

## BERNARD MANDEVILLE AND HIS *SPINOZISTIC* APPRAISAL OF VICES

Say the name ‘Mandeville’ in whatever circle of intellectuals, and you will certainly hear the echo ‘private vices, public benefits’. One might compare the iron relationship of these phonograms in the memory of academic people with the couple ‘Descartes’ & ‘Cogito, ergo sum’ or the connection of ‘Einstein’ & ‘Theory of relativity’. Mandeville acquired an undeletable fame in the history of political thought by his thoroughly positive assessment of human vices for the political wellbeing of peoples. The whole tradition of Western theology and philosophy had considered man’s passions as evil and detestable forms of behaviour which can be avoided and have to be avoided. Not so our radical thinker, who in his naturalistic approach takes man as one finds him always and everywhere. He looks at his normal way of life and discovers the enormous profits following from his selfish inclinations. Moreover, aside from religious superstition or institutional deceit he can find nowhere any valid reason for the moral condemnation, let alone for combating or eradicating man’s egocentric reactions. Instead of opposing them, therefore, he courageously prefers to oppose the blindness and stupidity of the ‘tradition’.

Was Mandeville in our Western history really the first in attributing social value to man’s extravagancies? Attentive reading of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) in a small philosophical circle convinced me in the year 2000 that Mandeville is highly inspired by Spinoza’s naturalistic anthropology. In February 2001 I had just started writing an article about his indebtedness to Spinoza, when the well known historian Jonathan Israel published in this very same month his quite innovative *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*<sup>1</sup>. In this seminal work about Spinoza’s prominence in the origin and development of the European Enlightenment I found, for the first time in the secondary literature, the very explicit statement of what I intended to demonstrate. After having referred to the relation scholars have put between Mandeville and the works of the brothers De la Court, Israel writes:

But what has been less<sup>2</sup> noticed but is arguably still more important is the close affinity of his political and moral philosophy to that of Spinoza, with whose work, though he never cites it, there is every reason to infer he was intimately acquainted.<sup>3</sup>

It is amazing that Mandeville and Spinoza were never before<sup>4</sup> brought into some kind of intellectual relation, since Mandeville, born in Rotterdam in 1670, was first a student at the Illustrious High School of the town, where he was taught by Pierre Bayle, who was, to say the least, highly fascinated by Spinoza’s philosophy and wrote an immense oeuvre on this ‘virtuous atheist’.<sup>5</sup> Even

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford University Press 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The author does not mention a place where it ever was noticed before.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.

<sup>4</sup> After finishing this article I found that I am mistaken. There does exist an excellent article on the relation between Mandeville and Spinoza, written by D. J. den Uyl: “Passion, State, and Progress: Spinoza and Mandeville on the Nature of Human Association”, published in the *Journal of History of Philosophy* (25, 1987, 369-395). This article maintains the same thesis as I do, but I give more detailed evidence for it.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Israel’s chapter “Bayle and the ‘virtuous atheist’”, o.c. 331-341. See also G. Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris 1999). My ‘never before’ is too strong. A few weeks after my reading of Israel’s book I discovered in *Spinoza au*

more important is the fact that he subsequently studied medicine at the academy of Leiden, where he followed courses of the famous crypto-spinozist Professor Burchard de Volder<sup>6</sup> and rounded off his studies with a disputation under his supervision.<sup>7</sup> These years were a very turbulent period, in which there was much discussion around Spinoza's 'philosophy' among the members of the Dutch 'republic of letters'. The Spinozists and friends of Spinoza A. Cuffeler and W. von Tschirnhaus published in 1684 their Latin treatises *Principia Pantosophiae* and *Medicina mentis*, books which infected the new philosophy inaugurated by Descartes with a spinozistic virus. In the same period a Leiden thesis of H. Overcamp, which was too openly on Spinoza's side against Descartes, was burned on the commands of the curators of the Academy.<sup>8</sup>

In order to persuade my reader of the Spinozistic origin of Mandeville's ideas about man and society it seems to be the best method to give first a short exposition of Spinoza's texts which clearly prelude the text of Mandeville. This must be done, since most Spinoza scholars, let alone unprofessional readers of Spinoza, do not accept that Spinoza was a predecessor of Mandeville's position. The choice of a key fragment for this introductory operation is easy because there is a capital sentence in Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* (I/1) explicating his fundamental attitude, which is more or less literally quoted by Mandeville in the *The Fable of the Bees*.

*Philosophers* conceive of the passions which harass us as vices into which men fall by their own fault, and, therefore, generally deride, bewail, or blame them, or execrate them if they wish to seem unusually pious. And so they think they are doing something wonderful, and reaching the pinnacle of learning, when they are clever enough to bestow manifold praise on such human nature, as is nowhere to be found, and to make verbal attacks on that which, in fact, exists. For they conceive of men, not as they are, but as they themselves would like them to be (*homines namque non ut sunt, sed ut eosdem esse vellent, concipiunt*). Whence it has come to pass that, instead of ethics, they have generally written satire, and that they have never conceived a theory of politics, which could be turned to use,

'The Introduction':

One of the greatest Reasons why so few People understand themselves, is, that most *Writers* are always *teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are.*<sup>10</sup>

'The Preface':

