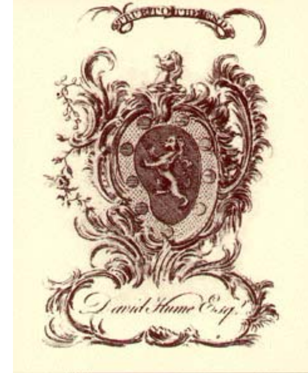

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Critical Study

J. Martin Stafford's *Private Vices, Publick Benefits?*

EUGENE HEATH

J. MARTIN STAFFORD, ed. *Private Vices, Publick Benefits? The Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville*. Solihull, England: Ismeron, 1997. xxiv + 639. ISBN 0–9512594–5–8. £52.50, cloth.

Of those philosophers that Hume credits with having "begun to put the science of man on a new footing" (T xvii), Bernard Mandeville has received relatively little attention from contemporary philosophers and Hume scholars. In contrast, Mandeville was not so neglected in his own age, a point well-chronicled in F. B. Kaye's introduction to *The Fable of the Bees*,[1] and substantiated, tangibly, by this collection of writings excellently assembled and edited by J. Martin Stafford. In the eighteenth century and, more particularly, in the decade between the publication of the 1723 edition of the *Fable* and Mandeville's death, numerous sermons, essays, letters, and books were published with the single intent of refuting what one eighteenth-century critic considered "so monstrous an Opinion" (300), namely, that private vice might render a benefit to the public. What one discovers on reading these early critics is that it is not so much Mandeville's opinion that is monstrous as it is the incessant misinterpretations that are so often used against him.

This new, beautifully bound collection will provide the scholar of eighteenth-century thought a single source for reading the English-speaking critics of Mandeville, whose 1723 edition of the *Fable*, offensive to religious believers and the civic humanist defenders of public virtue, created a scandal, provoking the Grand Jury of Middlesex to offer a Presentment against the book. Mandeville's mordant poem, "The Grumbling Hive: Or Knaves turn'd Honest,"

Eugene Heath is at the Philosophy Department, State University of ew York at New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561-2440
e-mail: heathe@matrix.newpaltz.edu

first appeared in 1705; from 1714, the poem was supplemented with remarks and essays and several times reissued as *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. However, it was not until the 1723 edition, which included the essay on charity schools, as well as "A Search into the Nature of Society," that Mandeville's work received the attention of a wide public. In 1728, a second volume was published consisting of dialogues articulating, among other things, Mandeville's naturalistic explanation of the evolution of norms.

Stafford's fine collection, which includes sixteen entries, does not include every work that appeared within the decade 1723–1732. It excludes several sermons defending charity schools, works in languages other than English, works whose primary focus is not on Mandeville, and some well-known and otherwise easily obtainable works. These exclusions, which seem quite defensible, mean that Joseph Butler's sermons (1726), which were not directed primarily towards Mandeville, and the relevant sections of the easily acquired work of Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* (1725), are not included, just as the 1767 work of Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, which bears on self-interest and on luxury, is excluded. The collection, which includes a hitherto unacknowledged sermon by Robert Burrow, generally follows the bibliography of references compiled by Kaye.[2] With the exception of the works of Hume and Smith, included because of their fame, most of the texts are not easily available and are here reprinted in full.

Although there are some typographical errors, the editing is otherwise careful and, except where noted, true to the original text. The editor translates Latin phrases, provides biographical footnotes on obscure names, and includes an index of names and ideas (but, alas, no general bibliography). With the exception of the entries from Hume and Smith, along with a short article from Read's *Weekly Journal*, each contribution includes a biographical summary, a helpful introduction to the text, and, where necessary, some notes on how the work was edited. There are minor instances of unnecessary editorializing in two footnotes (453 and 531 n. 4) and an unnecessary excursus, in the introduction, into whether current adherents of "eternal and immutable morality" would be "embarrassed" (xx) by issues such as homosexuality, euthanasia, and non-renewable resources.

These instances aside, however, this volume (which complements similar collections on eighteenth-century thinkers) is a welcome and very helpful addition to the growing corpus of scholarly works relevant to the study of Mandeville (and eighteenth-century thought more generally). Of course, Mandeville's ideas have always attracted a range of scholars from fields as diverse as literature, history, economics, politics, and philosophy; given the focus of his contemporary critics, this collection may have its greatest appeal to the historian of ideas and the philosopher. Out of the welter of commentary, there emerge several common strands of critique, that of the rationalist,

the defender of a religious (and Christian) foundation of morals, and various reconsiderations of Mandeville's twin concepts of vice and luxury. Along with these lines of criticism, there is a common misunderstanding about Mandeville's striking inversion of moral intention (vice) and social effect (public good). Finally, there is a notable paucity of attention to Mandeville's evolutionary suggestions and to his skepticism concerning the power of individual reason, themes that are found in the second volume of the *Fable* (1728), and which critics writing after 1728 seem barely to notice.

