

## John Mackinnon Robertson,

### Mandeville

This essay on Mandeville by John Mackinnon Robertson, from his book *Pioneer Humanists* (1907) is 'among the best analyses of Mandeville', according to F.B. Kaye, *Fable ii*, p. 445. Kaye adds that it is the same as Robertson included in his book *Essays towards a critical method* (1889), which first appeared in *Our Corner* (1886). However, Kaye is incorrect: it is not the same. Robertson states in a Note that this essay has been 'revised and expanded' ; in fact, it is almost double the size.

#### MANDEVILLE\*

##### I.

A CURIOUS act of literary favouritism, to call it by no harder name, is recorded of Adam Smith,<sup>1</sup> in connection with the less famous of his contributions to practical philosophy, the *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*. While he was in Paris in 1776 [or 1765 — his biographer is inexact in his dates], acting as bear[231] leader to the young Duke of Buccleuch, he received from the then Duke of Rochefoucauld a copy of a new edition of the *Maximes Morales* of the Duke's celebrated grandfather, with the courteous intimation that, though Mr. Smith had spoken unfavourably of that work in his *Theory*, the sender so much admired the latter book as to have begun a translation of it, which he had only failed to finish because the task had been carried out by someone else. The letter contained an apology for the cynicism of the author of the *Maximes*, on the score that his lot was cast in unhealthy moral regions; and, whether in consideration of this suggestion or, as seems more probable, out of mere complaisance towards his distinguished correspondent, Smith in 1789 gave the Duke to understand that in future editions of the *Theory* he would cease to rank La Rochefoucauld with the author of *The Fable of the Bees*. And he kept his word; for whereas in the first edition Mandeville and La Rochefoucauld were gibbeted together in the chapter *Of Licentious Systems*, the Frenchman's name has now absolutely disappeared from the treatise, and Mandeville has the bad eminence all to himself. To an impartial reader of to-day the justice of such a proceeding is very questionable; and it may not be unprofitable to go into the merits of the case.

##### II

Bernard Mandeville, as he called himself, or De Mandeville, as it has been the fashion to call him in biographical notices, was born[...] at Rotterdam,[...] in 1670; and he appears to have spent his boyhood in the former city, where his father was a physician. As the name shows, he was of French ancestry;<sup>1a</sup> and his [232]work has certainly more of a French than of a Dutch cast. When he was only fifteen he published at Rotterdam an essay, *De Medicina Oratio Scholastica*, pronounced by Professor Minto in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* "a remarkably eloquent schoolboy exercise"; and he studied medicine for six years at Leyden, taking his degree in 1691, his thesis being a *Disputatio de chylosa vitiata*. He had previously, in 1689, published a *Disputatio Philosophica de Brutorum Operationibus*. Immediately afterwards [1693] he came to England "to learn the language", and succeeded, as Professor Minto observes, "to some purpose, writing it with such mastery as to throw doubts upon his foreign extraction". London pleased him, and he settled there as a physician. It was not till 1705 that he issued his first English publication, a short satirical poem in pamphlet form, entitled *The Grumbling Hive*, the real *Fable of the Bees*, round which has clustered perhaps a larger body of polemics than has grown out of any production of similar bulk in modern times.<sup>2</sup> The fable, as Mandeville avows later, is not remarkable as a piece of verse, though, like all he wrote in English, it has an ease and directness of expression implying a singularly complete conquest of the language on his part.<sup>3</sup> "I do not dignify these few loose lines", he writes in 1714, "with the name of a poem, that I would have the reader expect any poetry [233] in them, but

barely because they are in rhyme, and I am in reality puzzled what name to give them; for they are neither heroic nor pastoral, satyr, burlesque, nor heroi-comic; to be a tale they want probability, and the whole is rather too long for a fable. All I can say of them is that they are a story told in dogrel". The "story" is, in brief, that in a certain hive of bees, corresponding in all respects to England, the fraud, corruption, luxury, and vice of the various sections of society created such an outcry on the part of everybody that at length Jove swore "He'd rid the bawling hive of fraud; and did"; whereupon the hive began to decline in wealth, in commerce, in population, in power, and in industry and the arts, the decay going on till only a few bees of Spartan cast were left, and these finally "flew into a hollow tree. Blest with content and honesty". And the moral is:

Then leave complaints: fools only strive  
To make a great, an honest hive.  
T' enjoy the world's conveniences,  
Be fam'd in war, yet live in ease.  
Without great vices, is a vain  
*Utopia*, seated in the brain.  
(...)  
So vice is beneficial found,  
When 'tis by justice lopp'd and bound;  
Nay, where the people would be great,  
As necessary to the State,  
As hunger is to make 'em eat.  
Bare virtue can't make nations live  
In splendour.  
(...)

The fable, in short, is a bold paradox, half serious, half humorous; not constructed to stand logical analysis or serve as the basis of a system of morals. As Professor Minto has seen and shown with his usual penetration, it had originally a political application. "Owing to a curious misprint in an edition published after Mandeville's death", he points out,[234]

a wrong date is commonly assigned to the *Grumbling Hive*, and the contemporary point of it consequently missed.<sup>4</sup> It appeared during the heat of the bitterly contested elections of 1705,<sup>5</sup> when the question before the country was whether Marlborough's war with France should be continued. The cry of the high Tory advocates of peace was that the war was carried on purely in the interests of the general and the men in office; charges of bribery, peculation, hypocrisy, every form of fraud and dishonesty, were freely cast about among the electors. It was amid this excitement that Mandeville sought and found an audience for his grimly humorous paradox that "private vices are [sic!] public benefits" — that individual self-seeking, ambition, greed, vanity, luxury, are indispensable to the prosperity and greatness of a nation.

*The Grumbling Hive* was in fact a political jeu d'esprit, full of the impartial mockery that might be expected from a humorous foreigner, and with as much ethical theory underlying it as might be expected from a highly educated man in an age of active ethical speculation. The underlying theory was made explicit in the *Remarks*, and the *Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, published in 1714. But his purpose in dwelling on the text that private vices are [sic! ACJ]<sup>5a</sup> public benefits was still rather the invention of humorous paradoxes than the elaboration of serious theory. This is perhaps the most perspicacious account that has ever been given of the matter; Mandeville's assailants having as a rule taken him up in a spirit either of intense seriousness<sup>6</sup> or of intense spite, and [235] his few defenders having been till lately too much occupied in exposing the unfairness or the blindness of the attack to pry into the heart of his mystery. Coleridge was one of the few to surmise his original

