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**A Defense of a Mandevillean Conception of Virtue**

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**Abstract**

Bernard Mandeville stood in dire opposition to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian moral tradition with his work *The Fable of the Bees* in which he argued that private vices can be public benefits. In response to his paradox, many of his contemporaries responded with resistance and criticism. In my thesis I respond to two such criticisms; one is by George Berkeley, and the other is by Francis Hutcheson. Each of their critiques represents a large body of other criticisms of Mandeville, and I defend Mandeville's writing against both these responses on account of their misunderstandings of his work. Both of these criticisms attempt to evade the ultimatum Mandeville implicitly puts forth in his poem: embrace a rigorous standard of virtue at the cost of industry or abandon virtue in pursuit of economic prosperity. I attempt to reconcile the ultimatum with a Mandevillean reframing of virtue. This conception rejects the rigorous standard of virtue insofar as it does not require complete and total self-denial as a prerequisite for virtue; virtuous actions in this conception can have a self-regarding element. Through this reframed understanding, society can maintain virtuous conduct and economic prosperity.

Keywords: philosophy, Mandeville, Berkeley, Hutcheson, morality, virtue, vice

The receptions of Bernard Mandeville's satirical poem "The Grumbling Hive" (1705)<sup>1</sup> vary in the significance they place on the work. Some write it off and deem it fairly meaningless in the context of eighteenth century French and British moral philosophy. Others, however, see the work as a valuable one that satirized moral eulogists. In this paper, I defend the latter view against a number of Mandeville's most notable critics and attempt to convey the importance of his work in terms of its moral philosophy. I intend to demonstrate that "The Grumbling Hive" offers no psychological claim that individuals are inherently vicious, but rather a moral realist's response to his contemporaries that, when read within the context of his other works, advances a realistic moral theory.

The focus of many moral philosophies and theories includes a concern about virtuousness and viciousness, and Mandeville's moral philosophy is certainly no exception. However, not every philosopher agrees about that which constitutes virtue and vice or those actions which can be considered virtuous or vicious, but a generally common agreement is that vice is undesirable

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper I introduce Mandeville's (and others') works with their original publication dates, but, for the parenthetical citations, I differentiate Mandeville's works using the publication dates of the *source* in which I found them.

and “bad.” Surely, this general agreement is at least part of the reason why the most notorious of Mandeville’s assertions is “private vices, public benefits” (often spelled “publick”); Mandeville makes use of this paradox in order to convey a certain degree of hypocrisy in contemporary society, as well as to subvert more commonly held beliefs about the nature of virtue and vice. “Private vices” are those actions which are entirely self-regarding (rather than other-regarding) and which are taken to satisfy one’s own self-interest, rather than to benefit others in the community. Mandeville argues that these private vices, including luxury, greed, and free trade, can often benefit the prosperity of the public – hence “public benefits” – by contributing to a bustling economy and the general public welfare. Without private vice, contemporary, developed societies (perhaps in particular the one in which Mandeville lived, London and Britain more generally) would not succeed economically. This thought is significant because it stands in stark contrast to the views of many of his contemporaries.

Similarly, it is important to characterize Mandeville’s understanding of virtue and vice. However, it is not immediately obvious from Mandeville’s poem alone his own beliefs and understandings about virtue and vice; his poem seems to characterize the general and common beliefs and understandings about virtue and vice by the general public. It is apparent from the poem that Mandeville thinks the general understanding of morality – as circumscribed by laws and reinforced with reward and punishment – is mistaken. With that being said, the general public understanding of virtuous actions are those actions that are completely self-denying and other-regarding and taken or performed with the ambition to do good unto others. The general public understanding of a vicious action is an action which is taken or performed with even the slightest regard for the benefit to the agent of the given action, even if the action does not cause some great harm to others. Later in this paper, I will explicate Mandevilleian definitions of virtue

and vice as I believe Mandeville thinks they *ought* to be defined, but before I proceed with anything regarding Mandeville's writing, a brief consideration of Mandeville's background and some context of the time in which he was writing will be helpful to the greater discussion of his work.

### **I. Brief Background & Context**

Mandeville was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, and after graduating with a degree in philosophy and medicine, he traveled Europe. Eventually, he settled in England. Mandeville learned the language, married, had children and practiced medicine focusing on hypochondria and hysteria<sup>2</sup>. Little record of the exact details of Mandeville's life exist now, but, due to Mandeville's controversial views that opposed many of his well-known, respected contemporaries F.B. Kaye notes, "rumor has been more communicative" when it comes to questions about his character and personality (xxi). Mandeville's critics – Christian and otherwise – built him up as a dangerous, delusional writer. And it is altogether more intriguing when one considers the time his critics then spent trying to prove his understanding of civil society to be specious. The fierce attacks, not only on Mandeville's writing but also his character, suggest fears that Mandeville might have actually identified a real societal problem that many others did not want to face or resolve. But to understand Mandeville and his critics most accurately, it is important to consider those ideas and values that prompted his writing. Mandeville's background plays a big role in shaping his work.

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<sup>2</sup> During Mandeville's lifetime, hypochondria and hysteria were terms used to refer to respective male and female stomach problems.

Eighteenth century England was home to the Society for the Reformation of Manners. This group aimed at ridding society of private vice – a common goal of many social theorists at the time as well – believing private vice to be toxic to a flourishing society. While it is likely that he directed his earliest writings at the Society for the Reformation of Manners, Mandeville consistently attacked the values which this group represented. They believed that the key to social order lay in virtuous conduct amongst all citizens (Horne ix). Indeed, most Christians in the eighteenth century upheld the same general precepts of morality; they certainly believed it to be necessary for an industrious society. The essential connection between virtuous conduct and civic prosperity actually had a name: “civic humanism” (Horne xi). It is likely that these sentiments were prompted by some catastrophic events that took place in the seventeenth century (including a revolution in 1688 and the death of the queen of Great Britain in 1714), often considered punishments from God for precisely the viciousness that Mandeville believes carries industry (Horne xi). Mandeville’s poem, “The Grumbling Hive”, was first published in 1705, but it was not until 1714 that he included prose-style commentary on the poem (in addition to the poem itself), in a book called *The Fable of the Bees*. By the publication of its sixth edition in 1729, *The Fable of the Bees* had garnered a great deal of attention and criticism (Dehart & Vandenberg).