In the sections to follow, I will review some of the critical themes and charges by considering (I) Stafford's introduction to the collection, (II) the criticisms launched by the famous philosophers (Hutcheson, Berkeley, Hume, and Smith), and (III) the evaluations penned by lesser-known figures.

I

Beginning with his poem, "The Grumbling Hive," Mandeville proceeded to develop a naturalistic view of society and morals that was not only written with sardonic vigor but was startlingly modern in its view of society, economics, and politics. From his definitions of vice and virtue, Mandeville proceeded to articulate an account of how vice, properly defined, was necessary for a bustling commercial society and how the wholesale practice of virtue was sufficient to reduce that society to poverty. Mandeville is not arguing that all vice should be tolerated or encouraged; only that which produced happy results.

> So Vice is beneficial found,
> When it's by Justice lopt and bound. (I 37)

Those acts are vicious in which the intention is the gratification of an agent's natural or selfish passion; those acts are virtuous that are contrary to the demands of a natural passion or appetite and are intended to benefit others in accordance with some dictate of reason. These conceptions of virtue and vice are aptly dubbed by Kaye as "rigoristic" (I xlviii), a term I shall use as well. For Mandeville, the essential problem for society is that of discovering which kinds of actions, whether virtuous or vicious, produce useful results. Rigoristic virtue, however, cannot create a large bustling commercial society. Vice (properly defined), along with a set of legal norms that delimit spheres of interaction, is necessary for the growth of commerce and trade. Moreover, out of our vicious qualities may emerge norms of action (including norms of honor, sociability, politeness, and benevolence) that evolve over time out of the unintended interaction of individuals. Thus, Mandevillean vice, "lopt" by Justice, not only produces a bustling economy but norms of peaceful interaction;

though not the rigoristic ideals of virtue, these norms are nonetheless sufficient for a moralized form of congenial and peaceful social interaction.

Of course, Mandeville claims that his insights do not argue in favor of vice. Indeed, Mandeville's "Vindication of the Book," included in Stafford's collection and taken from the end of volume I of the *Fable*, responds to the charge, leveled by the Grand Jury, that his work would corrupt morals: his is a book of "severe and exalted Morality" (16), exclaims Mandeville! Whether he is a severe "rigorist," which seems doubtful, his contention that he has shown the way to "worldly Greatness" though he nonetheless prefers the "Road that leads to Virtue" (17) conceals an important political consideration that would often be missed by his contemporary critics. A moral goal taken singly may seem respectable and worthy of pursuit, but it may also turn out, as Mandeville's thought would indicate, that not all moral and political goals are compatible and that some moral principles may lead to empirical results that call into question what, in theoretical isolation, had been considered worthy of pursuit.

In his able introduction to the collection, Stafford assesses the critics as either rationalist theologians or empiricists, either of whom might offer two kinds of criticism, verbal (focusing on Mandeville's rigoristic account of virtue) or substantive. Stafford contends, rightly, that Mandeville's professed devotion to (rigoristic) virtue was dubious. In fact, Mandeville was interested in the same project as Hume, a naturalistic explanation of society, including those norms that allow us to interact peacefully. What is not so clear is whether Mandeville assigns this task to the legislators and crafty politicians, who employ praise and flattery to cajole individuals into conforming to norms, or to a gradual evolutionary process of history, in which praise and flattery are used by a myriad of individuals in such a way that certain types of behavior coalesce into regularized norms of action, even though no single individual could have intended or foreseen the formation of these normative patterns. The former is what Stafford refers to, in his Introduction, as the "conspiratorial" interpretation (xvi), most prevalent in volume I ("An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue").[3] The conspiratorial thesis is, Stafford asserts, distinct from an "incompatible" (xvi) evolutionary account, delineated in volume II, in which Mandeville contends that morals and manners emerged over time through a process in which myriad acts of anonymous individuals became aggregated into uniform norms of behavior.[4] Clearly, almost none of Mandeville's contemporary critics (at least those writing after the 1728 publication of the second volume) engage the evolutionary thesis; on the other hand, as Stafford notably remarks, "there is no thesis in the first part of the *Fable* which was more persistently, more vigorously, or more cogently criticised than the conspiratorial account of the origin of virtue and the foundation of society" (xviii). Against the views of several scholars, some of whom try to find compatibilities in the two theses or interpret the conspiratorial as a metaphor-

