in the debate about the citizen as subject. Citizens were well aware that they had the burden of 'subjectship' and it was clear that some were more qualified than others. Even at times when democratic tendencies seem apparent, as was the case in 1672 when citizens had to act to replace failing magistrates, 'the conflict was not primarily about participation as a right, but about the necessary qualification to hold office and the subsequent choice of office-holders. It was about good governance, not about self-rule'. Pamphleteers were demanding greater functionality of government, in particular in re-establishing trust.

In his article, Michel Reinders goes a step further, arguing that the debates of 1672 had a profound changing effect on Dutch notions of citizenship and capability. Concentrating on the massive amount of pamphlets and petitions that appeared in 1672, many of which were produced by ordinary Dutch citizens, Reinders holds that 'it appeared that capability, or "bequaemhey" as contemporaries called it, stood at the heart of the citizens' political agenda'. As mentioned above, the goal of these citizens was not to rule themselves, but to remove from office magistrates who had failed to deliver good governance and to replace them with men who they deemed more capable of leading the country. This of course implied that citizens believed that they could determine who was or was not capable of holding a public office. The possible dangerous consequences of this implication were quickly spotted by pamphleteers who severely attacked the possibility of ordinary citizens assessing the capability of magistrates, objecting that this would lead to chaos and civil war. Citizens, these pamphleteers held, simply had to remain obedient to the laws and to their magistrates, for 'it is not allowed to do evil, even when its product is good'.

It was during these debates that the notion of citizenship broadened 'from local membership of a city into membership of a state-wide community in 1672 under influence of claims for capability'. Instrumental in this change was the 'fast and widespread dissemination of print in the Dutch Republic', which enabled citizens to learn very quickly what had happened and had been argued in other cities. This in turn enabled citizens from different cities and provinces to copy each others arguments. Equally important was that the pamphleteers who attacked the possibility of ordinary citizens assessing the capability of magistrates began to describe citizenship in general terms and 'as one movement'. According to Reinders,



this ‘had a tremendous impact on Dutch politics: it paved the way for one “national” citizenship’.

The consequences of the return of the prince of Orange to the political scene after 1672 for the concept of capability and its formal and practical applications in daily politics are clearly illustrated by Coen Wilders. Via Wilders’s article, we witness the intricate workings of the appointment of new office-holders in the province of Utrecht from 1672 onwards. Wilders argues that there were several formal stipulations for capability for office, such as age, religion and experience, but in practice these were at times ignored for the benefit of certain families or the family of Orange. This tendency was exacerbated by the fact that in Utrecht ‘loyalty’ was considered the most important quality a potential office-holder should have. Since the focus of a person’s or body’s loyalty changed over time, we learn from Wilders’s account that capability for office should be viewed in the context of an ongoing loyalty debate. His case study from Utrecht supports this claim. Here, the prince of Orange tried to expand his influence by appointing his favourites, mostly through two brokers: Godard Adriaan van Reede, Lord of Amerongen (1621-1691) and Everard van Weede, Lord of Dijkveld (1626-1702). Office-holders in Utrecht, however, were not only expected to be loyal to the prince of Orange, but also to the province, the locality and – in time – the brokers, whose interests apparently differed from those of their patron. Provided the interests of the prince of Orange fell in line with the interests of the province and the locality, it seemed that ‘Orangism’ determined capability. This perception changed, however, after 1678, when the prince of Orange came to oppose the province of Utrecht. In 1684, feelings of misplaced loyalty even caused civil uprisings in Utrecht. This is not to say, however, that the formal qualities that determined a candidate’s capability taken from documents such as the Governmental Regulation of 1674 were dead. At times, the prince of Orange or powerful politicians and their entourage met with varying success in their attempts to force ‘loyal’ clients into government. The formal regulations, however, could never thoughtlessly be swept aside. Wilders gives a beautiful example of the lengths that people were willing to go to meet the formal requirements for office. A member of the Equestrian Order in Utrecht, for example, had to be at least 24 years old, be an active member of the Dutch Reformed Church and own a manor with a tower and a drawbridge. When the Orangist favourite Hendrik van Nassau-Ouwerkerk (1640-1708) gained membership to the Equestrian Order in 1674, he did not possess a manor in the province. After a year, Nassau-Ouwerkerk succeeded in buying a former castle in Woudenberg (with the financial support of his family), which had been

uninhabited for decades and was probably a ruin. He boldly requested that the States give these remains the status of manor so that he would meet the eligibility requirements.