## II. The Infamous “Grumbling Hive”

“The Grumbling Hive” uses a hive of bees as a thinly-veiled metaphor for human civil society (and probably, more specifically, England). The hive enjoyed great “luxury and ease” and maintained a prosperous society with “vast numbers” of bee-inhabitants (Mandeville 1988 p.18). The bee-inhabitants held the same sorts of positions as any person. They built up a strong

army and were esteemed amongst all other bee communities. They seemed to preach against vice and avarice, calling out open cheats and violators of justice, but in reality, “All trades and places knew some cheat, / No calling was without deceit” (Mandeville 1988 p.20). Lawyers thrived in the business of settling disputes, extending trials and creating problems under a virtuous guise though they actually aimed at making money. In the same manner, doctors were more concerned with “fame and wealth” than curing patients, and clergymen embodied the very sins against which they preached (Mandeville 1988 p. 20-21). In one of his most notorious lines, Mandeville states: “Thus every part was full of vice, / Yet the whole mass a paradise” (Mandeville 1988 p. 24). However, these “secret cheats,” those benefitting from and engaging in private vice, consistently complained of the prevalence of vice in the hive. They cried out “Good Gods, had we but honesty!” in hopes that Jove would restore honesty and virtuosity to the hive (Mandeville 1988 p. 27).

Jove, the bees’ god, became tired of the complaints and thus decided to rid the hive of evil and avarice, revealing *everyone’s* concealed sinful and vicious behavior in the process. Justice was served to those who deserved it, and the rest began to live with a temperance and mildness that they never previously valued (Mandeville 1988 p. 31). Some professions were wiped out altogether. For instance, there were no more lawyers or locksmiths, as the bees no longer needed to settle petty disputes or lock their doors. The bees no longer wished to compete with each other or anyone else, and, no longer keeping any army forces abroad, they were defeated in war, leaving even fewer bees in the hive. The formerly vicious members of the nation “look[ed] with quite another face” (Mandeville 1988 p.32). The hive lived very simply and conservatively, fearing the return of private viciousness necessary to the luxury and ease they once enjoyed. By the end of the transformation, unable to defend themselves in war or maintain

the vast numbers of bees that once occupied the hive, those that were left in the hive had to relocate to a hole in a tree. The poem presents readers with a difficult choice: continue to ignore private viciousness in the interest of maintaining industry or embrace virtue and live sparingly. In either case, harmful vice is always condemned. Mandeville notes that vice is only beneficial when it is “by justice lopt and bound” (Mandeville 1988 p. 37).

### III. George Berkeley's Critique

It is hardly surprising given the historical context of Mandeville's time that his “private vices, public benefits” paradox was unpopular, if not outrageous. The earliest editions of this text did not receive much attention, but as Mandeville began to extrapolate his ideas – particularly when he added his opinions on charity with *An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* – people took notice. In fact, “the Grand Jury of Middlesex presented the book as a public nuisance” (Kaye xxxiv). The reputation of being a “free thinker” during this time did not have particularly good connotations. The problem with many of Mandeville's notable critics is that they fundamentally misunderstand *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. Perhaps one of the *most* notable of these is George Berkeley. His critique of Mandeville appears in his work *Alciphron* (1732), not coincidentally subtitled *A Defence of the Christian Religion against the So-Called Free Thinkers*. However, his book is not, as its title suggests, simply a defense of Christianity and a condemnation of all free-thinking ideas; it is rather a direct response to Mandeville's work. Notably, Berkeley's critique is the only one to which Mandeville responds, and he does so with his work, *Letter to Dion* (1732).

Berkeley's work is an imagined dialogue primarily amongst Euphranor, Lysicles and Crito. Lysicles represents the defense of Mandeville's paradox, though the defense is

intentionally weak and underdeveloped, and Euphranor represents Berkeley's thoughts<sup>3</sup> Lysicles initially suggests that drunkards contribute to the economy in innumerable ways, employing hundreds of people and "promot[ing] the safety, strength, and glory of the nation" (Berkeley 220). Berkeley presents Mandeville's argument as though it were saying that vice causes extravagant spending and excess, leading to a booming economy (Berkeley 226). Presenting the reader with his first criticism of Mandeville, Berkeley responds that a life lived conservatively and virtuously can attribute as much to the economy as a life lived in extreme excess. In the dialogue, after Lysicles defends drunkenness, Euphranor responds with a syllogistic interrogation of Lysicles that concludes with Lysicles agreeing that a sober man will drink as much as, or more, than a drunkard in a short life. This conclusion supports Berkeley's belief that the vices Mandeville puts forth as necessary to an industrious society are alternatively quite avoidable. Since a sober man can spend as much money as a drunkard in a given lifetime, – a sober man would be presumably the more virtuous of the two – it would benefit the society more to have a sober man than a drunk one. Indeed, claims Euphranor, "a healthy life consumes more than a short and sickly one" (Berkeley 228). Lysicles (or Mandeville, rather) has not sufficiently proven the *necessity* of vice to a prosperous society.

Berkeley continues with a second, distinct criticism: if society were truly as Mandeville sees it, then many important terms regarding moral judgment would be nonsensical. If a society tacitly allows for private vices in order to maintain industry, then it seems unjust that such a society should punish people for acting viciously. Nevertheless, when vice is exposed, the

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<sup>3</sup> I use Euphranor and Berkeley interchangeably throughout this section; Euphranor is simply the character delivering Berkeley's thoughts. The same applies for Lysicles and Mandeville. Crito facilitates the conversation and occasionally takes either side, but he is not as important to this discussion.

vicious act is met with outward disapproval and punishment. However, as Euphranor points out, value-laden terms such as “injustice” becomes meaningless in a Mandevillean society. Berkeley seems to be trying to suggest that if there is no natural, universal standard of right and wrong, something that appears fundamental – justice or lack thereof – becomes arbitrary.

Taking Mandeville to be pushing atheistic ideas, Berkeley offers something of a third criticism, though it pairs almost seamlessly with the second criticism that I just discussed. While Berkeley – again through Euphranor – admits his understanding that Mandeville believes people act under the restraint of law, he is frustrated by the lack of regard for religion in Mandeville’s poem. Berkeley criticizes Mandeville’s disregard for the power and persuasiveness of religion (Berkeley 230). It is clear in *The Fable of the Bees* that Mandeville believes religion is only instrumentally useful, and clergymen are not exempt from the private vices, public benefits paradox. This portion of Berkeley’s criticism includes a larger defense of Christianity against many “free-thinkers” of his time. The religious defense is particularly important to a complete discussion of Mandeville, as it is the most fundamental misunderstanding of his writing. Mandeville makes an argument against the possibility of religious conviction within the poem, doubtless as an anticipation of this response to his argument, and yet a great number of his critics are quick to claim that Mandeville does not take religious conviction into consideration.

The fourth criticism is a comparison of one person to a civic body. Lysicles agrees with Euphranor that “the public good of a nation doth ... imply the particular good of its individuals” (Berkeley 233). Lysicles further allows that, in order for a person to be happiest, he must have a sound mind and soul. Working backwards, Euphranor suggests that a virtuous person would be happiest, and a virtuous people would make the happiest society. Lysicles grants that civil society can “subsist” when all its people are virtuous, but vice is necessary for society to flourish

(Berkeley 233). Crito chimes in to respond that vice may not actually make a society economically prosperous at all. He claims that a prosperous society will have a great population, – and Mandeville certainly agrees with this statement; he emphasizes the “vast” numbers of bees in the hive – but Crito thinks that vice would discourage marriage, as people would be too distracted by other partners to remain monogamous; vice would favor stinginess and dishonesty in economics, “enabl[ing] our more frugal neighbors to undersell us”; and vice would encourage dedicated, though perhaps less wealthy people of honest pursuits to engage in bad practices for money (Berkeley 236). In these ways, it would diminish society’s numbers and make for a generally unhappy society.