temper: “a *bonne bouche* of solemn raillery”, he calls it<sup>7</sup> incidentally in one of his scurrilous allusions to utilitarianism. I think, however, that Professor Minto goes a little too far in holding that in 1714 Mandeville was as much bent on humorous paradox as in 1705. A humorist he certainly was, but not, I think, “at least as much of a humorist as a philosopher”, as Mr. Minto puts it. Even his prose *Remarks* on his fable are not predominantly humorous, and his other works are still less so. As we shall see, he finally avowed a change of temper. It would probably be near the truth to say that as he grew in years he became more and more concerned to develop the scientific truth that weighted his original squib: an experience to which there are abundant analogies. The *Remarks* and the *Inquiry* were followed in 1723 by an *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools, A Search into the Nature of Society*, and a sufficiently serious *Vindication of the Book*; these again in 1728 by a volume of *Dialogues*, in which, though the old humour is not lost, the work of vindication is systematically gone about; and these in turn, in 1732, by a new set of *Dialogues* entitled *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War*, carrying the whole line of argument yet further. The writer is no mere jester. Sir Leslie Stephen, whose account of him veers a good deal, [236] does him a distinct injustice in declaring that in his preface Mandeville “avows” the diverting of his readers to be “his sole purpose”. Sir Leslie has misread the text. Mandeville says: “If you ask me why I have done this, *cui bono*? and, what good these notions will produce? Truly, besides the reader's diversion, I believe none at all: but if I was asked, what naturally ought to be expected from them? I would answer that, in the first place, the people who continually find fault with others, by reading them, would be taught to look at home” — thereby learning to mend their own ways; and, further, that lovers of ease and comfort would “learn more patiently to submit to those inconveniences, which no government on earth can remedy, when they should see the impossibility of enjoying any great share of the first, without partaking likewise of the latter”. The humorist comes out in the sarcasm that, after so many books have been written for the benefit of mankind with so little good result, he is “not so vain as to hope for better success from so inconsiderable a trifle”; but the notes in vindication of the poem, with all their sub-acid humour, are keenly reasoned. He must indeed have been very happily constituted to take quite humorously the storm of obloquy to which his enlarged book gave rise. The poem had, as he tells us, been taken by many, “either wilfully or ignorantly mistaking the design”, to be “wrote for the encouragement of vice”; and his prose explanation only increased the outcry. On the one hand, ridiculing as he did the optimism of Shaftesbury, he had against him many of the deists; and on the other, his questionable profession of Christianity was quite insufficient to conciliate most Christians, whom he startled and irritated by his merciless reduction of [237]all good actions whatsoever to the promptings of self-love, or, as he later preferred to put it, self-liking. Only the tacticians, appreciative of his help against Shaftesbury, gave him any measure of good-will.<sup>8</sup> The orthodox majority, according to their habit, called him an atheist, besides charging him with deliberately encouraging vice; and the leading deists both of his own and the next generation concurred on the latter if not on both heads; “pernicious” being the favourite adjective for the book. Smith, as we have seen, held it up to unique reprobation; stating first that its tendency was “wholly pernicious”, and further on ponderously pronouncing that, “though perhaps it never gave occasion to more vice than what would have been without it”, it “at least taught that vice, which arose from other causes, to appear with more effrontery, and to avow the corruption of its motives with a profligate audaciousness which had never been heard of before”.

That sentence recalls, if it was not inspired by, the ingenuous work of Berkeley entitled *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, a set of dialogues, in one of which the system of Mandeville is subjected to a quasi-refutation by the simple expedient of grossly misrepresenting it through the mouth of a foolish youth who is described as adhering to it, but who is really an impossible libertine with a set of opinions never formulated or held by any human being. Sir Leslie Stephen charitably observes<sup>9</sup> that

"Berkeley's *Minute Philosopher* is the least admirable performance of that admirable writer." John Mill<sup>10</sup> says as much, and then goes a little further: [238]

It is most likely that Berkeley painted freethinkers from no actual acquaintance with them, and in the case of "sceptics and atheists" without any authentic knowledge of their arguments. Like most other defenders of religion in his day, though we regret to have to say it of a man of his genius and virtues, Berkeley made no scruple of imputing atheism on mere surmise — to Hobbes, for example, who never speaks otherwise than as a believer in God, and even in Christianity; and to the "God-intoxicated" Spinoza. We may judge that he replied to what he supposed to be in the minds of infidels, rather than to what they anywhere said; and, in consequence, his replies generally miss the mark.

I venture to go a step further still, and say that the *Alciphron* is an unpleasantly unscrupulous performance. The philosopher who rose from Tar-water up to Tar-water's God, and who, according to Pope — a precious authority, certainly — had "every virtue under heaven", is in reality a very striking illustration of the demoralising effect of devout religious belief, and of the clerical function, on men in their intellectual relations with their fellows. It is pleaded for him that he saw growing corruption in society, and fancied that unbelief was the cause: the answer is that he promoted the corruption by the immorality of his own controversial methods; than which, besides, no species of immorality could be more commonplace. The philosopher had recourse to the most habitual expedient of his profession both then and now — the vilification of thinkers whose books he had not read.<sup>11</sup> Mandeville, in his *Letter to Dion* by way of self-vindication, takes [239] quite the superior position, explaining and arguing without temper yet without flippancy, and making none of the severe rejoinders that he legitimately might.

This superiority of tone comes out equally when he is contrasted with almost any one of his opponents. When he does not far surpass them in acuteness he is sure to have the advantage of them in serenity. Thus Law, the utterer of the *Serious Call*, who criticised Mandeville with considerable dialectic skill, fails of impressiveness in the long run by reason of the acrid and carping tone of his attack. Even Hutcheson, the "never-to-be-forgotten", as Smith affectionately termed him, passes from satire into spleen in his *Observations*<sup>12</sup> on the *Fable*, venting his bitterness in sneers at such matters as "that easy phrase 'meliorating our conditions'," and "that most grammatical epithet 'superlative'"; which phrase and epithet are now current without challenge. Hutcheson was a devoted admirer of Shaftesbury, and could not get into a judicial attitude towards Shaftesbury's sardonic antagonist. As for poor John Dennis, who wrote a work entitled *Vice and Luxury Public Mischiefs* (1724) against Mandeville by way of fortifying the Established Church, he simply gets into the state of frenzy with which his name is so irretrievably [240] associated; pronouncing the book<sup>13</sup> "a very wretched Rhapsody, weak, and false, and absurd in its Reasoning; awkward, and crabbed, and low in its Wit; in its Humour contemptibly low, and in its Language often barbarous." But the contemporary attacks are too numerous to catalogue; and so strong was the chorus of denunciation that on the issue of a fresh edition in 1723 the grand jury of Middlesex "presented" it as one of a number of pernicious publications by "zealots for infidelity" in their diabolical attempts against religion. "We are justly sensible", said the pious jury, "of the goodness of the Almighty, that has preserved us from the plague, which has visited our neighbouring nation; but how provoking must it be to the Almighty, that his mercies and deliverances extended to this nation, and our thanksgiving that was publicly commanded for it, should be attended with such flagrant impieties!"<sup>14</sup>

### III.

What then was in effect the teaching which so revolted the mind of the respectable British public in the days of George the First? The alternative title of Mandeville's expanded book — *Private Vices[,], Public Benefits* — is apt to be even more misleading

to a reader to-day than it conceivably might be then; and even from Mandeville's own point of view it does not cover his whole sociological theory. His paradox is two-edged. On the one hand he argues against the censors of social corruptions, and this not merely humorously, that nearly all the evils they denounce — luxury, envy, avarice, selfishness, prostitution, and so forth — tend to benefit society in some way; on the [241] other he argued against the school of Shaftesbury that the alleged benevolent and virtuous impulses in man, prompting him to live in society and to do well by his fellows, are as surely manifestations of self-liking, or the spirit of self-assertion or self-preservation, as any other impulses whatever, and are thus to be classed with the "vices" — selfishness being always so catalogued. On the face of his theory, Mandeville was thus an extreme optimist and a good deal of a pessimist: the pessimism and the optimism being alike logically involved in the first proposition; while the second had for the ordinary reader all the effect of a depressing view of human nature. The thesis that "vices" work good, of course, is really no more a vindication of vice than is the thesis of Milton, that it is absurd to blame Deity for introducing evil into the world, seeing that without "evil" there can be no "good"; an argument constantly used by Christians and theists when they find themselves hard pressed in the defence of their faith. Strictly, Milton's proposition is the more "licentious" of the two, seeing that it asserts evil to be a necessary condition of good, while Mandeville only says it is actually found to involve good. Nay, the Christian scheme of redemption, promising as it does remission of sins on the mere condition of belief in Christ, is theoretically a stronger encouragement to immorality than the doctrine either of Milton or of Mandeville. But the orthodox disputant is always prepared to endorse the orthodox and the Miltonic principles without regard to their consequences, while ignoring, in regard to the other, everything but the hypothetical consequences. Emerson and Browning, being of a religious temper, are free to elaborate a pantheistic view of evil which annihilates all a priori ethics, including their own. [242]

So, too, Pope may with impunity argue that "whatever is, is right", though the proposition involves even more than Mandeville's; the ethics of the pious having at all times been a medley of inconsistencies, and their hatred or favour depending largely on the fashion in which their prejudices are countered or conciliated.<sup>15</sup> Even the deists who denounced the theses of Mandeville would not stay to ask whether Shaftesbury's Spinozan doctrine that evil was "not positive" did not imply as much potentiality of "licence" as any other. We see the same play of blind hostility and blinder sympathy to-day.