Comparative studies are essential in order to unearth the specifics or non-specifics of the debates about capability in the Dutch Republic. Both Vermeesch and Von Friedeburg draw our attention to areas outside the Republic (i.e. the southern Dutch provinces and Germany, respectively). England, often one of the Republic's closest allies, but also its most bitter commercial rival, offers a unique case for comparison. With the exception of a brief period in the middle of the seventeenth century, England was a monarchy throughout the early modern period. The specific nature of the English polity, however, is a matter of debate among modern historians. In his contribution, Glenn Burgess critically re-evaluates the popular idea of England as a 'monarchical republic'. By closely examining the way how contemporaries understood the terms 'monarchy' and 'republic' (or any of their English or Latin equivalents), Burgess demonstrates that the term 'monarchical republic' is misleading. Contemporaries actually understood England to be a republic – or rather a 'commonwealth', but in the generic sense 'as any government, of whatever form, over free men for their own good', not as a commonwealth in the specific sense as a non-monarchical form of government. It was only by the later 1640s, amidst the Civil Wars, that the term 'commonwealth' really came to be used to describe a non-monarchical form of government – sometimes even the antithesis of monarchy.

The fact that most contemporaries saw England as both a 'commonwealth' and a 'monarchy' had several implications for office-holding and the demands English office-holders had to meet. The key implication is that English office-holders had to serve both the king and the commonwealth. The latter implied a set of virtues (piety, justice and wisdom) and qualities (adhering to the right faith, knowledge of the laws and skill in negotiation and mediation) not unlike those found in the Dutch Republic. The former implied obedience and loyalty to the king, who was the head of the Church, the fountain of justice and in whose name and authority English office-holders worked. Thus, while it is true that 'office-holding was indeed integral to the governance and society of early modern England', Burgess rightly claims that there 'is no reason to suppose that this made the realm of England into any sort of republic, not even a quasi-republic'. The interesting thing is that, at least with respect to office-holding, the situation in England did not differ very much from that in the Dutch Republic where, despite the many people involved, the capabilities required of office-holders were often the same.

Conal Condren takes the English context to discuss what he calls ‘the Dutch emphasis on governmental capability’ in a broader European perspective. Condren shows that underlying any claim to office was ‘an ethical and practical set of assertions’, shared by all early modern Christians, including the Dutch. These assertions were not only used to legitimise claims on holding an office, but they also provided the standards ‘by which one could be critically judged’. Thus, for an English monarch, a claim to an inherited right was never enough to legitimise his rule as this opened the door to a comparative test against the abilities and competences his predecessors had emphasised to legitimise their rule, and, if he failed the test, to the erosion of his authority. Therefore, in England, as much as in the Dutch Republic, ‘the legitimating functions of lineage were never taken for granted’. Instead, special care was taken that the future monarch was properly educated.

But what were the ingredients of a proper education? Surely, a future ruler should be taught the cardinal Christian virtues of honesty, piety and temperance. But he also needed to know practical and military skills, and he at least had to be acquainted with the dark side of man, if only to recognise and combat evildoers. The moral difficulties possibly involved in such an education are reflected in the ‘Janus-like character’ of reason of state. ‘A positive reason of state exhibited the necessary skills and judgement to good ends, the exercise of capacities within and justified by an ethical frame. A bad reason of state, bereft of ethical legitimation was skill reduced to mere Machiavellian cunning, judgement in the service of evil or self-interest, where one could be a variation on the other.’ It was primarily in its negative form ‘as a series of accusatory and dire warnings’ that the English described the Dutch as sly, cunning and manipulative merchants who were only interested in financial gain. In their portraits, the English did not deny that the Dutch were competent, diligent and efficient, but they also accused the Dutch of irresponsibility and a lack of moral integrity. The Dutch may possess the technical skills to hold a public office, but they lacked its virtues. Thus, in the eyes of the English, Dutch capability was ‘narrow, efficiently pursued self-interest, dangerous because effective’.