Additionally, Euphranor brings up a fifth possible criticism that wealth is not the only possible end towards which a society can or should strive; wealth is not *all* that makes a society flourish. The ultimate end for which a civil society strives is happiness, and the immediate, often temporary happiness or pleasure that wealth provides is not nearly as valuable as the happiness or pleasure achieved through the pursuit of virtue. A healthy person endowed with rationality, according to Berkeley, will recognize the merit of virtue. And this particular understanding of virtue is crucially at odds with one of Mandeville’s most basic beliefs: that morality is artificial; something that exists only within the context of civil society. Berkeley suggests that each rational being is pre-disposed to recognize and value virtue, and it is most certainly not just a “mere whim or fashion,” as Mandeville apparently suggests (Berkeley 237). In fact, the dialogue between Euphranor and Lysicles seems to go so far as to suggest that Mandeville ignores the rational element of humankind altogether. This point harkens back to Berkeley’s other contention, that Mandeville disregards religious conviction.

In the interest of strengthening the fifth claim – that wealth is not the ultimate end of society – Euphranor identifies three sorts of possible pleasures: that of sense, that of imagination and that of reason (Berkeley 241). Pleasure of sense is the least valuable; it provides the most temporary sort of happiness, while pleasure of reason is the highest and most lasting sort of happiness. Euphranor struggles with the idea that this pleasure of reason, unique entirely to human beings, would not in some way affect our understanding of happiness and change the way we prioritize certain types of pleasure. “Sensual pleasure,” concludes Euphranor, “is but a short deliverance from long pain” (Berkeley 245). Moreover, Euphranor asserts that one cannot accurately estimate or account for future happiness through pleasure of sense. Considering only pleasure of sense leads only to determining present happiness, but calculating future happiness requires reason. Thus, “minute philosophers,” a phrase he uses to refer to Mandeville and his contemporaries, pay no regard for continued, future happiness which requires rational thought and consideration (Berkeley 251). According to Berkeley, if the “minute philosophers” considered rational pursuits, they would realize these pursuits are more long-lasting and fulfilling than sensual pleasures.

Berkeley represents the majority of Mandevillean critics in his responses to *The Fable of the Bees*. The problem with these criticisms is that they miss Mandeville’s point almost completely. Nevertheless, it is still worthwhile to discuss Berkeley because he represents the sentiments of so many people that read Mandeville at the time. Berkeley’s basic issue with Mandeville’s *Fable* is that he sees it as promoting outward, rampant viciousness. Indeed, many of Mandeville’s contemporaries found this work reprehensible because they believed it promoted blatantly vicious behavior. Some interpretations of Mandeville would suggest that Mandeville believes morality is utterly useless. If private vices reap public benefits, then it seems that vice is

completely excusable. Moreover, if virtue and vice are ultimately artificial societal “tools,” then it seems people could simply get rid of morality without any ultimate consequence. It is not difficult to understand why Berkeley in particular would have a problem with this claim as an eighteenth century, committed Christian.

#### IV. Response to Berkeley

As early as the opening sentences of the dialogue, Berkeley uses Lysicles to convey the problems with apparent and unabashed viciousness, including the sort manifest in activities such as drinking and gambling. Mandeville disapproves of these vices as well; it is the kind he would categorize as harmful. Nevertheless, Berkeley suggests that this is precisely the sort of vice of which Mandeville approves and encourages. Thus, Berkeley demonstrates his deep misconceptions of the *Fable of the Bees*. From this descriptive claim, many of Mandeville’s critics, including Berkeley, tend to make a conclusive jump that Mandeville is making a normative claim that we *ought* to embrace viciousness openly. But at no point does Mandeville endorse public drunkenness or excessive gambling. What Berkeley fails to grasp about Mandeville is the difference in the type of vice to which Mandeville is speaking. The first several stanzas of Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*, the lines that illustrate the bees’ hive before Jove’s intervention, are making descriptive claims about civil society in the real world. Mandeville is trying to create a picture of civil life as it is, not as it ought to be.

Indeed, Mandeville is sure to point out that even in the privately vicious society, everyone looks down upon those who are harmfully vicious, as harmful actions are detrimental to the public welfare. As Mandeville notes, vice is only beneficial when it is accompanied by justice; harmful vice must be punished. Mandeville does not at any point suggest that all

viciousness, harmful, private or otherwise, *should* be openly and widely accepted in society, and everyone should feel free to indulge in their greatest guilty pleasures without question.

Mandeville believes that harmful viciousness is wrong. Such viciousness poses a threat to the general public welfare, and it makes no difference whether or not Mandeville's claims about private viciousness are correct, doing harm unto others (especially with the intent to do so) still deserves punishment. However, it is *no more wrong* than the "secret cheats" who appear to be virtuous. The vice with which Mandeville is concerned is that of pride and self-liking<sup>4</sup> and the hypocrisy that private viciousness tends to promote. Those who engage in privately vicious pursuits and those who reap the benefits of these pursuits are often the loudest objectors of rampant viciousness in society; this is the sort of hypocrisy Mandeville condemns.

It is important to understand the distinction Mandeville draws between feigned virtue and true virtue<sup>5</sup>. Although they both appear on the surface to be quite the same, it is the difference in intention that sets the two apart. The kind of virtue displayed in the prosperous (yet vicious) hive is feigned; the bees only appear to be moral, but the moral actions they perform are done with regard to the benefits the agent will receive for himself – presumably, Mandeville also thinks this is how people in society behave. Feigned virtue is basically a result of excessive pride. Because it is virtually indistinguishable from true virtue, one can feign virtue and still receive the same praise as if he had acted truly virtuously. True virtue is other-regarding, and it is "the conquest of our passions by reason and true religion at the cost of genuine effort and self-denial" (Rogers 3). Nevertheless, Mandeville makes clear that in the case of persisting feigned virtue – in a society

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<sup>4</sup> To be sure, these two terms refer to the same thing; self-liking is the natural disposition towards oneself and pride is what it is called within society.

<sup>5</sup> "Feigned virtue" is a synonym for Mandeville's own term "private vice," but I use feigned virtue here because it is the term A.K. Rogers uses in his article on Mandeville.

where private vice prevails – the public benefits greatly, not in spite of vice, but rather because of it. The kind of vice that Berkeley is criticizing Mandeville for supporting (harmful vice), then, is an entirely different kind of vice than that to which Mandeville is actually speaking (feigned virtue). Harmful vice does not pose itself as virtue in the way that private viciousness does, hence why it is considered feigned virtue. Feigned virtue conceals vice by providing the same sorts of benefits to the public as true virtue, while harmful viciousness is both selfish, feeding one's pride the way feigned virtue also does, *and* injurious to the public.