Studied in detail, Mandeville's first contention is rather a truism than a paradox. That — to take his boldest assertion — the existence of prostitutes secures the "chastity" of a number of young women who would otherwise become "unchaste", is a statement which no thinking man will very confidently dispute. To-day we go further, and point out that the comfortable life of the married women of the middle classes is in large measure provided for by the sacrifice of women of the lower; the middle-class man being saved from the burden of a family in his early manhood, not by his "prudence" but by his resort to the prostitute. So with the rest of Mandeville's propositions, many of them being now commonplaces. That strife of sects promotes religious zeal and clerical good conduct; that destruction of goods and property benefits certain producers; that avarice saves wealth; that prodigality distributes it; that the expenditure of [243] the rich is the means by which many of the poor are "employed"; that ambition and love of pleasure stimulate to exertion; that the desire for good things causes good things to be produced — all these statements, taken simply as assertions of fact, are indisputable. The real "answer", in so far as the book called for an answer, seems never to have been given in Mandeville's own time, and indeed is given in its entirety only by the most advanced social philosophy of to-day.

Insofar as temperate rejoinders were made to the Fable in the eighteenth century, they were inconclusive, if not irrelevant. Mr. Minto points out as much in regard to

the criticism of Johnson, which is in parts just enough. "I read Mandeville", said that pundit in his old age,<sup>16</sup> "forty or, I believe, fifty years ago. He did not puzzle me; he opened my views into real life very much. No; it is clear that the happiness of society depends on virtue". "The fallacy of that book is, that Mandeville defines neither vices nor benefits. He reckons among vices everything that gives pleasure". As Mr. Minto points out, and as James Mill pointed out long ago in his *Fragment on Mackintosh*, this objection (like those of Malthus and McCulloch) misses the point, for Mandeville worked on the definition of virtue and vice which was orthodox in his day. It was even then pretended that he was founding on an extravagant ascetic formula, but the student of the history of ethics knows that the fact was not so. Johnson's objection, however, happens to be a mere repetition of Smith's; that optimistic deist, as Sir Leslie Stephen rightly describes him, having found no better argument with [244] which to stiffen the pages of rather thin rhetoric in which he denies, deprecates, and dismisses Mandeville's doctrine. If his criticism does anything, it begs the question against Mandeville's theory of motive, and it does not even do that with any air of conviction. "I do not think", says Whately, whose treatment of Mandeville is uncommonly fair, "he [Smith] fully understood Mandeville; and if, as I believe is the fact, he had read the second volume, he can hardly be thought to have dealt fairly by the author, in omitting all mention of it."<sup>17</sup> Whately's view of the book is worth notice in itself. Of Mandeville he says: —

He was indeed a man of an acute and original, though not very systematic or comprehensive, turn of mind; but his originality was shown chiefly in bringing into juxtaposition notions which, separately, had long been current (and indeed are not yet quite obsolete), but whose inconsistency had escaped detection.<sup>18</sup> It is sufficient to remark, that he is arguing all along on an hypothesis, and on one not framed gratuitously by himself, but furnished him by others; and on that hypothesis, he is certainly triumphant. His argument does not go to show categorically that vice ought to be encouraged, but hypothetically that, if the notions which were afloat were admitted, respecting the character of virtue and vice, and respecting the causes and consequences of wealth, then national virtue and national wealth must be irreconcilable and consequently that of two incompatible objects, we must be content to take one or the other. Which of the two is to be preferred, he nowhere decides in his first volume; in his second, he solemnly declares his opinion, that wealth ought to be renounced as incompatible with virtue.<sup>19</sup>

This does credit to Whately's good feeling, but is just a little too accommodating a view to take of Mandeville's development.<sup>20</sup> The defensive position [245] on which he elected to stand was that "private vices, by the dexterous management of a skilful politician, maybe turned into public benefits";<sup>21</sup> and this does not consist with the "solemn" protestation founded on in Whately's verdict. If, however, we temper its generosity with Mr. Minto's view of the humorous purpose of the original *Fable*, and then concede that what Mandeville began as an amusing paradox latterly took a serious hold of his mind and feelings, we shall perhaps come as near as may be to a true and fair view of the case. It then becomes easy to reach a critical conclusion.

For us to-day, the fallacy of Mandeville's thesis, insofar as that is expressed by his sub-title, lies not in the definition of vice, for which he was not specially responsible,<sup>22</sup> but in his implied definition of "public benefits". What he really does is to show that the "vices" of some people work good to some other people: what he fails to define, and what he ought to define, is "public benefit". Everything there depends on what you understand by "public", and our answer to Mandeville may be stated very simply thus: That no benefit is a public benefit which involves the degradation of any. So long, of course, as we do not feel as a personal grievance the hardship of others, we shall tend to find Mandeville's demonstration either satisfactory or perplexing according as we are un-[246] prejudiced or biased in favour of a transcendental ethic; but as soon as we attain the sense of the solidarity of society, and reason out

the nature of the social interdependences, Mandeville's case becomes an exposure of social evil and a proof of the need for a reconstruction. We do not deny that such "vices" involve such "benefits"; we say we want to have our benefits of a different kind — benefits that shall be truly public, not private. The question finally resolves itself, in short, into what we now call the social problem: How are we to maintain the physical advantages of a great wealth-making system without the present drawbacks? Mandeville in effect said that it could not be done. But in reality he begged the question.

#### IV.

Seeing that Mandeville was never answered in this sense in his own time,<sup>23</sup> it would be unfair to attack him on the strength of his general account of things so far as we have discussed it; but it cannot be denied that there is a certain aggressive callousness in his treatment of the problem of poverty. He not only worked out clearly enough, in his *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (which is an addition to the *Fable*), that view of poverty which is now associated with the name of Mr. Spencer; going perhaps as far as that thinker, and certainly as far as Mr. Mallock; but he proposed to dragoon the poor in various ways; one of his proposals, it should be noted, being to compel them to attend church regularly on Sundays.<sup>24</sup> Not satisfied with insisting that the poor should not be coddled, he expresses a desire that they should [247] always be numerous, as otherwise the dirty work will not be properly attended to.<sup>25</sup> In view of which teaching the average reader will perhaps sympathise less than he otherwise might with our author in that the proposal to drive the poor to church did not save him from the charge of attacking religion; and for the same reasons one is apt to render a somewhat tepid tribute to the piercing shrewdness of the essayist's commentary on affairs. Still, he must be credited with anticipating Smith in respect of several of his economic doctrines and demonstrations, such as the account of the advantages of the division of labour,<sup>26</sup> the glimpse of the true nature of international commerce, the clear detection of the bullion fallacy,<sup>27</sup> and the condemnation<sup>28</sup> of interferences with trades; credit which he needs the more because his constantly avowed aim is to keep the poor ignorant and contented in the interests of their betters. It is something in his favour, too, to be able to say that in his pamphlet on the executions at Tyburn (1725) he protested strongly and cogently against the atrocious misrule in the jails, thus anticipating Howard, if not acting in Howard's spirit; and that he makes a warm and [248] apparently quite sincere plea for vegetarianism, on the score of the horrors of all butchering.<sup>29</sup> It may be, then, that if we knew more of him in his private character we should find him on the whole as likable as Doctor Johnson, to say nothing of Swift.