As all contributions make clear, capability was of crucial importance to the legitimacy of rulers. Since claims for capability were never thoughtlessly accepted, debates were intricate, subtle and interesting. Simply pointing out one’s lineage would not do. Kings needed an education and proof of their quality. Conversely, it was not enough to point out the negative impact of one’s lineage. Accordingly, Johan de Witt had to come up with

more than a story of the wicked family of Orange in his *Deduction*, which he did. For instance, he presented the reader a seven-page calculation wherein he ‘revealed’ that the stadholders had cost the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic over 19 million guilders. The fact that this argument worked shows not only that the Dutch reason of state was indeed closely connected to commercial gain, but also how claims for capability could lead a nation to define itself.

Overall, the Dutch defined themselves as good Christians and law-abiding citizens who knew their rights and duties. One of their prime duties was to protect their commonwealth or *patria*, however defined. In emergencies, citizens thought it their duty to stress the accountability of magistrates who in their eyes had failed to deliver good governance. They did not want to rule themselves, but they wanted to replace magistrates who had proven themselves incapable of fulfilling their tasks with more capable persons. Even political commentators like Boxhorn and the De la Court brothers did not deem every citizen fit to hold public office, although they had ideas about capability that differed from the seventeenth-century mainstream.

The ideas the Dutch had about the tasks that office-holders had to fulfil and the criteria that candidates for and office-holders in office had to meet were widely shared by their European neighbours. In a world of conflict and threat, the primary task of office-holders was to create and keep order. That goes as much for a Dutch burgomaster or surveyor, as for a German city *regent*, an English Justice of the Peace or a clerk from Antwerp. Since these office-holders had to share power and stood in direct contact with the people they were supposed to serve, there was – apart from an emphasis on knowledge of practical skills – tremendous weight put on virtues such as honesty, temperance and loyalty, be it to a king, a prince or *patria*.

As regards the Dutch Republic, it is striking that the Dutch made a constant appeal to the ‘market’ (the public at large) in their debates about capability. The extent to which the Dutch were unique in this aspect should be investigated further. Unlike England or France, the Dutch lacked a sovereign lord who could function as an independent arbiter. The Union of Utrecht designated the stadholder as a mediator or arbiter in the event of internal conflict, but not as a sovereign lord. Opinions about the role of stadholder in the Dutch body politic and the range of his privileges may have varied, but William III’s failed attempt to be elevated to duke of Gelre shows that there were limits to what even the staunchest supporters of the prince of Orange would allow. The fragmented political infrastructure of the Dutch Republic, the concentration of power on the local city level, the fact that Dutch *regenten* lived among their fellow

citizens over whom they did not hold a hereditary right to rule, let alone the fact that Dutch *regenten* did not have a monopoly on military force and were in most cases dependent on the willingness of the burghers who filled the ranks of the city militias to support their rule, forced Dutch *regenten*, willingly or not, to engage citizens in discussion and convince them of their viewpoints. We not only see this pattern occur during the great crises of the seventeenth century (1618-1619, 1650, 1672), but also during crises on a smaller scale, for example, in Dordrecht in the late 1640s.<sup>24</sup> As the articles in this volume show, the close ties between politics, science, rhetoric, political philosophy and popular politics (pamphleteering) in the Dutch Republic ensured that the approval of the public was sought by all who tried to defend their (supposed) capability and by those who tried to prove the incapability claimed of the other side. This was done by citizens, political theorists, and at times even by men who just wanted to measure a piece of land.

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<sup>24</sup> Frijhoff, Nusteling and Spies (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht van 1572 tot 1813*, 19-21, 211-16.

