

## **Harold J. Cook, Matters of a hypothetical doctor.**

In his book *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine and science in the Dutch Golden Age* (2007), Harold J. Cook's criticizes Thomas A. Horne, who is saying: "Mandeville maintains throughout his work a rigorous moral standard, [but one] which man is unable to live up to" (p. 399). Cook censures Horne, author of *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (1978), by stating: "who [Horne] unfortunately finds the roots of this in Jansenism rather than in Calvinism" (p. 469, fn. 62).

Cook's criticism seems to have been answered effectively by Jan de Vries (*The American Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (April 2008)). De Vries: "It is not common for a scholar to retool himself in mid-career and plunge seriously into the history of another society, as Cook has done. One runs the risk of misinterpreting things large and small, and this volume has its share of misspellings and — mostly non-fatal — gaffes. (...) When Cook turns to religion in the Netherlands, he relies on overdrawn, one-dimensional characterizations of the main theological movements." But the reasons suggested by De Vries are disputable. First, Cook does not pretend to be a scholar. He tells the readers that *Matters of exchange* is the result of a 'voyage of imagination' (p. xi) and that it is a story (p. 4). So Cook considers himself to be a storyteller and the book should be judged by literary standards of literature only. Secondly, Cook's misinterpretations and gaffes relate not only to 'another society', being the Dutch Republic, but, for instance, also to the works of Bernard Mandeville. In general, crossing borders as such need not be a problem.

Cook's ambition is far from modest. His endeavour is to bring a specific idea of his to life: "I still seek to understand what the changes of the early modern period would look like were they depicted, not as a kind of mind-body dualism, (...) but as an integrated whole that represented united lives." A scope which might put off great authors of historical literature to travel into the foreign country that is called (p. xi) the past. Lesser literary gods must be doomed to struggle, and potentially to stumble.

While struggling, Cook must have been minded to leave off, but (p. xii) 'the old ambition of composing a work of history not torn apart by dividing the world into a conceptual part and all the rest remains'. Why did not he return half-way? 'One of the key terms for seeing how such a history might work is what early modern people themselves called the "passions", which they considered to be the forces that create change, not only in minds but in bodies, and not only in individual persons but in all things.'

This key may have served Cook as a panacea, but we think it to be acceptable only if etymological dictionaries would affirm or support this all-encompassing meaning of the word. But they don't and, it may be noted here, Bernard Mandeville did neither.

If readers may think Cook's ambitious project to have been unsuccessful, he is, at least, hoping that they (p. xii) "will find some of the descriptive material on which it is based of interest." Cook tells about Mandeville in a chapter which is called 'The refusal to speculate' (pp. 378-409). The Mandeville section of it (pp. 379-409) mainly consists of two articles, Cook published earlier, namely *Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of the 'Clever Politician'*, in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* (1999), and *Body and Passions: Materialism and the Early Modern State*, in *Osiris* 17, (2002). We can see now that these

articles were only a stage in a tour de fiction, which took Cook more than twenty years to finish. Considering how and where they were published, without any proviso, they had to be taken for the work of a scholar, such as Letizia Gai did, in *Passioni, medicina e società: la riflessione mandevilliana*, in *Natura e storia*, a cura di Lorenzo Bianchi (2005), pp. 89-119. Probably they have occasioned De Vries to pass over Cook's statement in the preface.

Thanks to his invented panacea, Cook freely substitutes Mandeville's 'passion' for his own definition. For instance, 'passion' means 'disease', in the title *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711), but who cares? If Mandeville's term passion is unfit to Cook's purposes, Mandeville must be joking: "The famous slogan to his *Fable of the Bees* (1714), "private vices, public benefits," said it all, as long as one recognizes the tongue-in-cheek substitution of "vices" for passions." (Cook, 2002, p. 48).

For Cook, it is relevant to show that politicians and physicians play the same part in society: they manipulate people for their own sake. "The beginning of therapy lay not in the physician's right reason but his own passions, that is, the search for reputation and gain." Cook's assertion (p. 404) is accompanied by a footnote: "E.g., Anon., *The True Meaning of the Fable of the Bees* (London, 1726), 106." "E.g." is too vague to be dealt with, but the anonymous author is one of the many contemporary opponents of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. Yet this author does not use the terms physician and therapy. As for politicians, he thinks to be challenging Mandeville this way: "whoever thought the *Politician* might do a *good Action*, was shrewdly mistaken; it being the essence of the *Politician* never to do any such Action, nor so much as to design *good* to any Body but *himself*." This source, if checked, would not be convincing. So Cook flatly tells his readers: "Just as in his political economy Mandeville emphasizes the importance of the skilful politician to regulate the passions among competing individuals, so too in his medicine he emphasizes the importance of the skilful physician for regulating the behaviors of patients." No source added, which is annoying, since we have not seen such an opinion in Mandeville's works.

Anyway, if politicians are hypocrites, the same must be true for all so-called clinical or bedside physicians. This is affirmed by Cook (1999, p. 122): "Coupling the Hippocratic and hypocritic arts can work to restore or retain health." The wordplay may be misunderstood. Therefore Cook repeats: "For Mandeville, the physician is to the person as a magistrate is to the government: a skilful politician who, from his own self-interest, properly regulates the conflicting passions in a patient so as to create his or her general welfare." Repeating may be effective as a rhetorical device, but does not create truth. What would be more convincing than citing Mandeville himself as a witness? Cook repeats once more: "In his medicine as well as in his political economy, Mandeville proclaimed that health, like moral virtues, "are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride." Here Cook refers in a footnote to *The Fable of the Bees*, I, p. 51, but unfortunately no allusion to medicine or health can be found there.