It is not for moral charm, however, that the modern reader will do well to turn to Mandeville. What he will find without fail is a continual play of acute, original, arresting criticism of life, put forth with a vivacity not to be found in any other serious essayist of that age; in a style certainly less fine than that of Berkeley, but not inferior even to his in general freshness of manner; and turned to account in dialogue with a degree of dramatic instinct of which Berkeley's wholly one-sided and embittered dialogue gives no example. Of Mandeville's general intellectual power a fair idea can be had from his essay *Of Free-will and Predestination*,<sup>30</sup> one of the most lucid and simple statements of the determinist case in our literature. The strategy of the essay is characteristic. The philosophic thesis sustained is that "what we call the will is properly the last result of deliberation", and is not therefore conceivable as "free"; and the case is thus cleared: —

That the true motives of our will so often pass by undiscovered, is to be attributed to the swiftness of thought, and the sudden diversity of our volitions, which often succeed each other so simultaneously that when men are in haste and irresolute we may sometimes observe one part of the body yet employed in executing a former will, while another shall be already obeying the commands of a later; but when we act slowly, and what is called deliberately, the motives of every volition must be

obvious to all that have the courage as well as capacity to search into them. [249] Give two men each a glass in his hand of some value, which, if he break it, he is to pay for: let the one be of a covetous nature, but no wrangler, and very pliable as to opinion; the other very positive, but lavish of his money. Dispute with either of these pretty warmly against free-will, and the power he has of dropping the glass or keeping it in his hand. The first, depend upon it, will not let it fall; and, dare him to it ever so much, he'll content himself with saying that he is sure he can do it if he will, but that he has no mind to throw away so much money to be laughed at. The other, 'tis ten to one, will dash it to pieces, and if he dares speak his mind tell you that he had rather pay for the glass than not have the pleasure to convince you of your folly, obstinacy, or what else his passion or manners shall give him leave to call it. I doubt not but both persons would be fully persuaded, and therefore might swear with a good conscience that they had acted from a principle of free-will, though it seems plain to me that each of them was prompted to what he did, and overruled, by a predominant passion.

The demonstration, however, is turned to the account of neither a "licentious" nor of an anti-religious position, but to that of simple toleration. With the same simplicity and lucidity, it is shown that the Pauline or Calvinistic view makes God the author of sin; and that the Socinian view saves the divine credit on that score solely by negating the divine prescience and omnipotence. The one loophole offered is that the dilemma of reason constitutes an insoluble mystery; that Calvin and the synergist Melancthon, with their opposing views, were equally good and able men; and that the only possible course for reasonable people is to leave the matter forever an open question. If all of the pious persons who denounced the essayist as a pernicious teacher had been equally concerned to strive for peace in their polemic, the world, as he suggests, might have escaped much suffering. [250] But the really important contribution made by Mandeville to social science — the scientific truth by which he ultimately set most store and which he elaborated most fully — is his doctrine that self-regard is the basis of all moral or benevolent or "virtuous" action, as of any other, even when it takes the form of self-denial. In 1728, as we saw, he added to his book a set of dialogues, the greater part of which consists of a vindication of the author's earlier propositions on this head. In the course of the work he gives us to understand that his original fable had been to some extent a "rhapsody", and that his later remarks on it had been in part ironical; but on the instinctively self-regarding nature of all conduct he is serious and explicit. Sir Leslie Stephen has noted the acuteness of his views on the growth of language and society; and it is perhaps not too much to say that he was one of the first English writers to lay a scientific basis for sociology. A biographer of Helvetius has alleged<sup>31</sup> that that writer was "the first to found morality on the immovable basis of personal interest"; but the statement only proves ignorance of Mandeville's work, which was translated into French in 1750, eight years before the appearance of the *De l'Esprit*.<sup>32</sup>

[251] It might be urged, indeed, that Mandeville owes something to Hobbes, who of course pointed to the root principle of self-interest plainly enough; but Mandeville's exposition is so penetrating and so independent that even his assailants do not seem to have denied his essential originality. Perhaps he owed more to Shaftesbury, whose optimism he controverted, but whose naturalism he in effect endorsed; but such a derivation tends to carry us yet further back — to Spinoza, whom he is likely to have studied, though he makes only a disparaging reference to his "atheism". Mandeville may fairly be said, however, to have followed in the wake of La Rochefoucauld, whom, as we saw, Adam Smith had originally put in the same category in his review of ethical systems; and the only possible technical justification of the exclusion of La Rochefoucauld from the blame passed on his successor is that the *Maximes* are rather a set of epigrams, written for their own sake, than an ethical treatise. On no other ground can the Frenchman fairly be passed by while the Dutch[...]man is censured. Mandeville, indeed, seems to work quite independently, though he cannot but have heard of La Rochefoucauld's work; and while, on the one hand, the maximist makes

the subtler analyses of *amour propre*, the fabulist in his prose addenda makes a connected demonstration of the principle. Nothing in Mandeville goes deeper, perhaps, than La Rochefoucauld's remark that we confess our faults and weaknesses only in a spirit of self-love — that we secretly pique ourselves in that case on our candour; but La Rochefoucauld, on the other hand, does not attempt to apply his doctrine systematically to the entire history of society — indeed he never troubles himself about the history of society at all, [252] though he has studied human nature profoundly enough.

One might go on for pages balancing the two against each other; but the end of our comparison, I think, would be the decision that Mandeville has done the greater service to human thought, while La Rochefoucauld has made the more brilliant contribution to literature. Mandeville, with all his comparative coarseness of statement, has constant sight of the scientific truth, though he is often unscientifically perverse in his rendering of it; La Rochefoucauld really restricts us too much to the contemplation of the men of the courts and camps of his time and country. Take, for instance, his celebrated reflection that "in the misfortunes of our best friends we find something not displeasing to us"; careful self-study will (I hope) convince all of us that the fact is not so, the misfortunes of our best friends being found to be unmingledly painful. The fact is that La Rochefoucauld, as his grandson said to Smith, saw men in the conditions most deadly to real friendship; and he wrote of what he saw. Mandeville, with all his surgeon's coolness, never denied that sympathy and pity were sources of keen pain; he tried only to show that, because they were instinctive, no credit could be taken for them as virtues. Here, of course, he was working on the contemporary theological definition of virtue, which made self-denial a *conditio sine qua non*; and, whatever he proved in regard to the operation of vices, his paradox destroyed the transcendental doctrine of virtue. The comparatively temperate author of *Deism Revealed*,<sup>33</sup> noting that Shaftesbury "labours to prove mankind, of whom he knew but [253] little, benevolent, public-spirited, and by nature good", decides that neither he nor Mandeville is right, "In most controversies, truth is on one side or other, or, at least, in the middle; but in this between Shaftesbury and Mandeville it is really nowhere; men are not what either represents them". But in denying that there is even a "middle", the critic has left himself no standing-ground; and, besides, he has evidently misunderstood Mandeville's position. Mandeville, indeed, is a little confusing, but his service is none the less effective because of the inconsistency involved in his language. When he proves that the courteous and outwardly unselfish man gratifies his developed self-love, he narrows the field of "virtue" in the old sense considerably; but when he shows that pity is now as fundamental a passion as fear; that "thousands give money to beggars from the same motive as they pay their corn-cutter — to walk easy"; that the murderer may in a given case feel pity as strongly as the good man; and that the prostitute may use her child well, while the poor girl-mother may strangle her babe for shame, and yet again prove a tender nurse to those she bears in wedlock — when he thus reduces the "benevolent" impulses to instincts, he has led us over the threshold of the truth that the "virtuous" tendencies are simply those which are held to make for the general well-being, or are sanctioned by an accepted moral code, while the "vicious" are those of a different order. To-day we are not going to throw away the words "virtue" and "vice" because their contents are found to be different from what was once supposed: we simply recast the formulae. Mandeville, in short, is one of the real founders of utilitarianism; and the foundation, with all its defects, is perhaps sounder [254] than a good deal of the later building.<sup>34</sup> But not merely does he prepare the way for a rational system of morals: he foreshadows the whole evolution doctrine by his rigorous inquisition into the biological bases of social phenomena.

Between him and Shaftesbury the question lies in a nutshell, and to clear it is to cross the *pons asinorum* of evolutionary ethics. In the non-technical sense, one was an "idealist", the other a "realist." Both reasoners are Naturalists, aware that morality roots in human interest, and therefore is not dependent on any revelation or any

theology. Shaftesbury, however, being primed by his theistic optimism, argues as if this recognition got rid of all moral difficulty — as if “human interest” did not imply “clash of interest”, and as if men could actually be capacitated at all times to see the beauty of justice and righteousness, even as deducible from their own formulas. His case was, in sum, that the right course is the morally beautiful, useful, and fitting course. Mandeville, a Naturalist with a difference, given to analysis rather than to synthesis, and accustomed to look at human nature as a physician, saw that taste in morals varied endlessly; that multitudes had no palate for the moral use or beauty of Shaftesbury's ideal; that each's “interest” is simply that which each desires; and that each organism must infallibly energise on the line of its bias. He rightly contended, therefore, that there is no absolute in morals. It followed that men concerned for right conduct should [255] strive to impose their ideals on others; and, crediting such men in the past with “inventing” or fostering useful conventions by appealing strongly to certain kinds of bias, he argued that in the present the best thing to be done was to keep the poor in poverty in order to force them to work, and (here almost smiling in our faces) to preach the precepts of practical religion by way of morally hypnotising them.