For the main design of the Fable, (as it is briefly explain'd in the Moral) is to shew the Impossibility of enjoying all the most elegant Comforts of Life that are to be met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful Nation, and at the same time be bless'd with all the virtue and Innocence that can be *wished for in a Golden Age.*

'The Moral':

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XVIIIe siècle (*Présentation par O. Bloch*. Paris 1990) the article of A. McKenna about "Spinoza et les 'athées vertueux' dans un manuscrit clandestin du XVIIIe siècle" in which he claims that "la doctrine baylienne .... annonce la perspective de Mandeville" (p.88). According to Bayle the human passions work in favour of the social order and promote the public peace.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Wim Klever, "Burchardus de Volder (1643-1709) A Crypto-Spinozist on a Leiden Cathedra", *LIAS* xv (1988), 191-241. De Volder was later (1719) called a 'sequax Spinozae' by the Franeker professor Ruard Andala in his *Apologia pro vera et saniore philosophia* (Franeker 1718), 163.

<sup>7</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*: "Mandeville studied under Burchardus de Volder, which means he gained not only a thorough training in De Volder's scientifically orientated Cartesianism but was almost certainly introduced at an early age to Spinoza", p. 623.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wim Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza. Presentatie van een emanciperende generatie 1650-1700* (Hilversum 1997), chapters 8 (143-164), 9 (165-186) and 11(205-228) on Cuffeler, Tschirnhaus and De Volder respectively, which are quoted by Israel. See also Wim Klever, *Ths Sphinx. Spinoza reconsidered in three essays* (Vrijstad 2000), Essay 1, chapter 4: "Descartes' hallucination according to Overcamp", 66-76.

but such as might be taken for a chimera, or might have been formed in *utopia*, or in that *golden age* of the poets, when, to be sure, there was least need of it.<sup>9</sup>

...Yet live in Ease  
Without great Vices, is a vain  
*Eutopia* seated in the brain.  
...They [nations] that would revive  
a *Golden Age*, must be as free  
for Acorns, as for Honesty.

As he tells us in the fourth article of the same (first) chapter of his *Tractatus Politicus* Spinoza “has laboured carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand (*intelligere*) human actions; and to this end I [Spinoza] have considered passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity and the other emotional perturbations not as vices (*vitia*) of the human nature, but as *properties* which belong to it, just as heat, cold, storm, thunder and the like belong to the nature of the atmosphere...”<sup>11</sup> The so-called ‘vices’ - Mandeville’s term is the same as Spinoza’s ‘*vitia*’ - are only vices for the eyes of a moralist or satyricus, but not for the eyes of a scientist who wants nothing else than to describe the ‘properties’ of the thing we call man. For the philosopher Spinoza and the realistic essayist Mandeville it makes no difference whether we discuss the properties of the behaviour of man or of other things in nature.

Spinoza rather heavily stressed this point in his ‘science of man’ which he finally called his ‘*Ethica*’. “Most of those who have written about man’s passions (*affectus*) and ways of living, seem to treat not of natural things, which follow the common laws of nature... My view is that nothing happens in nature, which might be attributed to any defect (*vicio*) in it” (III, praefatio). And on he goes in describing accurately by what causes what kind of physico-psychical reactions happen and formulating the laws dominating their appearance in human interactions. It is not the place here to articulate his meticulous analysis. We must throw, however, an eye on the passage in part 4 of his *Ethica*, in which he deduces from his (empirically established) psychological principles the political conclusion which so much inspired his compatriot. The title of this fourth part is: “About human slavery, or, about the power of the passions” (*De servitudine humana seu de affectuum viribus*). The upshot of the whole part, which is in fact a political treatise, is that the *passions*, to which man is fully obnoxious and as a consequence of which he is not master of himself but very impotent and the prey of fortune,<sup>12</sup> *do nonetheless have a rather positive effect in so far as they enforce his forming a political body with his fellow men*. This line of Spinoza’s thought is made explicit in the second scholium to proposition 37 and its demonstration, which contains Spinoza’s deduction of man’s necessary politicisation. We have to pay attention to this fragment, because it is the only place in the history of Western philosophical texts which is an unveiled predecessor of Mandeville’s radical thesis and, moreover, its source. It deserves to be quoted here in its headline.

Everyone exists by the highest right of nature, and consequently everyone, by the highest right of nature, does those things that follow from the necessity of his own nature. So everyone, by the highest right of nature, judges what is good and what is evil and promotes his own

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<sup>9</sup> Spinoza, *A theological-political Treatise and A political Treatise*. Translated by R. H.M. Elwes (New York 1951).287.

<sup>10</sup> Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, Edited with an introduction by Phillip Harth (London, Penguin Books, reprint 1989) 77.

<sup>11</sup> I have slightly corrected the Elwes’ translation, quoted in note 8. My italics.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ethica* part 4, preface.

advantage according to his own view (*suaeque utilitati ex suo ingenio consulit*)<sup>13</sup> (see 4/19 and 4/20),<sup>14</sup> and avenges himself (see 3/40c2), and strives to preserve what he loves and destroy what he hates (see 3/28)... Because men are dominated by their passions (*affectibus sunt obnoxii*) (by 4/4c) which by far surpass in power their own resistance or virtue (by 4/6), they are often drawn in different directions (by 4/33) and come into conflict with each other (by 4/34), while yet needing each other's help (by 4/35)...