ical expression of the evolutionary,[5] Stafford contends that the two accounts should be viewed as distinct, citing among his reasons the clear fact that the conspiratorial "was taken very literally by all of Mandeville's immediate contemporaries" (xvii). Stafford believes, further, that the evolutionary explanation is Mandeville's response to the criticisms of his conspiratorial account. Although it is not clear that Stafford has shown that the two accounts are, strictly speaking, incompatible, he nonetheless raises a serious challenge. Scholars should be reluctant to conflate the two theses and should consider more fully whether Mandeville gave up on his earlier "conspiratorial" thesis. That said, it is not clear that Mandeville has an explicit response to some of the criticisms that get at the very logic of flattery, whether employed by a politician or by anonymous individuals seeking to interact more peacefully and happily. We can develop some appreciation for this problem by considering the criticisms launched by some of the more famous of Mandeville's foes: Hutcheson, Berkeley, Hume, and Smith.

II

As Kaye contended, Hutcheson was "Mandeville's most persistent opponent" (II 345 n. 1), and apparently this was so not only in his writing but in his teaching.[6] Stafford does not include any of Hutcheson's writings from *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good,* though he does include Malcolm Jack's brief article revealing that Hutcheson's quotations in the *Inquiry* are not, in fact, quotations from any of Mandeville's works! That aside, it is in the *Inquiry* that Hutcheson broaches the point, made by Hume in the *Treatise,* concerning whether it would be possible for flattery to affect the motives of those who are selfish. Before turning to that question, it is worthwhile to consider Hutcheson's letters to the *Dublin Weekly Journal,* published in February 1726, and reprinted, posthumously, as *Reflection upon Laughter and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees.*[7]

From Mandeville's pithy subtitle, Hutcheson discerns five distinct propositions, and then proceeds to argue that the affections (benevolence, gratitude, the love of God), as opposed to the appetites, arise from an evaluation of goodness in the object of the affection and that therefore the affections are amenable to reason. That said, some finery or luxury is compatible with virtue and is not vicious if it does not tend to the public harm. In his second letter, Hutcheson speculates, as had George Bluet one year earlier, that the level of economic productivity that Mandeville attributes to vice could be achieved without vice. That Mandeville has adopted a specific, if not peculiar, conception of vice is taken by Hutcheson to reveal a nefarious intention: that individuals will associate the broader, and therefore more innocent, Mandevillean conception of vice with the narrower, standard sense and "they will lose their Aversion to moral Evil in General" (397). Hutcheson contends further that

Mandeville believes that "Theft and Robbery" tend to good (399). However, even though "The Grumbling Hive" states that a virtuous hive would have no need of locksmiths (I 29), it also stipulates the need for justice. Hutcheson is not unique in holding the mistaken view that Mandeville believes that violence or destruction may generate economic benefits, an economic fallacy that even apart from Mandeville's own words would be surprising in a thinker who is otherwise so economically astute. To claim that any sort of destruction generates an economic windfall, a good for the public, would be the sort of economic fallacy that might occur to less astute thinkers than Mandeville and tempts many to this day.[8]

In his third letter, Hutcheson, having criticized what he considers the egotistic style of Mandeville's writing, makes a crucial mistake that reveals his misunderstanding of the idea of unintended consequences that is at the very heart of Mandeville's inquiry. Hutcheson contends that Mandeville claims that "Vice is Gratifying Appetite without regard to the Publick" (italics omitted) and that the phrase "without regard" means "Pernicious to the Publick" (403, italics omitted). From these two phrases Hutcheson deduces an inconsistency, namely, that vice is pernicious to the publick and beneficial. However, Hutcheson has misread not only Mandeville's definition but his overall project, for Hutcheson has slipped from the first claim, about an agent's intention ("without regard"), to a claim about an actual effect. But a major part of Mandeville's enterprise, and what may have befuddled so many of his contemporaries, is just to reveal how intentions (and motivations) can generate, individually and in the aggregate, effects which have a qualitatively distinct nature.[9]

In 1729, there appeared three letters in the *London Journal*, each of which contains transcriptions from Hutcheson's previous letters to the *Dublin Journal*. The author of these letters, having dismissed volume II of the *Fable* as "too low and mean to deserve one serious Thought" (509), turns to assess Mandeville's assertion that there is no "Pulchrum & Honestum" (511), no transcendent moral code, no intrinsic value in some actions over others. If, argues the author, certain actions are rewarded with flattery because these actions tend to promote the general happiness, then Mandeville must either hold that such actions do not tend to happiness or he must agree that right and wrong do have some grounding in nature (511–512). Even here, however, Mandeville might be able to agree that certain actions tend to be suitable for human beings but that this suitability is discerned not by reason but by history; for this reason, therefore, any inquiry that attempts to go deeper than these empirical summations, "is not much better than a Wild-Goose-Chace" (I 331).