Obviously he had not reached logical finality. On his own repeated showing, failure to obey the precepts of “religion” is normal among those who entirely accept its sanctions. On this head Mandeville always equivocated, doubtless ironically. In his sixth dialogue<sup>35</sup> he so puts the *pros* and *cons*, as to leave no case for his own ostensible advice. “Multitudes”, he makes his orthodox disputant say, “are never tainted with irreligion; and the less civilised nations are, the more boundless is their credulity”, while “on the contrary, men of parts and spirit, of thought and reflexion if their youth has been neglected are prone to infidelity.” Ergo, there must be assiduous teaching of what such minds are inapt to believe. All the while, it is the unquestionably religious multitude that in the terms of the case exhibits most misconduct. The antagonist replies that what is wanted is to train the young morally, not dogmatically. The first speaker retorts that “nothing has contributed more to the growth of deism in this kingdom.” The argument is at an end. Mandeville in his heart is with the rationalists, not with the dogmatists; and what withholds him from going the whole way with them is partly his prudence and partly his pessimism. Logically, his rejection of Shaftesbury's moral [256] optimism should have included the theism on which it was based; and at this point he either temporised or dogmatised.

But the practical effect of his reasoning, alike for theists and for thorough Naturalists, is to stress the inductive and objective views of the moral problem as against the a priori and the subjective. Here he was doing a real service to science, not only paving the way for the evolutionary conception, but preoccupying for Naturalism the ground which would otherwise have been held for dogma as against optimistic theism. Where the theologians would have made the alternative lie between idealising pantheism and irrational faith, Mandeville sardonically indicated that there was another. And to-day social science must embody his point of view as well as the other.

#### V.

As his thought ripened with experience he cut ever more deeply to the roots of his problem. The *Enquiry into the Origin of Honour*, published in the year before his death, is in several respects his most stringently reasoned performance. In his preface, as he was wont, he sums up his argument; and it is after a rapid induction from the etymology of such words as virtue (from *vir*), clown (from *colonus*), and villain (from *villein*) that he writes: —

Moral, for aught I know, may now signify virtue, in the same manner and for the same reason that panic signifies fear. That this conjecture or opinion of mine should be detracting from the dignity of moral virtue, or have a tendency to bring it into disrepute, I cannot see. I have already owned that it ever was and ever will be

preferable to vice, in the opinion of all wise men. But to call virtue itself eternal cannot be done without a strangely figurative way of speaking. There is no doubt but all mathematical [257] truths are eternal, yet they are taught; and some of them are very abstruse, and the knowledge of them never was acquired without great labour and depth of thought. All propositions, not confined to time or place, that are once true, must be always so, even in the silliest and most abject things in the world; as for example. It is wrong to under-roast mutton for people who love to have their meat well done. The truth of this, which is the most trifling thing I can readily think on, is as much eternal as that of the sublimest virtue. If you ask me where this truth was before there was mutton, or people to dress or eat it, I answer, in the same place where chastity was before there were any creatures that had an appetite to procreate their species. This puts me in mind of the inconsiderate zeal of some men who, even in metaphysics, know not how to think abstractly, and cannot forbear mixing their own meanness and imbecilities with the ideas they form of the Supreme Being.

There is no virtue that has a name, but it curbs, regulates, or subdues some passion that is peculiar to human nature; and therefore to say that God has all the virtues in the highest perfection wants as much the apology that it is an expression accommodated to vulgar capacities as that he has hands and feet, and is angry. For as God has not a body, nor anything that is corporeal belonging to his essence, so he is entirely free from passions and frailties. The holiness of God, and all his perfections, as well as the beatitude he exists in, belong to his nature; and there is no virtue but what is acquired.

The truth last put is at least as old as Aristotle;<sup>36</sup> and Mandeville is hardly more consistent in his grasp of it than was Bacon, who endorsed and then ignored it;<sup>37</sup> but the collocation of it with a thoroughly naturalistic conception of the evolution of morals was perhaps never before that day better achieved than by Mandeville. It is in this connection that he vindicates his ostensibly extravagant proposition that morals originated in the craft of rulers. Taken [258]literally, the doctrine is, as Sir Leslie Stephen says, preposterous. A moral bias must exist before "rulers" can take advantage of it; but when Mandeville goes on to show how the "point of honour" has been evolved on the same lines as the conception of "virtue", it begins to appear that under the exaggeration of his phrase there lies the scientific conception of forms of moral opinion as fostered variations. The thesis is clearly put in the first dialogue of the *Enquiry into the Origin of Honour*: —

*Horatio*. But pray come to the point, the origin of honour.

*Cleomenes*. If we consider that men are always endeavouring to mend their condition and render society more happy as to this world, we may easily conceive, when it was evident that nothing could be a check upon man that was absent, or at least appeared not to be present, how moralists and politicians came to look for something in man himself, to keep him in awe. The more they examined into human nature, the more they must have been convinced that man is so selfish a creature that, whilst he is at liberty, the greatest part of his time will always be bestowed upon himself; and that whatever fear or reverence he might have for an invisible cause, that thought was often jostled out by others more nearly relating to himself. It is highly probable that skilful rulers, having made these observations for some time, would be tempted to try if man could not be made an object of reverence to himself.

*Hor*. You have only named love and esteem: they alone cannot produce reverence by your own maxim: how could they make a man afraid of himself?

*Cleo*. By improving upon his dread of shame; and this, I am persuaded, was the case. For as soon as it was found out that many vicious, quarrelsome, and undaunted men, that feared neither God nor Devil, were yet often curbed and visibly withheld by the fear of shame; and likewise that this fear of shame might be greatly increased by an artful education, and be made superior even to that of death, they had made a discovery of a real tie, that would serve many noble purposes in the society. This I

take to have been the origin of honour, the principle of which has its foundation [259] in self-liking; and no art could ever have fixed or raised it in any breast if that passion had not pre-existed and been predominant there.

*Hor.* But how are you sure that this was the work of moralists and politicians, as you seem to insinuate?

*Cleo.* I give those names promiscuously to all that, having studied human nature, have endeavoured to civilise men, and render them more and more tractable either for the ease of governors and magistrates, or else for the temporal happiness of society in general. I think of all inventions of this sort, the same which [I] told you of politeness [*Fable of the Bees, Part ii*, p. 132], that they are the joint labour of many. Human wisdom is the child of time. It was not the contrivance of one man, nor could it have been the business of a few years, to establish a notion by which a rational creature is kept in awe for fear of itself, and an idol is set up that shall be its own worshipper.<sup>38</sup>

Thus stated, the doctrine is seen to have a content not recognised by Mr. Lecky, who cites an earlier statement of it only to vituperate it.<sup>39</sup> Obviously the formula is askew, inasmuch as "moralists and politicians" themselves belong to the category "man", and in the terms of the case their moral perception figures as spontaneous. But there remains the truth — now freshly illustrated for westerns by the case of Japan — that moral ideals are matter of "invention" and inculcation like arts and sciences, and that a given ethic is simply a variation which has survived — the source of variation being perhaps somebody's "genius."

Had the case been thus put, it would have been possible on Mandeville's behalf partially to turn even the home thrust of Hume: "Is it not very inconsistent for an author to assert in one page that moral distinctions are inventions of politicians for public interest; and in the next page maintain that vice is [260] advantageous to the public?"<sup>40</sup> The parry would consist in saying that the original "invention" needed overhauling; that morals had become conventionalised; and that it was necessary to have a fresh valuation. Not that that answer would have saved the thesis of "private vices, public benefits."