How (*qua ratione*) it can happen that men who are necessarily subject to passions (by 4/4c), inconstant and changeable (by 4/33), should be able to realize each other's safety (*securitatem*) and form a community, is clear on the basis of 4/7 and 3/39: no reaction can be restrained except by a reaction stronger than and contrary to the reaction to be restrained, and everyone refrains from inflicting injury through fear of receiving greater injury himself. Well, this is the law according to which a society will be established (*hac lege societas firmari poterit*).

This must be enough as a prelude to the paradoxical subtitle of *The Fable of the Bees*. It is not man's rational decision which brings about states of mutual help, of safety and of the common good, no, those states, sc. man's civil societies, are the product of his *affectus*, that is his passions and emotional reactions. And there is no doubt that according to Spinoza those passions or reactions are nothing but vices (*vitia*). Vices, therefore, everybody's private shortcomings based on ignorance and weakness, are the factors which normally generate political societies. States are the product of everyman's egoism, fear, avarice, pride etc, in short, of his endeavour to make the best of everything for himself and the promotion of his own wellbeing, and this always on the basis of the inadequate and confused ideas of his imagination.

Modern Spinoza scholars speak with one voice in this question.<sup>15</sup> All agree that Spinoza is not a representative of the so-called 'contract-theory' nor a Hobbesian. The coagulation of individuals to a low or high degree of political organisation is the pure and unfinalised effect of an emotionally driven conspiracy and a process of necessary and mostly unreflected coöperation from which no escape is possible, this only on account of the fact that we are totally subject to the

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<sup>13</sup> Some modern translations are slightly inaccurate, because they do not take Spinoza's '*consulere suae utilitati*' as a practical *activity* in behalf of one's wellbeing but interpret it merely as a kind of *contemplating* one's utility. So gives E. Curley (*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Cambridge UP 1985): "considers his own advantage according to his own temperament" and translates S. Shirley (*The Ethica and Selected Letters*, Indianapolis 1982): "and has regard for his own advantage according to his own way of thinking". E. Giancotti (*Etica*, Roma 1988) and A. Dominguez (*Ética*, Madrid 2000), however, approach the right meaning of 'caring for' with their "e provvede alla sua utilità secondo il suo giudizio" and "y provee a sua utilidad según su propio ingenio". R. Misrahi (*Ethique*, Paris 1990) is close to the correct meaning with his "et veille à ses intérêts selon sa constitution". For the meaning of the technical term 'ingenium' in Spinoza's text, see P.F. Moreau, *Spinoza. L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris 1994) 379 ff.

<sup>14</sup> It is especially relevant to remind here the text of 4/19: "From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil".

<sup>15</sup> See the standard work of Alexandre Matheron *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris 1988, 2<sup>e</sup> éd.). See also E. Giancotti, *Studi su Hobbes e Spinoza a cura di D. Bostrenghi e C. Santinelli* (Naples 1995); E.J. Pena Echeveria, *La filosofía política de Espinosa* (Valladolid 1989) and A. Negri, *L'anomalie sauvage. Puissance et pouvoir chez Spinoza* (Paris 1981). The last mentioned work, a French translation of the Italian original, is introduced by A. Matheron who explains the state as "la résultante quasi mécanique" of the interactions of individuals on the level of their passions. "Nous sommes là aux antipodes de la trinité Hobbes-Rousseau-Hegel", who interpreted the state as a product of a rational decision.

workings of the external world on our body.<sup>16</sup> And the state of nature is not superseded when and insofar man is part of a political body.<sup>17</sup> The passions reign for ever in the visible state, not in the human mind which has come to the highest kind of knowledge that makes him capable to become virtuous.

Let us turn now again to Mandeville. The most striking feature of his treatment of human life may be expressed in a negative form: his *not* describing man's morals in terms of what he ought to do or not to do or in conformity with the expectations of tradition, education and public opinion. Not what people should do, but to sketch what they *are* and what are the lines of their factual behaviour is the object of his Fable. This scientific style is the feature which separates him from the legions of moralists and preachers of all centuries. We saw already how Mandeville proclaims the point solemnly, but without mentioning his source, in Spinoza's words.<sup>18</sup> This attitude and this intention to present an objective instead of a moralizing or idealizing picture of man's behaviour is rather often stressed by him in various contexts. His fable is not a moral lesson nor a prescription of reason, but, as it is asserted in the 1714-preface,<sup>19</sup> an *examination into the nature of man*. Let us admire this scientific attitude in the first paragraph of his programmatic proclamation:

Laws and Government are to the Political Bodies of Civil Societies, what the Vital Spirits and Life itself are to the Natural Bodies of Animated creatures; and as those that study the Anatomy of Dead Carkasses may see, that the chief Organs and nicest Springs more immediately required to continue the Motion of *our Machine*, are not hard Bones, strong Muscles and Nerves, nor the smooth white Skin that so beautifully covers them but small trifling Films and little Pipes that are either overlook'd or else seem inconsiderable to Vulgar Eyes; so they that *examine* into the Nature of Man, abstract from Art and Education, may observe, that what renders him a Sociable Animal, consists not in his desire of Company, good Nature, Pity, Affability, and other Graces of a fair Outside; but that *his vilest and most hateful Qualities are the most necessary Accomplishments to fit him for the largest, and according to the World, the happiest and most flourishing societies.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In chapter 16 of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), where Spinoza cursorily sketches the origin of the state from fear and other reactions, he stresses the necessity of the process, which indicates that it cannot be a matter of rational choice: *homines necessario in unum conspirare debuisse...; pacisci debuerunt*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. letter 50: "discrimen inter me et Hobbesium, de quo interrogas, in hoc consistit, quod ego naturale ius semper sartum tectum conservo..." (the difference between me and Hobbes, about which point you put a question to me, consists herein, that the right of nature is fully and unconditionally conserved by me...)