Resorting to a satirical dialogue of his own, it was perhaps Berkeley who "more than any other critic seems to have gotten under Mandeville's skin."[10] However, Berkeley's notable, and notably misconstrued, critique of Mandeville, in the second dialogue of his *Alciphron: Or, the Minute Philosopher*

(1732), features a Mandevillean character, Lysicles, who not only contends that highway robbery may have a public benefit but utters the half-truth that one can "leave nature at full freedom to work her own way, and all will be well" (545–546). Both of these claims are of the sort that ignore Mandeville's belief that a properly managed system of law would allow "vicious" individuals to interact in such a way that the consequences would redound to the good of the public. Such a legal system demands piecemeal evolution, the sort of evolution Mandeville develops in volume II, along with his considerations as to the weakness of individual reason to discern the appropriate means to distant ends, especially in complex societies. This is quite far from Berkeley's portrayal of Mandeville as a proto-revolutionary who delights in "blowing up systems and dissolving governments, to mould them anew upon other principles" (562). Following Berkeley's dialogue is Mandeville's reply ("A Letter to Dion," 1732) wherein he notes Berkeley's "spiteful Inferences, and invidious Comments" (578), and then states that he will treat Berkeley's dialogue as the handiwork of someone who had never read the *Fable of the Bees*.

Added to this collection are selections from Hume's *Enquiry*, along with his essay on luxury. Not included is the brief section from the *Treatise* (T 500) in which Hume challenges, implicitly, the heart of Mandeville's naturalistic explanation of morality. For whether or not the politician is understood in a conspiratorial sense or as a metaphor for an historical and social evolution, a question can be raised as to whether any such flattery could affect a nonmoral (or selfish) individual's pride.

In part ii of Book III, Hume considers two questions concerning the rules of justice, their manner of origin, and the reasons by which we understand these rules to be morally justified. It is when he broaches the second question (*"Why we annex the idea of virtue to justice, and of vice to injustice,"* T 498) that Hume asserts that our limited generosity does not befit us for human society. He then points out that, although self-interest is the first motive to justice, it is not the reason why we attach moral virtue to justice. Virtue and justice are united only with the operation of sympathy. At this point, Hume seeks to counter the naturalistic explanation of Mandeville, noting that the "progress of the sentiments" is "natural" even as it may be

> forwarded by the artifice of politicians, who . . . have endeavour'd to produce an esteem for justice, and an abhorrence of injustice. This, no doubt, must have its effect; but nothing can be more evident, than that the matter has been carry'd too far by certain writers on morals, who seem to have employ'd their utmost efforts to extirpate all sense of virtue from among mankind. Any artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which she suggests to us, and may even on some occasions, produce alone an approbation or esteem for any particular action; but 'tis impossible it should be the

> sole cause of the distinction we make betwixt vice and virtue. For if nature did not aid us in this particular, 'twou'd be in vain for politicians to talk of *honourable* or *dishonourable, praiseworthy* or *blameable.* These words wou'd be perfectly unintelligible, and wou'd no more have any idea annex'd to them, than if they were of a tongue perfectly unknown to us. (T 500)

Hume's last point seems to address the very meaning of a moral term, but his larger interest, here, is to cast doubt on whether a moral term could motivate if there were no disposition other than self-interested ones. In Hume's view, if there were no natural disposition to approve of qualities that are either agreeable or useful to others (or to oneself), then the relevant moral terms would have no human disposition on which to anchor. (Of course, even if there were no such disposition, it is not clear, despite Hume's language, that the moral terms would be cognitively unintelligible; though if there were no prior understanding of a moral concept as *moral*, rather than self-interested, then there could be no moral motivation.)

A similar point was made by Hutcheson in that very section of his *Inquiry* in which he mistakenly attributes certain quotations to Mandeville. Hutcheson not only contends that morality is essentially distinct from advantage and that the former is perceived by a moral sense (263–265), but that the praise of a politician could have no effect in generating morality if all acts (including speech acts) were self-interested.