Certainly, vanity and pride are a different sort of vice than excessive drinking; vanity and pride are satisfied by pursuing virtuous actions that make one feel good about him or herself. Excessive drinking makes someone – even Mandeville's work, according to the Grand Jury of Middlesex – a public nuisance, rather than an admirable contributor to society. Further, a drunkard is likely to contribute more harm to society than any good; we condemn drunk drivers because they are putting their lives and everyone else's in danger. But Mandeville thought we should neither be the charitable, seemingly virtuous person whose actions are secretly all aimed at satisfying our pride nor the fumbling drunk. This reading of Mandeville is the most common misinterpretation. Mandeville remarks in his response to Berkeley, *Letter to Dion*, that it appears as though Berkeley never actually read *The Fable of the Bees* as his response is so misconstrued (Mandeville 1954 p. 2). While I disagree that Berkeley himself did not read the book, it is certainly possible that some of Mandeville's critics may not have read his account too deeply; it is Mandeville's paradox alone with which many of his contemporaries take issue. A critical reading of Mandeville certainly would not yield the interpretation that harmful vice ought to be acceptable. Mandeville is not comparing or equating private viciousness and harmful viciousness in order to demonstrate that one ought to engage in harmful vice; he is rather trying to suggest

that it is hypocritical to condemn one form while silently benefitting from another. Still, Berkeley's critique is detailed and offers several other arguments against Mandeville that require thoughtful response.

Berkeley makes a strong comparative argument that a civil society's welfare is determined by the welfare of its individual citizens (his fourth argument), and his claim about human happiness is persuasive (his fifth argument). The fifth argument claims that sensual pleasures are not the only – or most important – sorts of pleasures human beings can experience. Nevertheless, Berkeley does not discount sensual pleasure as legitimate and perhaps even worthwhile, if only temporary, Berkeley only maintains that this sort of pleasure is not *as* valuable as rational pleasure. Though it appears by his own reasoning, that people can be concerned only with sensual pleasure and be made generally happy by the satisfaction of natural inclinations, and thus a society could be considered happy – whether or not it is the happiest it could be does not seem relevant. This argument, then, appears to agree with Mandeville to an extent. Mandeville notes that the bee hive is comfortable with their way of life prior to Jove's intervention, and after Jove restores true virtue to the hive, they *do* flourish, not in wealth or population but in contented honesty (Mandeville 1988 p. 35). One may point out that content and happiness are different, and Mandeville may be arguing that the content hive is not happy. I grant that they are certainly different, but Berkeley is not arguing that rational and sensual pleasures elicit the same emotion. I do not think that Mandeville is saying that contented honesty is not as attractive or exciting as wealth and prosperity, but the choice is a matter of personal value. Berkeley values rational pleasure more and thus would choose contented honesty. Perhaps, however, Berkeley is trying to suggest a society could maintain both sensual and rational pleasure, – that is to say, be both sensually and rationally fulfilled, both prosperous and truly

virtuous. In that case, Mandeville would strongly disagree. True virtuousness, performed with the degree of rigor that the general public believes necessary (total self-denial and regard for others), is only possible if industry is sacrificed.

Moreover, while I agree that happy individuals make for a happy society, I disagree that the same sorts of pursuits that are *fulfilling* for an individual make a society *prosper*. It may be rationally and intellectually pleasurable for someone to read philosophical texts in a library for days at a time, but it is apparent that such an activity does not stimulate a society's economy or contribute to its general prosperity. To extrapolate this example, an entire society constituted of individuals following more rational pursuits would not make for a prosperous society. In other words, the society as a whole is not made happy by rational pursuits because, in a certain sense, the society is not a rational being. That which benefits the state (economic prosperity, strength in war, "vast numbers" of citizens, free trade) cannot be achieved entirely by each individual following his or her own rational pursuits, nor can it be achieved by each individual *mostly* following his or her own rational pursuits and sometimes following sensual pleasures and natural inclinations. And by sensual pleasures I do not only mean eating, drinking and having sex; general consumption (buying clothes, property, etc.) and garnering praise, wealth, honor and fame also fall in the realm of sensual pleasures, all of which can contribute greatly to industry. A prosperous society requires that individuals *mostly* follow sensual pleasures, as these pursuits tend to contribute to the economic prosperity and wealth of a nation.

William Law, a priest of the Church of England himself, offers a critique in the form of a direct letter to Mandeville titled "Remarks on the Fable of the Bees," and he agrees with Berkeley's thoughts about the individual's rational nature stating that Mandeville considers "man, merely as an *animal*, having like other animals nothing to do but follow his appetites"

(Law 51). Law's remark also seems to imply the same sort of misunderstandings as Berkeley with regard to an endorsement of harmful vice, as though Mandeville believes in a hedonistic lifestyle. But, as I believe I have already demonstrated, there is a very specific kind of vice to which Mandeville is speaking. Private viciousness includes greed, avarice and vanity, and these vices, while certainly not encouraging rational pursuits, do often encourage material consumption and charitable actions that feed one's pride. The satisfaction that these activities reap are utterly unique to human beings; I cannot think of a species of animal that enjoys buying clothes entirely for the sake of looking fashionable or donating to charity to encourage praise from others. Natural inclinations are not necessarily animalistic.

Law's attack also ignores the attention Mandeville pays to an individual's awareness of his public image. Even those inclinations that *are* of a more animalistic nature, those that are considered taboo and upon which society frowns, people tend to sublimate. Public image plays a large role in private viciousness. Mandeville is not claiming that someone has a certain natural inclination and follows it despite societal repercussions or fear of punishment. People follow their natural inclinations strategically. One understands, as a result of moral education, that excessive pride is a negative trait, but one can find ways that appear virtuous and appropriate in order to satisfy his pride. I fail to see how this reduces human beings to animals. If anything, it appears that Mandeville accounts well for the rational part of human beings in their decisions to act privately vicious. Mandeville interprets rationality as instrumentally useful to satisfying natural inclinations, but rationality is also an important tool in moral education. Rationality is necessary to distinguish harmful viciousness from private viciousness, so one understands harmful vice as necessarily hurtful to other people. Indeed, in *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville grants that rational and intellectual pleasures are certainly the highest sort of pleasure, but this fact does

not necessitate that people will follow rational pleasure. While Law and Berkeley see the rational part as persuading people to act according to true virtue, I think Mandeville sees the rational part as recognizing that which is considered virtuous (those actions which benefit the public but pay no regard to selfish desires) and using this recognition as an instrumental tool in deciding how one can appear virtuous while simultaneously paying regard to the self and satisfying sensual pleasures and natural inclinations.