Cook's distortion does not stop. He continues (1999, p. 122): 'The English author who came closest to Mandeville's outlook was the dangerous Deist John Toland, who insisted that skilful politicians needed to "govern all men by the springs of their own passions".' Putting Mandeville and Toland into the same company of Deists is an old phenomenon, just as groundless now as it was in the 1720's. Mandeville was a Christian

theist. And Toland belonged to Shaftesbury's circle, which was not Mandeville's piece of cake, to put it mildly.

But let's look at Cook's footnote and meet with Justin A. I. Champion, author of *The pillars of priestcraft shaken, The church of England and its enemies, 1660-1730* (1992). Champion's statement concerning Toland, p. 209, differs from what Cook made of it: "John Toland insisted that the efficient politician must learn to 'govern all men by the springs of their own passions, and to manage the whole machine by the chains and weights of prevailing opinions'." Mandeville's name does not appear in Champion's text at all.

It may be interesting to look into this matter a bit further. Champion is quoting from John Toland (1670-1722), *A collection of several pieces of Mr. John Toland* (1726), vol. 2, p. 377. Toland wrote a letter, in which he paid attention to the publication of the English translation of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), *Spaccio della bestia trionfante. Or the expulsion of the triumphant beast* (1713). A longer quotation from this letter may be useful to understand Champion's quotation in its context. Toland: "[376]...In the Court of Queen Elizabeth 'tis generally acknowledg'd, even by her enemies, that there was a set of very extraordinary men, and among them some, who understood very thing else as well as the Art of Government, and who saw further than any since [377] (or perhaps before) into the mysteries of Priestcraft and the extravagancies of Superstition. This knowledge of the follies of some men, and the frauds of others, did not little serve to make them such exquisite politicians, enabling them to take every thing by the right handle, what safely to abolish, what necessarily to retain, how to govern all men by the springs of their own passions, and to manage the whole machine by the chains and weights of prevailing opinions. Private Conferences they usually had, wherein they talk'd of every thing freely and without a veil, being secure from the censure or mistakes of the prophane vulgar, and in those things true to one another, tho' not seldom at variance on other occasions. The most remarkable instance of their liberty of thinking, and of their prudence in concealing their notions, is this book [Bruno's *Spaccio*], which was written with the privacy of a certain number among them. [...]"

If Toland would be the author who came the closest to Mandeville's outlook, it might be expected that they both would appreciate the *Spaccio*. Toland did so: "Toland's central claim for the value of the *Spaccio* is that it is a superb device for exploding the machinery of priestcraft and superstition." (Champion, pp. 153-4). But how about Mandeville? What he thought of the *Spaccio* is scathing: "Jordanus Bruno of Nola, who wrote that silly piece of Blasphemy call'd *Spaccio della Bestia triumphante*"; in *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. Kaye, i, p. 214.

As for Mandeville and the Dutch Republic, in Cook's design there has to be a connection between the two Dutch physicians Boerhaave and Mandeville. In his 1999 article Cook tells us (p. 117) that Mandeville and Boerhaave were *classmates*. In the explaining footnote, Cook is less positive: 'Herman Boerhaave defended a thesis at Leiden on 21 December 1690, just three months after Mandeville, making their *acquaintance* almost certain.' He knows, of course, there is no evidence that Mandeville and Boerhaave were acquainted. In *Matters of exchange* (p. 399) Cook's story gets a different turn. 'After two years Mandeville successfully defended a medical thesis - just three months after Boerhaave, whom he must *have met* as a student - with the title *De Chylosi vitiata*.' If Mandeville graduated as a M.D. just three months after Boerhaave did,

no reader will think it to be unlikely that they met as a student. However, Mandeville studied medicine and Boerhaave theology. Mandeville graduated in March 1691 and it was only in 1691 that Boerhaave took up the study of medicine. Boerhaave defended his own medical thesis in July 1693, at Harderwijk. (And even if Mandeville and Boerhaave ever met: so what?)

Another example of Cook's fancy is his story of Mandeville's background (pp. 398-9). This makes clear that Cook has no idea of the functioning of 'factions' in the Dutch cities and regions. The Mandevilles and Verhaers were not influenced by any - because non-existent - 'political party'. They were no anti-Orangists, but undaunted supporters of the Dutch stadtholder and commander-in-chief William III. Even a glance at Bernard Mandeville's bibliography would have learnt that he explicitly esteemed both William III and Mary. And contrary to Cook's speculation, the Verhaers did not live at Rotterdam, but at Schoonhoven. Bernard Mandeville's maternal grandfather was one of the many captains of the Dutch Navy. He never was a member of the Admiralty Board at Rotterdam and never 'served with Paets on the admiralty board'. And Cook's digressions on Paets, the Erasmian or Latin School at Rotterdam (which was never transformed into an Illustrious School), Jurieu and Bayle have, with regard to Mandeville's education, to be dismissed as meaningless.

When we opened the volume *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine and science in the Dutch Golden Age* (2007), we encountered a most promising motto: "My subject is nature, that is life" (Pliny, *Natural History*). When we closed the volume and reflected on Cook's performance, we could not help thinking of a striking similarity with the hypothetical doctors, Mandeville is speaking against. " 'Tis Pride that makes the Physician abandon the solid Observation of never-erring Nature, to take up with the loose Conjectures of his own wandering Invention, that the World may admire the Fertility of his Brain". (*A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* (1730), p. iv-v).