> Nay, what should excite a Cato or a Decius to desire praise, if it is only the cold opinion of others that they were useful to the State, without any perception of excellence in such conduct?—Now how unlike is this to what the least observation would teach a man concerning such characters? . . . So easy a matter it seems to him . . . for one who has no ideas of good but in his own advantage, to be led by the persuasions of others, into a conception of goodness in what is avowedly detrimental to himself, and profitable to others; nay, so entirely, as not to approve the action thoroughly, but so far as he was conscious that it proceeded from a disinterested study of the good of others!—Yet this it seems statues and panegyrics can accomplish![11]

The criticisms of Hume and Hutcheson are significant ones and, interestingly, were anticipated by some of the lesser-known critics of Mandeville. Whether these criticisms have a Mandevillean answer is not obvious, but it would seem that an answer would require that one take seriously the evolutionary Mandeville of volume II and attempt to show how moral praise might emerge from nonmoral praise and how moral praise could still affect the pride of essentially self-interested individuals.[12]

Turning back to Stafford's collection, he includes from Hume's second *Enquiry*, part i of Section II, later to become Appendix II ("Of Self-love"). There Hume contends that the Mandevillean assertion that "benevolence is mere hypocrisy" is "incompatible with all virtue or moral sentiment" (613), just as the denial that a passion could be anything other than some "modification of self-love" (613), is contrary to common sense, even though it may leave unmolested our ordinary practical distinctions between virtue and vice. Such claims, Hume suggests, are products of the "love of *simplicity*" (615), but the claim of selfishness is less simple than the commonsensical claim that there is a "disinterested benevolence, distinct from self-love" (617). Nature provides propensities or passions that are "antecedent to self-love" and it is only because of such passions that self-love exerts itself (617); thus, it is "from the original frame of our temper, we may feel a desire of another's happiness or good" (617).

In his essay "Of Luxury" (after 1760, "Of Refinement in the Arts"), Hume concludes that the gratification of sensual desire and pleasure is vicious only "when they are pursued at the expence of some virtue, as liberality or charity" (618); otherwise luxury is innocent. The periods of "refinement are both the happiest and most virtuous" (619), but if luxury is not innocent then neither is it beneficial. Despite Hume's misgivings concerning Mandeville's account of luxury, he betrays a certain sympathy with Mandeville's overall outlook, sharing the latter's perspicuous recognition of the complexity of society and of competing moral principles: "Let us, therefore, rest contented with asserting, that two opposite vices in a state may be more advantageous than either of them alone; but let us never pronounce vice in itself advantageous" (625).

Of course, the debate on luxury, commercial progress, and virtue would continue in the eighteenth-century and revive strands of thought that neither Mandeville nor Hume would countenance.[13] Although Mandeville's thesis that beneficial consequences might result from self-love was an insight that prepared the way for Adam Smith's economic theory, Smith did not countenance the more general outlook of Mandeville. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith devotes part of section II, chapter IV to "Licentious Systems," specifically that of Mandeville, who, Smith complains, fails to recognize any "essential distinction between vice and virtue" (627). Smith concedes that "self-love" may be a motive of a virtuous action, but he sets this question aside for that of whether the desire to do the honorable and noble can be considered vain. For vanity must be distinguished from the love of virtue and, secondly, the love of true glory. Vanity is the desire for praise either for nonvirtuous action or for qualities that do not merit the degree of praise desired (629); in Smith's view, Mandeville utilizes, unjustifiably, the motive of vanity as the motive of all virtuous actions. Moreover, Smith is critical of Mandeville's views that anything short of ascetic rigorism is luxury and that

"every passion [i]s wholly vicious, which is so in any degree and in any direction" (632).

III

Apart from these well-known critics, Stafford's collection includes lesser-known writers. Some of their criticisms fall wide of the mark, but some of their challenges intimate ideas broached more notably by Hume, Hutcheson, or Smith.

The very first of the commentators and critics was Robert Burrow, in a sermon that was delivered on September 28, 1723, a few months after the publication of the *Fable*. Unmentioned by Kaye, Robert Burrow's sermon includes a footnote in which Burrow admits that Mandeville's book is "a very odd Miscellany of many ingenious Reflections, wherein there is a great deal of good Sense discover'd, and of many (whatever they may be for Wit) very unwise ones" (31). Burrow affirms the natural sociability of man as well as a more traditional assumption, against which Hobbes contended as well, that society and morality must conform to God's will and to transcendent and immutable relations. Since these immutable moral relations are known by all, there is no need to postulate flattery or fraud to account for their origin.