But the service done by Mandeville, when all is said, lies in his method, not in his results. He is of the tribe of Machiavelli, one of the spirits who face the realities of life and put aside conventions to reach their own estimate. "One of the greatest reasons", he writes, in the *Introduction to his Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, "why so few people understand themselves, is that most writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are. As for my part, without any compliment to the courteous reader or myself, I believe man (besides skin, flesh, bones, etc., that are obvious to the eye) to be a compound of various passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no." And he insists again:<sup>41</sup> "To understand human nature requires study and application, as well as penetration and sagacity." In medicine, as in morals, he was a sceptic and a naturalist; and his book of the *Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases*,<sup>42</sup> while vending a good deal of fantasy concerning the bodily "spirits", after the fashion of the time, insists from the first on a closer and more patient study of nature. It is this vital hold on permanent fact that makes Mandeville [261] fresh and stimulating for us to-day, keeping him worth reading now in connection with the most advanced science in history, sociology, and biology.<sup>43</sup> And yet, somehow, he has practically passed out of sight for the general reader.<sup>44</sup> I suppose it is partly because of our intense prudery and still prevailing superstition; partly because of that turn for optimistic platitude which is so much more characteristic of English thought than any "practicality" or "hatred of shams." Our timidity about "the nude" extends to truth in general. In France, despite the "restrictions banales" which M. Thenard believes<sup>45</sup> will long continue to be made there on the teaching of La Rochefoucauld, that writer is a familiar classic; and ven in this

country it is certain that many will acquiesce in Mr. Saintsbury's outspoken vindication of him who would shrink from Mandeville. Mrs. Grundy has always made exceptions in favour of foreigners. "It may be", said Mr. Home once,<sup>46</sup> "that false modesty, and social as well as religious hypocrisy, are the concomitant and the counterpart of the present equivocal state of our civilisation; but if I were not an Englishman, it is more than probable I should say that these qualities were more glaringly conspicuous in England than in any other country."

#### VI.

It would be finally unwarrantable to dismiss as mere conventional prejudice the hostility to Mandeville shown by Mr. Lecky in the section on utilitarianism [262] which begins his *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, a section which is perhaps the least durable portion of an ill-coordinated book. But when Mr. Lecky adds to his always inconclusive because always misconceiving criticism of utilitarian ethics the use of at once question-begging and vituperative terms, which can only browbeat the uninstructed while doing nothing for the student save repelling him — then we are justified in imputing to the scholar the temper of unscholarly bigotry. To begin by calling Mandeville's theory (taken not as a whole, but in a section admittedly inconsistent with the main and notorious thesis) "perhaps the lowest and most repulsive form" of the principle that virtue rests on self-interest; to reiterate the term "repulsive" and call the scheme in question "selfish"; and yet again to speak of Hobbes's system as attaining intellectual grandeur though "starting from a conception of human nature as *low and base* as that of Mandeville" — this is not to reason and confute, but to eke out weak argument with abuse. Such was the tactic of Mackintosh, who dismissed the whole subject with a "not to mention Mandeville, the buffoon and sophister of the alehouse: or Helvetius, an ingenious but flimsy writer, the low and loose moralist of the vain, the selfish, and the sensual"<sup>47</sup> — thus coarsely contemning the acute and original fabulist and the benevolent and beloved Helvetius, while giving complaisant notice to Shaftesbury, Hartley, Tucker, and Paley. As against such a deliverance it is not uninteresting to cite the judgment of one whom Mackintosh had occasion once to characterise<sup>48</sup> as failing "in little but the respect due [263] to the abilities and character of his opponents." Says Macaulay, in his early essay on Milton<sup>49</sup>: —

If Shakespeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the *Fable of the Bees*. But could Mandeville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man, a real, living, individual man?

The criticism is an arresting one; and on reflection it recommends itself as just. It is certainly well borne out, as regards the last sentence, by the *Virgin Unmask'd*. But the praise remains very sufficient, and is not lightly to be discounted. Elsewhere in the regions of propriety, too, there has been heard at times a reasonably open-minded verdict on the *Fable*: it was Miss Mitford,<sup>49a</sup> I think, who once pronounced it the wittiest and wickedest of modern books. Browning,<sup>50</sup> finally, appears benevolently to credit Mandeville with holding his own elastic doctrine, presumably derived through Shaftesbury and Pope and Priestley, that evil, while perceptible only as contrary to good and necessarily to be hated and resisted as such, is somehow good from a non-human point of view. The interpretation will not stand; but the endorsement is notable. It is the professed philosophers who have been loudest to cry "shocking." Even Sir Leslie Stephen, I think, gives undue countenance to the Grundyite view of Mandeville by calling him a "prurient" writer, and accepting old gossip to the effect that Mandeville was given to [264] ribald talk in the coffee-houses.<sup>51</sup> "Mandeville", he says, "was giving up to the coffee-houses a penetration meant for loftier purposes"; and he accuses him of "brutality," and of wearing a "detestable grin" when he shows us the "hideous elements that are fermenting beneath" the Shaftesburian "coating of

varnish." All this is a little over-strained. If Mandeville was a prurient writer, Pope must be pronounced very prurient indeed; and in fact half the writing of his time must be similarly censured. He is perhaps not so absolutely innocent as James Mill made out: his *Virgin Unmask'd* is not an entirely well-meaning performance; but even the most dubious part of that is far more of a realistic study than a prurient production; and the bulk of the book runs to politics and rather stilted narrative. The valid objection to him is on the score of his deficiency in sympathy, which is bad enough, but can hardly be called "brutality"; and in any other sense he is much less brutal than Swift. As for the "detestable grin" which Sir Leslie Stephen discovers, I have not been struck by it; and I cannot see the point of the charge that the coffee-houses got the best of Mandeville's gift of penetration. How many more books would the critic have had from a practising physician?

#### VII.

In view of the severity towards Mandeville shown by such writers as Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and Mackintosh, it cannot be said that his unpopularity [265] is substantially due to his repute for unbelief in religion. Open heterodoxy could bring upon Spinoza the passionate hatred of generations of Christians; but in the case of Mandeville, as in that of Machiavelli, the charge of unbelief was rather a pretext to aggravate a resentment felt on other grounds than a spontaneous protest. Men were unaffectedly exasperated at seeing themselves held up to the light like so many impaled insects, by observers whose utter dispassionateness was more wounding than the savage contempt of Swift. But Mandeville certainly added to the volume of resentment against him by indicating a tranquil incredulity as to Christian dogmas while habitually calling himself a Christian. He might soothe churchmen at one time by mercilessly dissecting the graceful theistic schema of Shaftesbury; but when he turned the edge of his criticism towards the church as a factor in human conduct he was as unpleasant reading for the priests as he had ever been for the heretical optimists. It would be difficult to discredit Christianity more effectually in that day than Mandeville did by simply weighing its claims as a moralising force. The stress of the deistic criticism had lain on the issue of credibility; and the defence ran largely to saying that freethinkers were not and could not be good men. Mandeville in effect shrugs his shoulders over the question of belief, barely taking the trouble to indicate skepticism.