<sup>18</sup> A mediatory role of Bayle must be excluded here, since the crypto-citation from the *Tractatus Politicus* can nowhere be found in Bayle's many texts, which are recently republished by Françoise Charles-Daubert and Pierre-François Moreau as *Écrits sur Spinoza* (Paris 1983).

<sup>19</sup> The fable itself was first published anonymously as a cheap pamphlet in 1705 under the title *the Grumbling Hive; or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*. This publication, however, attracted little attention. In 1714 Mandeville republished the fable unchanged under the **new** title *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. This book added to it "The Preface" (in the Penguin-edition pp.53-59), "The Introduction" (one page), "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" (pp.81-92) and 'Remarks' [A till Y] (pp.93-259). This procedure, namely to add remarks, distinguished by capitals, to a shorter but more basic text was probably inspired by Bayle's *Encyclopédie historique et critique* (1697/1702) in which we find a similar extravagant quantity of remarks to the rather short article on Spinoza. [Pierre Bayle is twice referred to in the text: pp.130 & 178]. The 1714-book was later, in 1723, extended with "An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools" (Penguin ed. 263-325) and "A Search into the Nature of Society" (pp.329-383). In a 1724-edition there was added to this collection "A Vindication of the Book" (pp.387-411).

<sup>20</sup>Italics in quotes are always mine, unless differently indicated.

*'They that examine into the Nature of Man'*: Mandeville claims to belong to this group throughout his work. He is focused on "realities in our frame and not imaginary Qualities" (101). It is his intention to avoid a mistake, "which we commit for want of understanding Nature and the Force of Passions" (108). Very few men "take the right Method of examining themselves as they should do" (117). We must not look only to one link in a chain of causes but enlarge our view on the series of 'concatenated events' (123). We have to "judge men from their practice" (186) instead of from their ideals. It is especially in his criticism of Lord Shaftesbury, who in his *Characteristicks* 'fancies, that as Man is made for Society, so he ought to be born with a kind Affection to the whole, of which he is a part and a propensity to seek the Welfare of it', that Mandeville not only emphasizes that this speculation "is inconsistent with our daily Experience", but more specifically that we have "to examine into the Reality of the pulchrum & honestum" (330). "Whoever will duely examine things and look into Man more narrowly, will find that on all these Occasions we only endeavour to strengthen our interest..." (346). And a little further on this page: "I intend to investigate into the nature of Society, and diving into the very rise of it, make it evident that not the Good and Amiable, but the Bad and Hateful Qualities of Man, his Imperfections ... are the first causes that made Man sociable..." 'Examination' is the term with which he qualifies the work of research he is busy in. He can never be caught guilty of contributing something to a kind of deontology.

Secondly one ought to remark in the large quote above the word '*machine*' by which Mandeville characterizes the human body, or more generally "the Make of Man" (p.114). Contrary to Descartes, who kept to the free disposition of man's mind about his body, it was only Spinoza who first taught that all the motions in "the machine (*fabrica*) of our body" are exclusively brought about mechanically.<sup>21</sup> That not only man but the whole universe works mechanically, including that everything is mechanically produced by everything else, had been the core of De Volder's lessons on physics, which were attended by Mandeville.<sup>22</sup> Mandeville does not explicitly deny the influence of a putative free will on the motions of our body, but it cannot be doubted that he does by implication reject such a working of the mind on the body. Talking about "the frame of man" and its 'contradictions' (p.187) he refers at once to the conflicting or opposed motions in the body (as seen from an external point of view) and the corresponding vacillating ideas of them.

But the most important element in the quote above is, of course, Mandeville's proposition about the *causal relation* between man's "vilest and most hateful Qualities" and the origin of "the happiest and most flourishing Societies". It is precisely this causal relation which had been the objective of his earlier published fable of *The Grumbling Hive; or Knaves turn'd Honest*. Before paying attention, therefore, to his elucidation of this relation, I think it appropriate to insert here a summary of the fable itself.

The fable opens with the description of a flourishing beehive: "A Spacious Hive well stock'd with Bees, / That lived in Luxury and Ease; /.../ No Bees had better Government, More Fickleness, or less Content". The beehive is meant as a paradigm of the human society. "These Insects lived like Men, and all / Our Actions they perform'd in small:/ They did whatever's done in Town". One of the most striking features is that the bees "cunningly / Convert to their own Use the Labour / of their good-natur'd heedless Neighbour". It is always their own advantage which they strive after by means of foul play: "All Trades and Places knew some Cheat, / No Calling was without Deceit".