Moreover, it is not as though Mandeville ignores the rational part of human beings entirely. Mandeville clearly demonstrates a unique understanding of human rationality insofar as rationality can be instrumental to private vice. He only suggests that while an individual may recognize and appreciate that it may be rewarding to remain honest and virtuous, it would also be easier – and perhaps just as, if not more, rewarding – to *appear* honest and virtuous whilst being secretly entirely self-serving. One's rational part is not the only motivating factor, as it exists in tandem with the more animalistic, sensual nature. Taking into account both these parts of human nature, it appears that one may recognize that a seemingly virtuous action may garner praise and feed self-liking, thus satisfying both their rational and natural inclinations.

It is apparent that Berkeley thinks virtue is more compelling because he believes virtue is God-given and innate to people rather than man-made and artificial. Thus, Berkeley argues that people would be motivated towards rational pleasures *over* sensual pleasures. In Mandeville's conception, true virtue, unlike feigned virtue, is not motivating as it does not offer the opportunity to satisfy natural inclinations. Though people may see the merit of rational pleasure, they also recognize that society will thrive with secretly self-serving efforts. Mandeville is not ignoring our rational part, but rather he is taking it into account and considering the degree to which it actually motivates people. For, when one considers that feigned virtue provides a more

lucrative outcome conducive to pride, even as that virtue appears the same as true virtue, it appears more beneficial to the self-liking individual to act with feigned virtue.

Berkeley's second criticism – that virtue and vice are meaningless when they are not rooted in some higher power or some internal, in-born disposition – which I have not responded to prior to this point, but I think it should occupy a small part of my response to Berkeley's religious argument. The claim that virtue and vice are given meaning by society, as are justice and injustice, does not make these concepts meaningless or arbitrary. Morality can still be legitimate even when it originates from people, rather than some sort of higher power. A common respect for human life appears, to me, to be as appropriate of a starting point from which to ground a moral code as any other.

But I have yet to address fully the true heart of the Berkeley's argument with which Mandeville seems most completely at odds. Berkeley advances the religious element of *Alciphron* with the idea that virtue is only possible if accompanied by religious belief (apparently, Christian religious belief). Berkeley believes, like many Christian thinkers, that a supremely perfect and good God would will that people act well themselves. He believes that there are a number of general principles that stem from the idea that one ought to act in the best interest of humanity and that these principles are fairly self-evident and easy to understand. With sound, Christian religious belief and understanding, people will be obliged to act virtuously by these God-given precepts of morality. Mandeville, on the other hand, believes people only act virtuously within the constraints of government and society. Mandeville does not have a particularly lengthy response to those critics who contend that religion is more compelling in its quest to persuade and oblige people to truly virtuous behavior; he simply believes religion is not convincing enough to motivate people to act to the degree of rigor that its precepts require. I

grant that religion may motivate people just as much as laws and government, but I do not think, nor would Mandeville, that religious conviction offers anything more than the laws of a state insofar as both religion and government restrict and endorse certain behaviors and actions with threat of punishment and possibility of reward.

Further, even if it were possible for a society to exist composed entirely of Christian citizens with the same beliefs regarding morality, – that is, a society maintaining the strict standard of moral rigor that Mandeville views as unrealistic – I do not believe that such a society would be able to succeed and prosper the way that the bee hive (prior to Jove’s intervention) does. Critics, including Berkeley, who read Mandeville (or perhaps did not) and did not understand his dismissal of religion as motivation for true virtue overlook the satire Mandeville employs in the poem, particularly after Jove’s intervention. I would consider the religion critique rather unimportant to bring up as a relevant or strong opposition to Mandeville, as Mandeville’s answer to the possibility of morality mandated by God is infused into the poem. Jove’s intervention shows clearly that Mandeville recognizes that, in order for society to exist and uphold such a strict moral code, we face an ultimatum: surrender economic prosperity and large industry or give up wealth and esteem for contented honesty. The rigorous moral code that Mandeville suggests that society employs in its moral judgements is also embedded deeply in most Judeo-Christian conceptions of morality, and thus it is appropriate to interpret this moral code as that which Berkeley believes is possible to emulate with religious conviction. The rigorous moral code under which Mandeville implies the bees are operating and making moral judgments is the very code that pushes people to privately vicious behavior.

## V. Francis Hutcheson's Criticisms

There is yet another response to Mandeville that I find important to include because it represents the other side of his criticisms. Generally, these other sorts of criticisms make claims that Mandeville makes virtue unachievable, but I think these criticisms misunderstand Mandeville in a different manner. This misunderstanding comes from a deeply literal reading of *The Fable of the Bees*. This sort of reading of Mandeville takes him to be making the claim that in order to be consistent with society's moral code, we must honestly work to change the way we act. Our actions must always be self-denying and other-regarding. This view can also be extrapolated to promoting the idea of grace and defending morality as mandated by God, thus providing a good reason we ought to be virtuous. This transformation of society would also be one of society as a whole. People would no longer value competition with one another, and societies, in turn, would become smaller and less prestigious (much like the virtuous bee hive in Mandeville's poem). Such a society would require that there be no professions that reap benefits from the suffering of others, and we ought not to wage war unless absolutely necessary. Indeed, society as we know it would fall. This view is, again, a strictly literal reading of Mandeville. It still understands the poem as a critique of society, but it ignores the nuance and apparent sarcasm of Mandeville's language. Instead of critiquing Mandeville for advocating outright vice, this sort of critique accuses Mandeville of requiring excessive rigor in society's moral code.

I think Francis Hutcheson best embodies the sort of critique to which I am responding. His series of letters to the *Dublin Journal* (1726) attack Mandeville on many of the same grounds as Berkeley. Hutcheson believes similarly that a healthy, frugal person may contribute as much during a lengthy life as a greedy, excessive spender in a short one, and thus in the long run it would be more favorable to be a healthy, conservative person. Berkeley makes the same sort of

claim in the beginning of the dialogue in *Alciphron*, and I consider my response to Berkeley's argument sufficient to serve as a response to both him and Hutcheson. However, Hutcheson also offers an interesting claim that many of the acts that Mandeville paints as vicious in his poem are not vicious at all. Indeed, in cases where the public benefits of an act outweigh the private vices (and certain disadvantages or risks), the act is necessarily virtuous.

Hutcheson advances a utilitarian view of morality and attempts, thereby, to reframe the general understanding of morality, hence revealing his misinterpretation of Mandeville's sarcasm. Essentially, Hutcheson is asking Mandeville why the conception of morality need be so rigorous. This particular criticism suggests that Hutcheson also views civil society differently. While Mandeville implies that the rigorous standard of virtue by which the bees are being morally judged is the general standard, Hutcheson disagrees that this is this the case. Hutcheson believes that the utilitarian standard for virtue – that is, deciding what is virtuous by considering which actions will benefit the most people – is both the existing standard and the *right* standard. Indeed, Hutcheson applies the utilitarian standard to explain why certain examples that Mandeville offers as “privately vicious” are actually virtuous. Mandeville, on the one hand, is offering examples of privately vicious actions that are vicious insofar as they are selfish and taken to satisfy one's pride, but Hutcheson is defending these actions by their benefit to the public.