"Nothing is easier", he writes, "than to believe; men may be sincere in their faith, and even zealous for the religion they profess, and at the same time lead wicked lives, and act quite contrary to their belief". "Throughout the nation the Christian faith, according to the common acceptance, is that part of our religion in which the generality of the people are the least defective; if we inquire of those who attend the greatest profligates in the [266] last moments of life, even the ordinaries of prisons, we shall hear but few complaints as to this point."<sup>52</sup>

Like other freethinkers of his day, he makes deft use of the language of Archbishop Tillotson, a Broad Churchman a century before the Broad Church. Indeed he was something more than a Broad Church-man who wrote —

We will suppose that about the time when universal ignorance and the genuine daughter of it (call her devotion or superstition) had overspread the world, and the generality of the people were strongly inclined to believe strange things; and even the greatest contradictions were recommended to them under the notion of mysteries; being told by their priests and guides that the more contradictious anything is to reason, the greater merit there is in believing it —

by way of preamble to a discussion of the mystery of the Eucharist. It is after quoting a long passage couched in this strain from Tillotson, and another from Taylor on the improbabilities of Scripture, that Mandeville writes: "No candid reader can imagine that I would endeavour to make slight of faith, or lessen the reverence that is due to

the real mystery of our religion, *any more than* either of these prelates"; and we can imagine the growl with which some readers saw their religion reduced to a haze of uncertainty, to the end of forcing them to confess that they had no right to force creed subscription on anybody, and that the only tenet they could confidently hold was the existence of a God whom they could not conceive. For the rest, Mandeville's own way of handling the "mysteries" leaves small room for doubt as to his own convictions: —

In the idea we can form of the supreme being, the first attributes we are convinced of are his power and wisdom, [267] though in a degree of perfection vastly beyond our capacity to conceive; and if we continue in that contemplation we shall find that the unity of a God must be equally necessary with his existence: but as soon as we admit of reveal'd religion and the gospel, we meet something that surpasses, if not shocks, our understanding, which is the divinity of Jesus Christ, and that of the Holy Ghost. Men may cavil and wrest words to their own purpose as long as they list; but whoever has read the New Testament with attention, and denies that he has found any such meaning hinted at there, must be either very blind or very obstinate.

What then must we do in this dilemma? Shall we reject part of the gospel, or say that there are three gods, and so speak not only against the clearest ideas we have of the deity, but likewise the plainest doctrine of the same gospel as well as of the Old Testament? Not to be guilty of either, we ought to treat this point with the utmost diffidence of our own capacity. The more we endeavour to explain this mystery the more intricate we shall find it; and it will less startle and fight reason when propounded in a few words according to the simplicity of the scriptures than it does by that great train of explications that accompany it in Thomas Aquinas's commentators. It is impossible men should ever entertain the same sentiments of a matter which is unintelligible in its nature; and it is to be admired how so many men of sense and good logicians as this point has been controverted by for so many ages could ever imagine that anything could be a fit subject for disputation, which no language can give them the least idea of. Others may interpret for us as they please, and impose upon us what forms they think fit; but whoever will attend to what passes in his own mind may soon be convinced that believing is not a thing of choice. Our Church pretends not to infallibility, which implies that all her members are at full liberty to re-examine whatever she has taught them.<sup>53</sup>

Mandeville and Shaftesbury thus joined hands on the great practical issue of their day, the wringing of legal toleration for heresy from monopolist churchmen and opinionated fanatics. Whether or not they were [268] on the right side by force of their being in the minority, on that side the freethinkers then as later stood; and to their polemic is mostly due what advance was made in their age. Mandeville, for his purpose, freely quoted Bishop Taylor *On the Liberty of Prophesying*; but Taylor himself, after bearing his testimony, fell from light, and condoned persecution.<sup>54</sup> The freethinker, more fortunate, stands out for posterity in the light of the great virtue to which he remained loyal, and which makes practical amends for so much negative shortcoming in active sympathy.

If, after all, orthodoxy is still concerned to hold him up to odium on the score of the shortcoming, in revenge for his exposure of the vast failure of Christianity to make men either just or compassionate one to another, it must be noted that Mandeville to the last professed to admire the Christian ethic. "After all", says *Horatio* to *Cleomenes* at the end of his last dialogue, "I can't see what honour you have done to the Christian religion, which yet you ever seem strenuously to contend for, whilst you are treating everything else with the utmost freedom"; to which *Cleomenes* replies that "no discovery of the craft or insincerity of men can ever bring any dishonour upon the Christian religion itself. I mean the doctrine of Christ, which can only be learned from the New Testament, where it will ever remain in its purity and lustre".<sup>54a</sup> This

attitude, though certainly not orthodox, has so often passed for an acceptance of Christianity that it cannot plausibly be identified with an anti-Christian temper for the mere purpose of saddling on rationalism the scandal of the thesis that "private vices are[sic! ACJ] public benefits". To all appearance, Mandeville thought on [269] the Christian religion very much as did Locke, whose mode of adhesion is not commonly disclaimed. No doubt Mandeville was farcing when he solemnly arraigned Shaftesbury as a deist;<sup>55</sup> but his language concerning Bruno and Vanini<sup>56</sup> is worthy of Warburton; and it is certain that the author of *Deism Revealed* had no pretext in Mandeville's works for describing him as an assailant of Christianity.<sup>57</sup> But his value for us as a thinker is not affected by the question of his private attitude towards creeds; it lies in the "tart cathartic virtue" of his criticism of men and manners; in the downright force and fearlessness of his speech. "Of all the writers on the side of infidelity", admits the author of *Deism Revealed*, even while thus misrepresenting him, "this had the greatest stock of wit and experience: his stile, indeed, is a little lumpish, but it is clear and strong." Smith thinks the style, though humorous, was one of "coarse and rustic eloquence"; but in point of fact it is more pungent, nervous, and effective than Smith's own; and the humour is an added superiority. Pope's pointless half-line<sup>58</sup> in the *Dunciad* was probably penned with the poet's usual independence of personal inquiry. It may be noted to Mandeville's credit, finally, that he was a keen advocate of realism in art,<sup>59</sup> and that he is nearly unique in his generation in his insistence on the intellectual capacities of women.<sup>60</sup> That may [270] win him a measure of feminine consideration to-day, and he certainly needs some such special recommendation to secure much of it.

#### Notes.

\* In the same year with the first appearance of this essay [1886] there was published at Halle the doctoral thesis of Herr Paul Goldbach, *Bernard de Mandeville's Bienenfabel*. [...] 1 See the *Life* prefixed to Messrs. Nelson's edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, 1831 (and later), pp. vii, viii.

1acj. As for Mandeville's ancestry, see the information on this website.

2 Yet the original pamphlet would seem to have utterly disappeared. The British Museum possesses only a pirated reprint in four pages quarto, which Mandeville tells us was "cried about the streets" at a halfpenny. Dr. Goldbach, I notice, tried to procure the first issue, but of course in vain.

3 Coleridge justly ascribes to it "great Hudibrastic vigour" (*Table Talk*, July I, 1833). Dr. Goldbach's bibliography, by the way, includes two poems, *Typhon* and *The Planters Charity*, dated 1704, of which I can find no trace in the British Museum, and which he himself has not seen.

4 For instance. Sir Leslie Stephen (*English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii, p. 2,3) says: "The poem itself was first published in 1714. It did not excite much attention until republished with comments in 1723." In point of fact, the edition of 1714 was the reissue with comments. Professor Fraser (ed. of Berkeley, ii, 10) makes the same mistake, as does McCulloch (*Lit. of Pol. Ec.*). The confusion of dates is further confounded in my copy (ed. Edinburgh, 1772), in which, by an editorial blunder, Mandeville is made to say he published the *Hive* about 1699. Mr. A. W. Ward, again (Globe ed. of Pope, p. 391, note), gives the date 1708.

5 Dr. Goldbach, calculating from the preface of the ed. of 1714, gives the date 1706. But that preface says "above eight years ago." The reprint is dated 1705.

5 acj. It is remarkable that Robertson clearly misread or misinterpreted Mandeville's second title. Mandeville never stated nor meant that 'private vices are public benefits'. He explains 'private vices, publick benefits' in his *Letter to Dion* (1732), ed. Bonamy Dobrée, 1974, p. 36-38.

6 So Malthus: "Let me not be supposed to give the slightest sanction to the system of morals inculcated in the *Fable of the Bees*, a system which I consider as absolutely false, and directly contrary to the just definition of virtue. The great art of Dr. Mandeville consisted in misnomers" (*Essay on the Principle of Population*, 7th ed. p. 492, note).

7 *Table Talk*, as before cited.

8 John M. Robertson, *Pioneer Humanists*, p. 222:[acj] 'There was certainly small serious concern for Christianity in the author of the *Fable of the Bees*. None the less there arose, as Henry Crabb Robinson wrote to Schlosser, a "sneaking kindness" towards Mandeville on the part of the Churchmen, (Schlosser, *History of the Eighteenth Century*, Engl. Transl., ii, 51, note) who felt that if he did not believe in them he at least damaged their adversary, the optimist pantheist [Shaftesbury].' See for Schlosser's note quoting Robinson also F.B. Kaye, *Fable* ii, p. 441.