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<sup>21</sup> See the 'appendix' to *Ethica* 1 and *Letter* 13 in which Spinoza confesses to be an adherent of the mechanical philosophy, which asserts "that all variations of the bodies happen according to the laws of mechanics".

<sup>22</sup> See references in notes 8 and 10 above.

Mandeville, then, descends to the various professions and shows in detail how all lawyers, physicians, priests, soldiers, kings etc. bribed, cheated and stole in order to satisfy their lust, avarice and pride. “Thus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise”. The worst of the bees “did something for the common Good”, precisely by its vicious behaviour. Avarice, luxury, envy and vanity, all vices had positive effects for the employment of the poor, the turning of the trade and the growth of the welfare. However, incidental reverse and misfortune occasioned some bees to curse the politicians and to damn the cheating by means of which everybody earned his living. “Sermonizing rascals’ started to condemn their compatriots, crying : “The Land must sink / For all it’s Fraud”. The greatest rogues and hypocrites expected an improvement from morally correct behaviour: “Good Gods, had we but Honesty!” - The prayer filled Jupiter with indignation and caused him to change the world by purifying the bees from fraud and filling their hearts with honesty. But this meant nothing less than a disaster for the beehive. “The Bar was silent from that Day”, the lawyers had nothing to do and “troop’d off”. There was no work for “all those Officers, / that squeeze a living out of Tears”. Even the clergy was useless, where everybody was poor and honest. It was a pitiful sight to see the once so glorious hive in a total disarray. Suddenly all trades were superfluous. Prices fell, palaces were to let, buildings decayed, courtiers were gone. “So few in the vast Hive remain; / The Hundredth part they can’t maintain / Against th’Insults of numerous Foes”. Many bees die. Others fly into a hollow tree. - At this point of his fable Mandeville is ready to clarify his intention. The lesson to draw from the fable is that ‘FOOLS only strive to make a Great an honest Hive’.<sup>23</sup> The combination of honesty and economico-political greatness is an impossible one. To “live in Ease / without great Vices, is a vain / Eutopia seated in the Brain”. But it is not vice as such and unconditionally exercised that brings welfare. Vice can only become a productive power when checked by justice. “So Vice is beneficial found, / When it’s by Justice lopt, and bound”.

Let us now return to the question broached by Mandeville in the first paragraph of ‘The Preface’. It is asserted there with a strong accent that people do not develop into ‘social animals’, i.e. valuable members of a political body, on account of their naturally being inclined towards commiseration and altruistic fellowship. So-called virtues like the ‘desire of company’, ‘pity’ and friendliness (‘affability’) are definitely not the factors which produce a flourishing society. This productive role is reserved for a number of vile and hateful qualities which are normally condemned as blameful vices.

This revolutionary thesis has, as was shown above, its roots in Spinoza’s deduction of the state from man’s selfish passions. “Insofar each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, insofar men become most useful to one another”.<sup>24</sup> This is nothing less than a hedonistic-utilitarian explanation of the origin of the human society. Spinoza and in his wake Mandeville do not acknowledge a primary ‘social instinct’ in man’s nature as a consequence of which he should seek company and devote himself for the well-being of his fellow men. Man is fundamentally and exclusively oriented on the conservation and the promotion of his own well-being, as he imagines it, and it is this inclination alone which brings him to social-political activities. “If somebody wants to call him therefore a social animal (*animal sociale*)”, writes Spinoza in his *Tractatus Politicus*,<sup>25</sup> “I see

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<sup>23</sup> My capitals.

<sup>24</sup> Second corollary to *Ethica* 4/35.

<sup>25</sup> 2/15.

no reason to contradict him”. Mandeville uses the same scholastic qualification in the same argumentative context.<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to take cognizance of a couple of parallel places to this central proposition of *The Fable*. First it is remarkable that Mandeville claims compelling validity. “I *demonstrate* that if Mankind could be cured of the Failings they are Naturally guilty of they would cease to be capable of being rais’d into such vast, potent and polite societies, as they have been under the several great Common-wealths and Monarchies that have flourish’d since the Creation” (p.55). ‘Demonstration’ is a heavy qualification which purports to present more than plausibility or probability. Mandeville does not demonstrate his proposition synthetically or ‘more geometrico’, but analytically, convincing his reader by means of hundreds of examples and cases and inducing him along this way to the general and summarizing concept: the private vices lead straight on to public prosperity. His method is, in fact, the method of induction which is the method par excellence if one wants to persuade a great audience, which has no idea of the scientific basis of the pretention proposed and is forthwith hostile to it.

The reason why the socially or politically desirable effects are to be imputed to man’s vices, is that these are completely dominating him “in the State of Nature and Ignorance of the true Deity”. In this state, to be distinguished from the state of highest intuitive wisdom, man is “a Compound of various Passions” about which one has to declare, “that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no” (p.77). “Actions are the result of a mixture of Passions” (p.117). “I am forced to submit to every caprice of my unruly Nature”(p.174). Here again the Spinoza scholar is reminded of the source of the affirmations. The background is Spinoza’s sketch of the human condition of being determined by various passions, their fluctuations and his being drawn in opposite directions according to the most powerful impacts upon his body. In this situation man is lead by his imagination, which is, in fact, nothing more than ignorance about what happens in reality or his being a minor and dependent part of nature. Both authors, Spinoza as well as Mandeville, quote the famous verse of Virgilius ‘*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*’ (Everybody is drawn by his lust).<sup>27</sup> Mandeville’s words “ignorance of the true Deity” refer in a subtile manner to Spinoza’s ‘*Deus sive Natura*’. “All *untaught* Animals are only Sollicitous of pleasing themselves, and naturally follow the bent of their own Inclinations, without considering the good or harm that from their being pleased will accrue to others” (81). Mistakes are made “for want of understanding Nature and the force of Passions”(108).