Hutcheson takes issue, for example, with discounting foreign trade as completely worthless insofar as it occasions deaths and hardships for families because it is not evident that the negative consequences and possible risks of engaging in foreign trade outweigh the benefits of it (Hutcheson 393). It is not unlike the contemporary understanding that while plane crashes and accidents occur on occasion and may result in injury and death, this does not suggest that the

business of transportation via airplane should cease altogether. The benefits outweigh the (unfortunate) disadvantages. Hutcheson lists several more of these examples: agriculture, too, results in injury and death, but we do not cease agricultural labors; crossing the English Channel involves considerable risk, but it is worth it in order to provide for one's family. Even when ventures like those which Hutcheson lists risk *many* lives, they are still often worth their trouble in order to serve some greater good (Hutcheson 394). Anything, then, that promotes the

utmost improvement of arts, manufactures, or trade, is so far from being necessarily vicious, that it must rather argue good and virtuous dispositions; since 'tis certain that men of the best and most generous tempers would desire it for the publick good

(Hutcheson 394).

In his second letter, Hutcheson stands by these statements and furthers his idea that a prosperous society can exist without vice. Hutcheson denies what he sees as crucially Mandevillian: anything more than necessity is luxury. Instead, Hutcheson suggests, much like in his first letter, that human beings naturally produce and consume more than the necessary. Certainly, these tendencies can spill over and become vicious overconsumption but simply having more than one needs does not entail vicious luxury (Hutcheson 397). Hutcheson also suggests that even with some sort of redistribution of wealth such that everyone in society had only enough money to live conservatively economy and industry would thrive much the same. All things considered, the same amount of money and capital would be circulated (Hutcheson 398).

## VI. Response to Hutcheson

I do not wish to spend much time on Hutcheson's – or Mandeville's – economic ideas, as discussing these would require a paper of its own. However, Hutcheson makes a strong case for utilitarianism. He even goes so far as to claim that someone who engages in acts that benefit the public so greatly must have some regard for the public welfare, and it appears that Hutcheson cannot grasp how an action that benefits many people outside of the agent could be entirely self-serving. Hutcheson is attacking the standard of rigor with which Mandeville seems to be using to judge the bees of the hive. Mandeville seems to fault the bees for their appreciation for expensive fabrics and fruitful engagement in foreign trade as a form of feigned virtue rather than true virtue. As I mentioned earlier, a particular interpretation reasonably yields the view that Mandeville himself is advancing a normative claim: people ought to adhere to the rigorous standard of virtue by which he seems to judge the actions of the bees in the hive. But again, this interpretation does not account for the writing style with which Mandeville approaches the fable. He is satirizing those moralists who believe in the standard of rigor by which Mandeville judges the bees. The standard of moral rigor applied to the moral judgments of the bees is descriptive rather than normative. Rather than endorsing the rigorous moral standard characteristic of Christian moral eulogists of his time, Mandeville is condemning it for its deep-seated hypocrisy and its unrealistic rigor. Hutcheson does not account for Mandeville's use of satire and hence misses the insight that Mandeville endorses a certain form of utilitarianism, rather than the rigorous ascetism featured in the bee hive.

Indeed, Mandeville even posits that a utilitarian approach to morality is one way to reframe moral understanding and maintain industry. While "The Grumbling Hive" is posing a challenging ultimatum to either pursue rigorous ascetism and surrender prosperity or reject

morality in favor of industry, it is hardly evident that Mandeville hopes his audience choose one. The poem is rather a provocative piece of social commentary. Nevertheless, I believe there is a way to avoid the ultimatum altogether that is not subject to the shortcomings of Berkeley and Hutcheson's criticisms. Mandeville does not develop his own moral philosophy in "The Grumbling Hive" or *The Fable of the Bees*, But I am putting forth a Mandevillean account, built on a compounded interpretation of many of his life's works and scholarship about Mandeville's writing. Neither Hutcheson nor Berkeley – nor most of Mandeville's other critics – took the time to uncover a positive reading of Mandeville that could yield such a conception, being so taken aback by his provocative paradox, "private vices, public benefits." I intend to give a clear picture of exactly this aim – perhaps not entirely Mandeville's but certainly Mandevillean.

## VII. Mandevillean Virtue

The Mandevillean conception of virtue is a compounded effort to explicate a realistic form a virtue as a response to the problem that Mandeville's "Grumbling Hive" poses to society. Borrowing from works of Mandeville and scholarship regarding Mandeville's thoughts, as well as my own understanding of Mandeville, I think it is an altogether appropriate and consistent *Mandevillean* moral code. This conception provides a standard for virtue that is not founded in religion or a higher power, and it accounts for both action and intention without condemning people for having certain natural inclinations encouraging them to desire certain things or to want to satisfy our faculty of self-liking. Regard for the self is not demonized, as it plays an important in bolstering economic prosperity. Rather than criticize Mandeville's presentation of the oppositional nature of our current standard of moral rigor and bustling industry, this conception

resolves the divide by reframing our understanding of moral action (and thus our way of moral judgment, as well).

As I noted previously, Mandeville makes a distinction between self-love and self-liking that is deeply important to understanding his moral philosophy. Both are natural, but self-liking has a negative connotation as it relates to pride and vanity, and thus, vice. True moral action, then, necessarily involves denying one's natural inclinations, but self-denial, rather than denying self-love, denies self-liking. Mandeville distinguishes between the two in "The Third Dialogue between Horatio and Cleomenes." There he makes clear that, while both self-love and self-liking are natural, self-love deals primarily with the preservation of the self, while self-liking deals with valuing the self above all else. Pride originates from self-liking and consequently causes one to believe himself superior to all others. However, self-liking is not unregulated. Human beings are also endowed with a conscious understanding that each one of us is not *actually* superior to one another, and thus, we deem it inappropriate to constantly act upon the inclinations of self-liking – or at least to be open about the fact that we are doing so. Moral education teaches us to restrain ourselves from always outwardly expressing our pride, and further teaches us to expect this behavior in everyone else (Mandeville 1997 p. 173-174).

Mandeville's basic psychological claim is not that people are vicious; his psychological claim is that people naturally love themselves – and even further, they like themselves. Self-love is the faculty that encourages people in the state of nature to preserve themselves. Self-liking is the faculty that makes people value themselves above everyone else, and people cannot have one of these faculties without the other. People in the state of nature are not naturally virtuous; the rigorous standard of virtue is always taught, as both these concepts exist only as a result of society (Mandeville 1997 p. 160). Before civil society came to be, people lived only to serve themselves.