This sort of rationalistic criticism is continued by William Law, *Remarks on the Fable of the Bees* (1724), who presciently attributes to Mandeville the modern presumption of composing a "System" (51) in which the human being, having been reduced to the level of the animal, is then tricked by moralists into succumbing to morality and political society. Against Mandeville's apparent systematicity, Law asserts the Biblical conception of creation and man's nature, challenges Mandeville's speculations concerning a state of nature, and perspicaciously anticipates the point adumbrated by Hume in the *Treatise*: how can the moral terms of praise and flattery affect creatures who are nonmoral? Thus, Law reasons, unless some first principles of morality were "connatural to us, and essential to our Minds, there would have been nothing for the moral Philosophers to have improv'd upon" (58). On the other hand, Law believes, against Mandeville's rigorism, that virtue can be pleasant, just as he also holds that reason is the criterion of virtue:

> For if there be a plain Reason in the Thing, if there be a Precept of Duty to excite my Mind, as well as a natural Disposition in my Temper to perform the Action, it is impossible for the most penetrating Genius to prove that my Temperament had a greater Share in the Action, than the Reason of my Mind. (66)

Interestingly, Law is one of the few to make any mention of Mandeville's evolutionary account, but Law assumes that custom must operate blindly and

is incapable of generating any reasonable standards of behavior. As do many of the critics, Law also attacks Mandeville for alleged inconsistencies, attempts to counter what he takes to be Mandeville's relativism, accuses Mandeville of writing a treatise that would render individuals less prepared to accept religion than vice, and levels the not unwarranted charge that, despite protestations otherwise, Mandeville has not written a book of "severe and exalted Morality" (87).

Inspired by Malebranche, Richard Fiddes was an ethical rationalist for whom society should reflect God's will. Devoting the Preface of his 1724 work, *A General Treatise of Morality*, to a wide-ranging critique of Mandeville, Fiddes attacks what he views as Mandeville's relativism. Contending that Mandeville has illicitly confused those values "founded upon Reasons of real Convenience and Order" (115) with items for which there is no such standard, Fiddes seems unwilling to consider that, however infelicitous may be Mandeville's language on these matters, Mandeville might be willing to agree, with Fiddes, that "Men in all Ages have agreed in the general Notion of it [morality]" (117) without relinquishing his social-custom account of the generation of morals and manners. Clearly, what Mandeville would not admit is what Fiddes most strongly believes, namely, that the principles of morality are founded on "the immutable Reason and Order of Things" (118).

Fiddes is on more promising ground in his contention that even if Mandeville has shown that human beings are often selfish, he has offered no "convincing Proof that a Man never acts from a true Motive of publick Good" (123). More interesting is Fiddes's argument that if one agrees—as Mandeville would seem to agree (at least if his professed rigorism is sincere)—that one ought to be virtuous, then there must be good reasons for acting selflessly; if so, then that implies that one can so act. Thus does Fiddes employ a theological argument to challenge the coherence of Mandeville's profession of rigorism: "Nothing can be more derogatory to the Honour of God or reproachful to human Nature than to suppose Man cannot do, upon virtuous Motives, what God, or the State wherein he is placed by God, requires he should do" (126). However, if one ought to choose the path of virtue, as Mandeville counsels in his Vindication, it is simply not clear that such can be done, since "it is impossible that . . . mere fallen Man, should act with any other View but to please himself while he has the Use of his Organs" (I 348).

Also published in 1724, *Vice and Luxury, Publick Mischiefs*, is a brief book by the literary critic, John Dennis, a rationalist for whom right action "must of Necessity spring from Knowledge" (152). Dennis's book, Stafford suggests, might have been in Hume's mind when he wrote his essay "Of Refinement in the Arts."[14] Dennis, having misconceived Mandeville's conception of vice, and having contended that virtue is grounded on religion (and is not the result of crafty politicians), contends that luxury is debilitating to the military, a point, indeed, taken up by Hume, but one that notably appears in the work of a num-

ber of liberal and republican thinkers, including Adam Ferguson. On similar grounds, Dennis also forwards the argument that vice is detrimental to liberty and that luxury breeds corruption.

The longest entry, and from an author whose identity is uncertain, is *An Enquiry Whether a General Practice of Virtue tends to the Wealth or Poverty, Benefit or Disadvantage of a People?* (1725), a work divided into seven sections each attacking some aspect of Mandeville's views. Stafford reprints a note by F. B. Kaye in which it is argued that the author of this book is a lawyer named George Bluet (the other possibility being a Thomas Bluet).[15] In the first section, Bluet considers Mandeville's account of wealth and contends that wealth, consisting ultimately in a nation's soil, would actually increase with honesty (a point also made by Hutcheson in 1726). In the second section, Bluet confuses Mandeville's professed rigorism with his naturalistic explanation of virtue, thereby arguing that Mandeville's politicians seek to instill the sort of moral virtue that would generate only poverty (255). In discussing, further, Mandeville's account of the origin of moral virtue, Bluet comes close to posing Hume's question, noting that the praise offered by Mandeville's politician may have no correspondence to anything in human nature: "'Tis no matter, whether there ever was such a thing in nature. The Politician told them there was, that the Generality of them *had* it, or *ought* to have it. Some of them immediately took the hint, and swore, they felt it heaving in their Breasts" (262).