When speaking about the force of passions, Mandeville is well conscious of the fact that this force is for a considerable part due to the influence of the biological family and the cultural environment. “Liking and Disliking of things chiefly depends on Mode and Custom, and the Precept and Example of our Betters and such whom one way or other we think to be Superiour to us” (p.334). This has nothing to do with real virtue or moral excellence. “The Modesty of Women is the Result of *Custom and Education* by which all unfashionable Denudations and filthy Expressions are render’d frightful and abominable to them” (p.99). “Men ... generally judge of Things not as their Reason, but Custom directs them” (p.191). Education has “an excessive Force” (p.105). “What Men have learn’d from their Infancy enslaves them, and the Force of Custom warps Nature” (p.334). It is here again that Mandeville treads in Spinoza’s footsteps. In *Ethica 3 (def.XXVII)* one finds a remark which must have made a deep impression on Mandeville’s mind. “We ought to note here that it is no wonder Sadness follows absolutely all those acts which *from custom are called*

<sup>26</sup> In the scholium to the above quoted *Ethica 4/35* the use of the expression “animal sociale” is justified in the same way: “because we derive from the society of our fellow men many more advantages than disadvantages”.

<sup>27</sup> *The Fable* p.170, *Tractatus Politicus* 2/6.



*wrong*, and Joy, those which are called right. For from what has been said above we easily understand that this *depends chiefly on education*. Parents - by blaming the former acts, and often scolding their children on account of them, and on the other hand, by recommending and praising the latter acts - have brought it about ... Experience itself also confirms this. For not everyone has the same custom and Religion. On the contrary, what among some is holy, among others is unholy; and what among some is honorable, among others is dishonorable. Hence, according as each one has been educated, so he either repents of a deed or exults at being esteemed for it’.

In this way every child is taught to be kind to other children and to show commiseration when someone is suffering or in bad circumstances. But pity is not at all a virtue. “Pity, tho’ it is the most gentle and the least mischievous of all our Passions, is yet as much a Frailty of our Nature, as Anger, Pride, or Fear. The weakest Minds have generally the greatest Share of it, for which Reason none are more Compassionate than Women and Children. It must be own’d, that of all our Weaknesses it is the most amiable, and bears the greatest Resemblance to Virtue; nay, without a considerable mixture of it the Society could hardly subsist: But as it is an impulse of Nature, that consults neither the publick Interest nor our own Reason, it may produce Evil as well as Good” (p.91). A couple of Spinoza’s propositions shine through this fragment. Mandeville’s expression ‘frailty of our Nature’ means a weakness or vice as the opposite of a virtue or perfection. The four ‘frailties’ mentioned by him are likewise piece for piece ‘blamed’ by Spinoza as being only weaknesses of the man governed by his passions.<sup>28</sup> But he also admits that commiseration naturally arises from seeing misery in our equals and that showing no compassion would be inhumane.<sup>29</sup> Although pity is no virtue, if there has to be sinned, it can best be done in this direction.<sup>30</sup>

The passions compell us to the things we do and this is always what we *imagine* to be the best for us. They always “center in Self-love” (p.108). This becomes clear for instance when we consider “how tyrannically the immoderate Love we bear to our selves, obliges us to esteem every body that with or without design acts in our favour, and how we extend our Affection to things inanimate, when we imagine them to contribute to our present Advantage” (p.115). The Earl of Shaftesbury conceived the human nature as being equipped with a social inclination which would make him altruistic and stimulate him to participate in the life of society without first thinking of himself. In his chapter “A Search into the Nature of Society” Mandeville combates this view rather sharply. “The Noble Writer fancies, that as Man is made for Society, so he ought to be born with a kind Affection to the Whole, of which he is a part, and a propensity to seek the Welfare of it ... Two Systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship’s and mine”(p.329). Mandeville had not overlooked Spinoza’s anti-altruism as defended in the proposition that “Nobody strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else”,<sup>31</sup> a proposition which served as the ground on which his political theory was built. Man’s love of company ought not to be denied. Its existence cannot be denied, but the question is wherefrom it originates and why company is loved. “Does not Man love Company as he does every thing else for his own sake? (p.344). Man is made sociable precisely by his avarice, pride, lust, vanity, envy and so many other affections, in short by what Mandeville describes as his “Bad and Hateful Qualities” (p.346), or as “his Wants, his Imperfections and the variety of his Appetites” (p.349). It is always and permanently the savage man, man as an element of

<sup>28</sup> See *Ethica* 4/50 (Pity ... is evil and useless) and its scholium (He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of nature, will surely find nothing worthy of hate, mockery or disdain, nor will he have pity with anybody). See further 4/47, 4/51, 4/57.

<sup>29</sup> See *Ethica* 3/27 with scholia and the scholium to 4/50 (For who ... is not moved by compassion to help others is rightly called inhumane. For, by 3/27, he seems to be unlike a man).