It is actually a fairly simple claim: people did what they needed to in order to survive. Self-liking, while it still existed in the state of nature, was not manifested quite so much as it is in civil society. There were not nearly as many outlets to satisfy one's self-liking in the state of nature as there are in civil society, nor was self-liking a "bad" or "vicious" trait, as there was no concept of morality in the state of nature. It is not important here to discuss how Mandeville believes civil society developed, but only to point out how self-liking thrives in it. Self-liking is essentially pride, as I stated earlier, and people are able to feed their pride when they can compete with one another, seek praise and attention, and achieve fame and wealth. As I have mentioned and as Mandeville notes, people "[seem] to be accompanied with a diffidence," reminding people that they are not truly better than anyone else (Mandeville 1997 p. 172). Thus, most will only seek to satisfy natural inclinations in ways that appear virtuous and do not cause harm to others.

It is competition in society that has emboldened people to be vicious because one finds himself chasing praise and using vicious means to achieve it. In society, even the most virtuous is feigning virtue. She is winning the competition of being the best self-denier (or so it seems to the public) because she is actually satiating her faculty of self-liking. This contradiction is precisely the sort that Mandeville endeavors to point out in "The Grumbling Hive." He sees beyond the eulogistic ideals other moralists have put forth regarding self-denial. Society has constructed entire institutions that allow people to satiate their natural inclinations and selfish passions whilst appearing to work towards the betterment of society. There is no true merit in actions taken with regard to how they will benefit the self because those actions are not self-denying. Thus, it becomes apparent that the society of bees is prosperous because they are in constant competition to feed their own desires and natural inclinations.

At this point it becomes necessary to consider Mandeville's descriptive view of morality. Mandeville believes that the concepts of virtue and vice are completely artificial, so in "The Grumbling Hive," the bees are only vicious insofar as vice is defined as an action that is self-regarding rather than other regarding (Herdt 272). In other words, the reason civil society is falling short – the reason why private vice is rampant – is because of the unnecessarily strict standard of rigor by which we morally judge ourselves and others. His argument here may seem paradoxical, but it still stands. He argues that morality was created in order to control civil society. We have capitalized on our own understanding of self-liking and our conscious self-restraint of that self-liking insofar as we have created a moral code that counts self-denial as a prerequisite for virtue. In realizing that each person values himself above all else while simultaneously realizing that no one is truly more valuable than anyone else, people developed the idea that we ought to be other-regarding and treat people with impartiality, even if acting this way goes against our natural inclinations. But given that these actions go against natural inclinations, there had to be some system for encouraging people to act in this manner, and hence, praise for virtue and shame for vice were created.

Mandeville believes the traditional standard of morality is contradictory and hypocritical; it expects too much. We have contrived a moral code that demands we deny natural inclinations, and thus we feel pressure to criticize outright viciousness in society, even when we may be privately vicious ourselves. Rather than giving his readers an ultimatum – accept vice and let society thrive or embrace virtue and live sparingly – Mandeville is simply asking them to look at themselves and embrace honesty (Herdt 270). In the poem he states that open knaves (crooks and thieves) are virtually the same as seemingly virtuous people with respectable positions like

lawyers, doctors and clergymen, but the latter group laments the former and cries out for honesty when they themselves are truly the most dishonest.

Mandeville is, perhaps, suggesting that society is hesitant to embrace what it means to embody true virtue; Jennifer Herdt makes this point in chapter 9 of her work *Putting On Virtue*. I always remember telling my father (a lawyer himself) when I was very young, that I wished for world peace above everything else. And rather than agree, I was astonished to hear him assert that he did not. If there were world peace, he told me, he would be out of a job. (I suspect now that he was being only partially facetious, but he makes a compelling Mandevillean point). Part of Mandeville's argument is that it is virtually impossible even to conceive of a sustainable society that is altogether truly virtuous. He is trying to present his readers with a society they would find despicable and undesirable; the conclusion of his poem is a warning, not a realistic solution.

Admittedly, I have still not provided a sufficient Mandevillean motivation not to act viciously but understanding the poem – as Berkeley does – to be promoting harmful vice is simply wrong. Harmful vice is wrong not only because it is selfish but also because it is *harmful*; harmful vice is bad for others, and thus, it is not good for prosperity. In the case of harmful vice, then, it is rather obvious why we ought not engage in it – harmful vice prevents prosperity. Further, Mandeville is certainly not congratulating the hypocrites that have managed to keep their *private* vice hidden; indeed, it is very obvious that he is condemning them. As A.K. Rogers noted in his article “The Ethics of Mandeville,” “it is difficult to see why he should continue to view [vices] with a mixture of curious amusement and contempt, if his real purpose was to justify them against current and mistaken notions of what virtue is” (Rogers 6). Mandeville's claim that people consistently fall short of the rigorous standard of virtue does not entail that we ought to abandon virtue altogether, but instead we should evaluate this standard.

Mandeville's writing strongly suggests that he does not believe that unnecessarily rigorous virtue is possible in real society, at least to the extent that everyone could overcome their love of luxury and ease. It took the bees' god to save them from their own viciousness, and he makes no serious argument that he believes God's grace will save us from ourselves or that he truly believes that complete self-denial is attainable by any means. It is apparent that he understood the dichotomy he presents in his poem, that of living virtuously or in private viciousness, gave his readers two equally unfavorable choices. Furthermore, even if total self-denial were attainable for all of humankind, there is no plausible way to measure or recognize it. Mandeville echoes Pierre Nicole in the sense that they both recognize that charity and self-love appear so much like one another and achieve identical ends, so there is no way to tell them apart (Nicole). However, Mandeville does leave open the option that people may still be virtuous in some capacity, if not completely self-denying.

Mandeville puts forth basic conditions for considering an action virtuous are as follows: (1) the action must be taken out of the agent's rational intent to do good, and either (2) the action must deny natural inclinations (presumably to not take such an action or take some contrary action), or (3) the action must be taken to achieve the most benefit for the most people (Scott-Taggart 224). While the first of these three conditions is necessary, one must only additionally satisfy one of the other two conditions to be considered to be engaging in a moral action. According to Mandeville, people understand morality through moral education; again, morality and virtue are not natural qualities. Our moral education has taught us to recognize those actions which – and people whom – are deserving of praise due to their virtuous nature. As people all enjoy praise because of pride and self-liking, we act in ways that we believe will garner praise, and thus we realize that we can take actions for the benefit of other people that will in turn result in praise – the

action then is no longer truly for the benefit of someone else. This realization is that which Mandeville characterizes as private vice. The actions we are taking are no longer other-regarding, though the outcome may make it seem as though they are. Instead, these actions *only* feed our natural inclinations and selfish passions.