In the third section, Bluet plausibly argues, as would Hume, that the concept of virtue exhibits sufficient latitude to allow room for "all the Conveniences" (265) that might otherwise be considered vicious. Bluet is much more exercised over the issue of whether lavishness or frugality generates wealth, eliciting numerous examples to support the claim of frugality. His analysis here assumes that wealth, again traceable to the soil, is finite; from this assumption he concludes that "the more there is consumed, the less must remain" (267).

Bluet's fourth section considers dueling, which was made a legal offense only with the statutes of George III in 1803. In section V, Bluet offers some account of what he takes to be the skeptical forebears of Mandeville (e.g., Pyrrho and Montaigne); in section VI, he considers Mandeville's essay on "public stews" and points out that the tolerance of brothels in order to preserve some women's chastity is done chiefly to serve the lusts of upper-class men, who may then use the services of poor women; section VII, the last, concerns the charity schools that Bluet thinks reveal Mandeville's horrible attitudes towards the poor.

Two of the shorter entries include the book of John Thorold, who, in 1726, at the age of twenty-three, published *A Short Examination of . . . The Fable of the Bees*. Having admitted that the question of how vicious qualities can render benefit to society "is not so easily to be comprehended by vulgar Capacities"

(416), Thorold attempts to find inconsistencies in Mandeville's writing and offers a defense of the religious foundation of our ideas of right and wrong. A second brief entry comes in the form of a letter to *Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* (27 March 1731) attacking Mandeville as a "downright Knight-Errant" (523) for his accounts of virtue and vice, the latter of which, says this author, is much too broad: it illicitly places licentious sexual appetites into the same category as the enjoyment of veal or mutton (525).

Finally, one of the most interesting contributions is the anonymous work, *The True Meaning of the Fable of the Bees* (1726). This essay articulates the most vigorous defense of a version of the conspiratorial theory, and, in so doing, suggests, implicitly, that Mandeville is a modern Thrasymachus for whom "the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger."[16] The author proposes that Mandeville believes that there is no real virtue and that "virtue" is a term employed by politicians to ensure that they may gratify their appetites at will while others must be virtuous. Thus the politicians "endeavour'd to find out a Way to make others deny their Appetites, that so they might indulge their own without Interruption" (442). Although one may grant that this is an interesting interpretation, it may be motivated by the same sort of error made by Hutcheson: a misunderstanding of Mandeville's insight into the interplay between one kind of intention and another kind of effect. The author claims that, according to Mandeville, "vices" are "*Actions injurious to others*," and that virtues are "*Actions beneficial to others*" (443). If Mandeville understands "Publick" to mean "the majority of society," then his dictum of "Private Vices, Publick Benefits" would entail that actions injurious to others are beneficial to others—a contradiction! And, reasons this author, since Mandeville is too "ingenious an Author" (443) to have made such a mistake, his real meaning must be that the politician acts viciously and attempts to get others to act virtously so that the politician may, quoting Mandeville's own words, "*reap the Fruit of their Labours and Self-denial*" (442). The author suggests, however, that this political conspiracy may fail and for a reason similar to that offered by Hume: If the politician is to affect our behavior through pride and shame, then that presupposes that individuals at least imagine that there is "a *Worth* and *Excellency in some things before others*" (482) even if that thing is the self. But if that is the case, then how can the politician convince individuals to sacrifice their own interests? Mandeville contends that an equivalent must be shown for sacrificing one's own interest and "The Politician's Art is then shewn in finding out something which is not an *Equivalent*, and which may yet appear to be an *Equivalent*; to find a Counter which may pass for a Guinea" (483). Thus does this author anticipate Rousseau's account of the founding of civil society in his second *Discourse* (1754),[17] stating that "the poor Savage is led in a Halter, and thinks 'tis a Gold Chain" (484).

This anonymous work assumes that Mandeville is articulating the view of a minority of the powerful, but such an interpretation misses the heart of

Mandeville's work. In his Preface to the *Fable*, Mandeville poses the question of *why* he has written such unusual ideas. His answer appeals to the "Reader's Diversion" (I.8), but he then considers what a reader might profitably glean apart from amusement, noting, first, that those guilty of hypocrisy might come to examine their own consciences and, secondly, that those who are so fond of the "Ease and Comforts, and reap all the Benefits that are the Consequences of a great and flourishing Nation, would learn more patiently to submit to those Inconveniences, which no Government upon Earth can remedy, when they should see the Impossibility of enjoying any great share of the first, without partaking likewise of the latter" (I 8).