<sup>30</sup> Scholium to 4/54.

<sup>31</sup> *Ethica* 4/25.

the jungle, the uncivilized man of the state of nature, whose egocentric qualities drive him irresistibly to bargaining with his natural enemies in order to acquire the highest degree of pleasure and safety for himself. A society rises only from the brute selfishness of its members and it is also their continuous selfishness which only can preserve it. A society (or state) is defined, therefore, as “a Body Politick in which Man either subdued by Superiour Force or by Persuasion drawn from his Savage State, is become a diciplin’d Creature, that can find his own Ends in labouring for others” (p. 350). If men were angels, states could be the product of rational decision and cordial agreement between people of a country. The reality is different. “Sagacious Moralists draw men like Angels”(p. 88), not so Mandeville who accurately investigates man’s nature. As was indicated earlier, Mandeville follows Spinoza’s anti-abolitionistic theory, implying that the state of nature cannot be considered to be abrogated by whatever civil institutions.

Mandeville is proud of his long and very concrete exposition of the “seeming Paradox, the Substance of which is advanc’d in the Title Page” (p.371), the paradox namely about the public beneficial output of man’s vicious behaviour. Although the paradox was a century before theoretically justified by Spinoza,<sup>32</sup> the current moralistic prejudices were so strong that most people were prevented from discovering it. It is the great merit of Mandeville to have translated Spinoza’s esoteric theory in everyday language and examples and to have given in this way a revolutionary impulse to the discussion about politics. Up till now vices were only damned; from now one it was respectable to see some social or economic value in them. “I flatter myself to have *demonstrated* that, neither the Friendly Qualities and kind Affections that are natural to man, nor the real Virtues, he is capable of acquiring by Reason and Self-Denial, are the foundation of Society; but that what we call Evil in this World, Moral as well as Natural, is the grand Principle that makes us Socialble Creatures, the solid Basis, the Life and Support of all Trades and Employments without exception” (p.370).

Put into a larger historical context the work of Mandeville must be judged a major contribution to the enlightened treatise of man’s nature, in which various topfigures of the eighteenth century will excel. This new type of scientific antropology is characterized by its abstraction from any kind of moralizing speculation. The explanation of man’s nature and behaviour is not contaminated by moral judgments. Here one does not try to condemn or praise certain activities, but only, as Spinoza said so often, to understand them. But let us not forget that it was very courageous for Mandeville to take this step in the science of man. Literally everybody in his time and in the English culture damned him for his disparagement of virtue and ‘defence of vice’. He was accused of immoralism and promoting immoralism. John Dennis described him in 1724 as “a Champion for Vice and Luxury, a serious, a cool, a deliberate Champion, that is a Creature intirely new, and never been heard of before in any Nation or any Age of the World”.<sup>33</sup> Mandeville was confronted with a horrible aversion from his work and the unpleasant consequences of his good intentions. Naturally he saw it as his task to refute the accusations. *Remark T* offers for this purpose one of his most beautiful pages:

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<sup>32</sup> Spinoza had not only laid the fundament of the theory discussed in part 4 of the *Ethica*, but had also, anticipating as it were Mandeville, become more concrete in his *Tractatus Politicus* (10/6), where he recommands laws stimulating the ‘vices’ of the citizen, “from which originates a greater profit for the republic”. “And therefore the chief point to be studied is, that the rich may be, if not thrifty, yet avaricious. For there is no doubt, that, if this passion of avarice, which is general and lasting, be encouraged by the desire of glory, most people would set their chief affection upon increasing their property without disgrace, in order to acquire honours, while avoiding extreme infamy”.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted from Harth’s ‘Introduction’ to *The Fable*, p.15.

I cannot see what Immorality there is in shewing a Man the Origin and Power of those Passions, which so often, even unknowingly to himself, hurry him away from his Reason; or that there is any Impiety in putting him upon his Guard against himself, and the secret Stratagems of Self-Love, and teaching him the difference between such Actions as proceed from a Victory over the Passions, and those that are only the result of a Conquest which one Passion obtains over another; that is between real, and counterfeited Virtue... What hurt do I do to man if I make him more known to himself than he was before? But we are all so desperately in Love with Flattery, that we can never relish a Truth that is mortifying... I don't expect the Approbation of the Multitude. I write not to many, nor seek for any Well-wishers, but among the few that can think abstractly and have their Minds elevated above the Vulgar. If I have shewn the way to worldly Greatness I have always without hesitation preferr'd the Road that leads to Virtue" (p.240-241).

A scientific analysis of the mechanisms of man's behaviour cannot be qualified as 'immoral'. If this were the case, the indication of the causes of certain diseases would have to be labelled as immoral too. Mandeville does not "bid Men to be Vicious"; he only points to the fact that his many vices to which he is fully subordinate, transform his individualistic instinct into socially acceptable and politically productive behaviour. This does not mean, however, that they would stop to be vices. The dominance of the passions over man's mind is certainly not a situation which makes him happy. Actions which proceed from a 'victory over the passions' give much more satisfaction than the actions proceeding from counterfeited virtue. The rule of passions alienates people from themselves, so that they cannot dedicate themselves to 'relishing the truth' which would result into a change of life. Mandeville opens rather rarely this perspective on the higher level of virtue, on which man is able, as a consequence of his higher knowledge, to moderate the excessive power of his passions. On another place, namely at the end of his "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" he also throws light on the pleasure of a real and not counterfeited virtuous life. "The humblest Man alive must confess, that the Reward of a Virtuous Action, which is the Satisfaction that ensues upon it, consists in a certain Pleasure he procures to himself by Contemplating on his own Worth" (p.92).<sup>34</sup> The wise man does not expect a remuneration in a hereafter; he does not need it since he acquiesces in his own virtue with the highest possible joy.