But I do believe there is a way to reconcile our private vice with a combination of honesty about the apparent hypocrisy of the overly demanding moral code and use of moral agency and assessment of other's actions in accordance with the principles listed above. Those "secret cheats" who demand honesty can be satisfied without giving up competition and industry. If we take Mandeville to be saying that true virtue (in the traditional sense that he satirizes in the poem) is impossible, as I do, but hope to reconcile this impossibility without abandoning virtue then the solution becomes increasingly clear: rethink morality altogether. Mandeville recognizes that we have chosen industry over truly adhering to the stricter, more rigorous definition of virtue (the kind that requires absolute self-denial), and I think he believes – to an extent – this is important. Mandeville also, however, laments the hypocrisy of society, and we can only begin to eradicate this hypocrisy through honest reflection. Hypocrisy thrives in two ways: people pretend to espouse the values of the strict moral code and condemn those who are open cheats while simultaneously engaging in activities that go against this moral code *and* people lament viciousness in all its forms yet benefit from it greatly. By reframing our understanding of morality, we are taking an honest look at this sort of hypocrisy and confronting viciousness head on. We must also strive to towards an *attainable* virtue using the requirements for virtuous action that I laid out in the previous paragraph.

At first, the idea that Mandeville is suggesting that virtue is within reach for people seems contradictory to his writing. However, I believe that Mandeville is only condemning this

alarming rigorous standard of virtue that is utterly impossible to maintain without falling into private vice. People do not have the capacity to be entirely self-denying. Nevertheless, there is a way to emulate true virtue without sacrificing all industry in accordance with the previously stated conditions. This virtuosity involves self-denial, but only in a partial sense. Self-liking is generally regarded as vicious in society because it is not other-regarding, and virtue must be other regarding. However, liking the self and regarding others are not mutually exclusive to one another. Pride in excess is a problem because it leads to total viciousness and complete self-regard above all else, but self-liking is natural and controllable. So, if people choose to deny one inclination in order to do something good, they may still satisfy another – this is partial self-denial.

However, partial self-denial is not the only requirement to grant an action virtuous merit: the action must still meet (1). That is to say that the agent must be taking the action because she has a *rational* intent to do good through the action. This requirement is particularly important because it still restrains instances like those of pity from being considered morally good or of any virtuous merit<sup>6</sup>. In the instance of pity, there is no rational thinking involved in the action but rather an immediate reaction. As Mandeville has pointed out, pity is a natural inclination that can bring about virtuous or vicious actions in varying circumstances, and people that act from pity are not choosing an action with rational intent to do moral good. For instance, one may choose to work at a soup kitchen on the weekend because she recognizes that it is good for others and benefits a number of people without access to food otherwise. This person satisfies the natural inclination to seek praise for her generous action and to feel good about herself for doing so at the cost of negating the inclinations to do something else more selfish with her time – eat out, buy clothes or sleep in.

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<sup>6</sup> I list “morally good” and “virtuous merit” here, but I consider them virtually interchangeable.

Alternatively, it is also possible to act virtuously relying on the utilitarian principle (3), as Mandeville has laid it out. If one acts from the understanding that his action will benefit others (and he also meets requirement (1)), then this action can be considered virtuous. This principle still permits regard to the self insofar as utilitarianism aims to bring about the most good possible from a given action, so if this action results in some good for the agent (the satiety of some natural inclination) in addition to the good it brings to others, the action is still virtuous in this conception. The utilitarian principle condition makes more sense when one has several choices of actions. When there is one action amongst several choices that will result in the most good for the most people, one *ought* to choose this action over the others. In breaking down the anatomy of Mandevillean virtue in this way, it is easier to understand how one can put forth a serious Mandevillean moral theory that does not stray too far from words in his own work. So many moral philosophers in the eighteenth-century Augustinian tradition put morality in the hands of God, thereby making it impossible for people on Earth to ever consider themselves truly virtuous. In addition, in both cases – using partial self-denial or the utilitarian principle – Mandeville still allows some degree of regard for the self in the action, so long as it is coupled with a genuine regard for others.

The utilitarian principle may sound familiar to the reader; in fact, the utilitarian principle is similar to Hutcheson's critique. Hutcheson suggests that actions that benefit the public so greatly *are* virtuous actions precisely *because* they benefit the public; the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The contention between Mandeville and Hutcheson, however, exists in Hutcheson's belief that such actions are necessarily virtuous and always suggest a regard for public welfare. I think Mandeville believes there is more nuance and complexity in motivations for action, and it is possible that someone can act in a way that benefits the public to a great extent without

any regard for the public benefit. In other words, the genuine and rational intent to do good remains an essential (and separate) Mandevillean moral component.

Basically, there is a possibility to act truly virtuously, and I think Mandeville is saying he still believes we ought to be, despite the fact that some people will still be privately vicious. There is a way to prosper and maintain capitalist industry while still being virtuous and good to one another. As John Colman states, “Mandeville does believe the primary aim and purpose of morality is to enable men to live in harmony with one another for their mutual benefit” (Colman 136). It is in our best interest to benefit the public, and there is no reason we ought to shy away from the fact that some of our actions that benefit others also benefit us.

Mandeville’s most profound point is that human nature is contrary to the traditional standard of morality. The capacity for self-denial is innate, insofar as people are endowed with the ability to recognize that the value one places on himself is not his actual worth, but the ability to use this capacity in a moral sense is learned – moral education is important in this right. Additionally, “The Grumbling Hive” also sets out to warn people against the rigorous requirements to which the current conception of morality holds people accountable. It is this complete self-denial approach to morality that leads people to cut corners and ultimately, be privately vicious. Thus, Mandeville is characterizing a morality that encourages people to control their faculty of self-liking in such a way that society as we know it can endure. Mandeville’s poem is more than a retort to his Augustinian contemporaries, and it is certainly not, as some would argue, an *echoing* of those conceptions of morality. The careful reader will recognize what Mandeville has actually put forth in this poem: a coherent moral theory. John Colman agrees, though he adds that is clear Mandeville does “regard it as a rarity in the world” (Colman 137).

It is easy to write off Mandeville – many of his critics have – by arguing that Mandeville is endorsing private vice in everyone, but this reading of Mandeville overlooks the apparent satire of his language. The fact that people so ferociously attacked Mandeville for this work is a testament that he has made meaningful observations about human nature; his critics may be concerned that he *is* right. We are reluctant to evaluate ourselves and inevitably find that we tend to fall short of our own standards. But calling attention to outward vice in others will never make us virtuous. Demanding honesty from liars will never make us truthful. But perhaps Mandeville is suggesting that we ought to simply recognize our own shortcomings. Human nature inclines us towards our selfish passions, and they are by no means easy to subdue. Ultimately, however, Mandevillean virtue, at least, is within reach for everyone. Mandeville has effectively shown that we still have the opportunity to strive to be virtuous, but it is up to us whether or not we choose this path. We can be like the doctors, lawyers and clergymen who claim to exemplify virtue and honesty but ultimately fail because we resent the standards at which traditional morality holds us, or we can strive to expound a realistic virtue in a world that has rejected it completely.

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