Here lie two insights, one involving the implicit distinction between that which is a cost (and thus not to be alleviated) and that which is a problem (and presumably ameliorable). The second insight, to which I alluded earlier in this essay, involves a manner of considering moral and political problems as problems of the compatibilities of principles and empirical results. Coupled with Mandeville's understanding of the complexity of society and the tendency of consequences to arise in an unintended manner, it is this insight—along with his sparkling writing—which renders his work so interesting and worthy of study. Stafford's excellent collection of Mandeville's contemporary critics will serve as an important aid in the ongoing consideration of this modern, and neglected, thinker.

NOTES

1. *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988, a reprint of the 1924 edition of Oxford University Press), xvii–cxlvi. Future references to Kaye's edition will be indicated in the text by volume and page number, e.g. (I 23); references to Stafford's collection will be indicated by the citation only of a page number, e.g. (52); all references to David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), will be indicated, in the text, by the letter "T" and a page number, e.g. (T 123). Unless otherwise stated in the text, all quotations preserve their original italics.

2. *The Fable of the Bees* II 418–453.

3. "It is visible then that it was not any Heathen Religion or other Idolatrous Superstition, that first put Man upon crossing his Appetites and subduing his dearest Inclinations, but the skilful Management of wary Politicians; and the nearer we search into human Nature, the more we shall be convinced, that the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride" (I 51).

4. I offer a reconstruction of this account in "Mandeville's Bewitching Engine of Praise," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15 (April 1998): 205–226.

5. For discussions of the status of Mandeville's "politician," see Nathan Rosenberg, "Mandeville and Laissez-Faire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): 183–196; M.

M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. 47–77; E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 75–77; and Heath, "Mandeville's Bewitching Engine of Praise," esp. 206–207.

6. If Macfie is correct, then Hutcheson's lectures against Mandeville may have alerted his student Adam Smith to the importance of Mandeville's work. A. L. Macfie, *The Individual in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 115.

7. *Reflections Upon Laughter and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees* (New York: Garland, 1971).

8. For example, see the article by Tristan Mabry, "[Hurricane] Floyd May Leave Robust Economy in Its Wake," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 1999, A3. For a critique of the "Broken Window" thesis of economic production, see Frederic Bastiat's classic, "What Is Seen and Not Seen" (1850), in *Selected Essays on Political Economy*, ed. George B. de Huszar (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1964).

9. On this matter compare Haakonssen's resolution of Hume's sometimes evolutionary account of justice with Hume's sometimes rationalistic account: "The individual actions in which justice originates have one conscious end, namely a safer satisfaction of the 'interested passions', that is, self-interest, but they result in the rules of justice which have public interest (or utility) as their 'end' . . . I suggest that it is the failure to keep these tangled relationships quite clear (plus the lack of clarity about the natural/artificial distinction) that in some individual cases leads Hume to say things that are patently inconsistent with his theory of justice." Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 25. On the contemporary neglect of some of the issues of unintended consequences, see I. C. Jarvie, "Situational Logic and Its Reception," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 28 (1998): 365–380.

10. Jacob Viner, "Introduction," *A Letter to Dion* (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1953), 1.

11. Sect. VII, *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good*, in D. D. Raphael, ed., *British Moralists: 1650–1800*, vol. I (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 268.

12. Dennis Wrong offers a summary view of how the repetition of nonmoral acts may give rise to habits and then to obligation-generating expectations: "Instead of thinking of habit-expectation-norm as a seamless structured unity of simultaneously present elements or aspects, one might think of it as a sequence emerging in the course of time." See *The Problem of Order* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 48.

13. For example, Adam Ferguson articulates a more republican concern: that luxury might diminish the qualities of the free citizen and the citizen-soldier. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. Pt. VI, sects. II–V.

14. In addition, see Stafford's article, "Hume on Luxury: A Response to John Dennis?" *History of Political Thought* 20 (1999): 646–648.

15. "The Writings of Bernard Mandeville: A Bibliogrphical Survey," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 10 (1921): 461–462.

16. *Republic,* Bk. I, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 338c.

17. As the powerful convince the less powerful to form a government, Rousseau states, "They all ran to chain themselves, in the belief that they secured their liberty, for although they had enough sense to realize the advantages of a political establishment, they did not have enough experience to foresee its dangers." *Discourse on the Origin of Political Inequality,* Pt. II, tr. Donald A. Cress, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 70.