Yes, it is undeniable that Mandeville follows the headline of Spinoza's *Ethica*. The 'fable' itself is a duplicate of *Ethica* parts 3 and 4, in which the development from the powerful passions towards economico-political life is delineated. Part 5, *De potentia intellectus seu de libertate humana* (On the power of the intellect or on human freedom) is unmistakably reflected in the following peroration of "An enquiry...", which was meant as a mark of Mandeville's innocuous 'christianity':

Nothing can render the unsearchable depth of the Divine Wisdom more conspicuous than that Man, whom Providence had designed for Society, should not only by his own Frailties and Imperfections be led into the Road to Temporal Happiness, but likewise receive, from a

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<sup>34</sup> "All the Recompence a Man has of a Virtuous Action, is the Pleasure of doing it, which most People reckon but poor Pay" (p.233). "Virtue being its own Reward, those who are really Good have a satisfaction in their Consciousness of being so, which is all the Recompence they expect from the most worthy Performances"(p.91). Confer this with Spinoza's *Ethica* 5/42: "Beatitudo non est virtutis praemium, sed ipsa virtus" (Blessedness is not the reward of virtue but virtue itself) and the scholium to 5/41: "Communis vulgi persuasio alia videtur esse" (The usual opinion of the common people seems to be different).

seeming<sup>35</sup> necessity of Natural Causes, a Tincture of that Knowledge, in which he was afterwards to be made perfect by the True Religion, to his *Eternal Welfare* (p.92).

The word 'eternal' is of paramount importance in this quote. With this word Mandeville confesses his agreement with the apotheosis of Spinoza's *Ethica*, according to which we not only enjoy 'the immutable and eternal Thing' in our highest kind of knowledge, but likewise experience at once our own eternity, since we are a mode of the unique and infinite substance<sup>36</sup> The knowledge and love of the eternal nature, an effect of our realizing the necessity of natural causes, constitutes our 'true religion', as opposed to the primitive cultus of churches and the external piety due to our state. It constitutes also our unperishable wellbeing, named here our 'Eternal Welfare'. 'Eternal welfare' is nothing less than a spinozistic concept, comprising the absolutely perfect beatitude of the person who understands his being a modification of Nature's eternity.<sup>37</sup> Surely, Mandeville does not develop his theory of this human top experience which makes him religious in a superlative degree. He nonetheless shows his colours.

Many more details of the text could serve for strengthening my argument in favour of the thesis that Mandeville's sketch is rooted in Spinoza's science of man. At least ten of Mandeville's definitions of passions are either crypto-citations or paraphrases of Spinoza's list of definitions of the 'affectus'.<sup>38</sup> Just like Spinoza he maintains "that things are only Good and Evil in reference to something else and according to the Light and Position they are placed in" (p.369)<sup>39</sup> and that "Human Nature is everywhere the same" (p.282). The evidence, however, collected here about the correspondence of Mandeville's ideas with Spinoza's may be enough for the claim that Mandeville has to be considered a great continuator of Spinoza's interpretation of man in the age of Enlightenment. His '*Ethick*', as he once called his work (p.199), is a worthy 'scholium' to Spinoza's *Ethica*, by which the ideas of the latter are reverberated.

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<sup>35</sup> The words 'Providence' and 'seeming' are certainly introduced by Mandeville in order to immunize himself against irksome incriminations. There can be no doubt that he rejects the direction of the world history by a supernatural 'god' and that he maintains that all phenomena in the world, not excepted man's choices, are 'concatenated' by mechanically working processes. An arbitrarily choosing god, as also his counterpart, the freely deciding man, is completely absent from Mandeville's essay. Mandeville's last explanation for the reason why things happen as they do is always, that it is because of 'the Law of Nature' (e.g.p.214).

<sup>36</sup> See *Ethica* 5/20 scholium and 5/23 scholium.

<sup>37</sup> One ought to compare the propositions 24-42 of *Ethica* 5 to see the fundamental convenience.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. e.g. Spinoza's definition "XXXI of 'Pudor' as "tristitia concomitante idea alicuius actionis, quam alios vituperare imaginamur" with Mandeville's of 'shame' as "a sorrowful Reflection on our own unworthiness proceeding from an Apprehension that others either do or might, if they knew all, deservedly despise us"(p.99). Cf. Spinoza's definition XXVIII of 'superbia' as "de se prae amore sui plus iusto sentire" with Mandeville's of 'pride' as "that Natural Faculty by which every Mortal that has any Understanding over values, and imagines better things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all his Qualities and Circumstances could allow him"(p.148).

<sup>39</sup> See the preface to *Ethica* 4 (bonum et malum nihil etiam positivum in rebus...; respective dicuntur).