9 *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, ii, 43

10 *Dissertations and Discussions*, iv, 179,

11 "You are not the first, sir, by five hundred", says Mandeville (*Letter to Dion*, 1732, p. 5), "who has been very severe upon the *Fable of the Bees* without having ever read it. I have been at Church myself, when the Book in Question has been preached against with great Warmth by a worthy Divine, who own'd that he had never seen it; and there are living Witnesses now, Persons of unquestion'd Reputation, who heard it as well as I."

12 Of which Mackintosh held that Hutcheson "appears nowhere to greater advantage" (*On the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, 4th ed, by Whewell, p. i6i, note). I cannot think this is so. But there is point and force in Hutcheson's preliminary analysis (*Thoughts on Laughter, and Observations on the Fable of the Bees*, ed. 1758, p. 58), of the variations of Mandeville's thesis, which takes, as he points out, five different forms: — That private vices are themselves public benefits; that they naturally tend, as the direct and necessary means, to produce public happiness; that they may be made to tend to public happiness; that they naturally and necessarily flow from public happiness; and that they will probably flow from public prosperity through the present corruption of men.

13 Work cited, pref. p. 17.

14 See Mandeville's *Vindication* at end of *Fable of the Bees*, vol. i.

15 But Gibbon, in his conformist vein, joins in the conventional outcry. Of Law, who was his aunt's spiritual preceptor, he writes, demurely: "On the appearance of the *Fable of the Bees*, he drew his pen against the licentious doctrine that private vices are public benefits; and morality as well as religion must join in his applause" (*Memoirs*, Misc, Works, ed. 1837, p.10).

16 Boswell, *Globe* ed. pp. 468-9.

17 *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 4th ed. p. 28.

18 *Id.* p. 27.

19 *Id.* p. 28.

20 The same may be said of the gently charitable criticism of Mr. A. W. Ward (*Globe* edition of Pope, p. 391, note): —"Though Mandeville only meant to show that under the system of Providence good is wrought out of evil, he would have done well to leave no doubt as to both the meaning and the limitations of his doctrine."

21 *A Search into the Nature of Civil* [sic! acj] *Society*, end; *Vindication of the Book*, end.

22 Though he unquestioningly adopts it. "I see no self-denial, without which there can be no virtue" (Remark (O) on *Fable*). Compare *Search into the Nature of Civil Society*, par. 9, and *Dialogue* iii (ed. 1772, p. 90).

23 Though he put the point very plainly in his *Dialogues* (iii, near beginning — ed. 1772, p, 88).

24 Ed. 1772, p. 232.

25 It is a little difficult to decide how far Mandeville may be ironical in this as in some other of his propositions. The *Remarks* abound in humour; and in these (Q and Y) his doctrine as to the poor might be surmised to be satirical. He not only elaborates it, however, in his *Essay on Charity*, but recurs to it in the later *Dialogues* (vi, near end) in which he vindicates his positions. Frank cynicism rather than irony thus seems to be the explanation.

26 This is admitted by McCulloch (Lit. of Pol. Ec. p. 352); and Roscher (*Zur Gesch. der englisch. Volkswirtschaftslehre*, p. 123, cited by Goldbach, p. 59, note) praises Mandeville on the same score. For his vigorous and on the whole rational resistance to the "mercantile" theory, see *Remarks* (L) and (Y). A French translator (cited by Goldbach, p. 5, note) contends that the Physiocrats had based their system on the principles of Mandeville. But the fabulist had not shaken himself free of fallacy, even as

regards the mercantile theory. See *Remarks* (L) and (Q).

27 *Remark* (Q) on *Fable*.

28 *Essay on Charity* (ed. 1772, p. 226).

29 *Remark* (P) on *Fable*.

30 In the *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*.

31 *Poésies de M. Helvetius*, Londres, 1781, p. xxx.

32 The all-observant Buckle notes that " Helvetius, who visited London, was never weary of praising the people: many of the views in his great work on the Mind are drawn from Mandeville" (*Introd. to Hist. of Civil. in Eng.*, Routledge's ed. p. 413). The visit, however, was only made in 1764. Voltaire, too, as Buckle also notes, was impressed by Mandeville. He confessedly imitated the *Fable* in his *Le Marseillois et le Lion* (see the *Avertissement*, ed. Garnier, vol. x), and he has a passage on it in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. *Abeilles*: " II est très vrai que la société bien gouvernée tire parti de tous les vices; mais il n'est pas vrai que ces vices soient nécessaires au bonheur du monde. On fait de très-bons remèdes avec des poisons, mais ce ne sont pas les poisons qui nous font vivre. En réduisant ainsi la *Fable des Abeilles* à sa juste valeur, elle pourrait devenir un ouvrage de morale utile."

33 Ed. 1751, vol. ii, p. 217.

34 Even James Mill, while chivalrously defending Mandeville against the discreditable aspersions of Mackintosh, goes on to say that he does not think mankind are as Mandeville described them; a concession made, I think, rather on sentimental than on logical grounds. Certainly Mandeville is astray in some inessentials; but he ought to be judged by his essentials.

35 Ed. 1772, ii, 261 sq.

36 *Nicom. Eth.* vii, i.

37 *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, B. vii, c. iii.

38 *Enquiry into the Origin of Honour*, 1732, pp. 38-41.

39 *Hist. of European Morals*, 6th ed. i, 6.

40 *Essay Of Refinement in the Arts*.

41 *Dialogue* ii (ed. 1772, p. 75); cp. *Dial*, iv (p. 134).

42 So in later editions. The first and part of the second have "Passions" for "Diseases."

43 See, for instance, *Dialogue* iii.

44 An edition, issued in 1844, of *Law's Remarks*, with a characteristically rambling and purposeless preface by Maurice, gives, I think, the last reprint of the *Fable* in England.

45 *Préf.* to ed. of La Rochefoucauld, 1881, p. 38.

46 Ingram's *Life of Poe*, i, 253.

47 *On the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, 4th ed. by Whewell, p. 69.

48 *Id.* p, 303.

49 *Essays*, Student's ed. pp. 3-4.

49acj Possibly Mrs. Buller, affirmative to "the wickedest cleverest book in English history"; see Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary* etc. (1869), I, 392.

50 *Parleyings -with Certain People of Importance in their Day*.

51 Dr. Goldbach (pp. 32-3, note) notes that Schlosser (*Gesch. d. 18 Jahrh.* i, 408) says Mandeville's life corresponded to his book, but answers with Tabaraud (*Hist. Crit. du Philos. Anglais*, 1806, ii, 248) that there is no evidence for such defamatory statements.

52 *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness*, 2nd ed. 1729, pp. 6-7.

53. *Id.* pp. 71-73.

54 See the admissions of his biographer Willmott, *Bishop Jeremy Taylor*, 2nd ed. 1848, p. 200.

54acj Like so many, Robertson fails to see Mandeville's distinction between (inward and private) 'christianity', i.e. the doctrine of Christ, strictly restricted to the New Testament, and (outward and public) 'christendom', i.e. the worldly organized religious enterprise. As for Mandeville's personal position, see *Recent News on Mandeville* on this website.

55 *Dialogue* vi, end.

56 *Remark* (R) on *Fable*. He describes both as atheists, which they were not, and gives a quite erroneous account of Vanini's end. 57 Lechler, in his careful *Geschichte des*

*Englischen Deismus*, does not mention Mandeville at all.

58 B. ii, 414.

59 *Dialogue* i.

60 *Dialogue* iv (ed. 1772, pp. 142-3). I do not recollect any earlier proposition of a similar kind in our literature, save that of Defoe in his *Essay on Projects*, 1698. In Mandeville's *Dialogue* i, the woman is given the best of the argument on art. It must be confessed, however, that Mandeville's criticism does not in general spare women any more than men.