

A Godless Fable: Atheism and the Philosophy of Bernard Mandeville

by

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BA, University of Victoria, 2009

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master Of Arts

in the Department of History

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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Dr. Paul Wood, (Department of History)  
**Supervisor**

Dr. Gregory Blue, (Department of History)  
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## Abstract

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The Anglo-Dutch philosopher Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) was among the most controversial figures writing in English in the eighteenth century. His satirical exploration of the nature of human sociability and economic prosperity infuriated his contemporary critics and deeply influenced the ideas of later Enlightenment *philosophes*. One of the most persistent questions about Mandeville's work concerns the sincerity of his declarations of Christian piety. Mandeville is commonly identified as a deist. This thesis explores the possibility that he was an atheist. The question is examined through an analysis of Mandeville's major influences, most notably French Jansenism, Epicureanism, Scepticism, erudite libertinism, and Dutch republicanism. Key figures that Mandeville engaged with in his writings include Pierre Bayle, René Descartes, Shaftesbury, Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Nicole, and Pierre Gassendi. In the process of discussing Mandeville's putative atheism, the methodological problem of researching and identifying atheism in early-modern Europe is explored.

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## List of Abbreviations

In citing works in the notes, short titles have been used for Mandeville's works, frequently cited works and conventionally abbreviated works. These works are identified by the following abbreviations:

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| CSM(K) I, II, III | Descartes, René. <i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> . 3 vols. Edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny. 3 volumes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. |
| FB                | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits</i> . London, 1714. GALE: Eighteenth Century Collections Online.  |
| FBK I, II         | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits</i> . 2 vols. Edited by F.B. Kaye. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988.  |
| FT                | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness</i> . Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog), 1969.   |
| HEF               | Hundert, E.G. <i>The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.   |
| OH                | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour, and the Usefulness of Christianity in War</i> . London: John Brotherton, 1723. GALE: Eighteenth Century Collections Online.                        |
| MT                | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases In Three Dialogues</i> , 1 <sup>st</sup> ed. London, 1711. GALE: Eighteenth Century Collections Online.                          |
| MT 3rd            | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases In Three Dialogues</i> . 3rd ed. London, 1730. GALE: Eighteenth Century Collections Online.                                      |
| MVU               | Mandeville, Bernard. <i>The Virgin Unmask'd: or, Female Dialogues between an Elderly Maiden Lady and Her Niece</i> . London, 1709. GALE: Eighteenth Century Collections Online.                                  |

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2. Front Matter of the second edition of the *Fable of the Bees* 118

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Historiography

Bernard de Mandeville was born in or near Rotterdam in 1670 to Judith (*née* Verhaar) and Michael de Mandeville. The de Mandevilles had been physicians for generations and the young Bernard followed his father into that profession. The social prospects for a physician were good; Michael de Mandeville and his father were members of Rotterdam's political class, aligned with the city's anti-Orangist, republican, States Party faction. The States Party favoured relative religious toleration and maintained that political power should rest within the hands of the merchant élite rather than in the monarchical figure of the Stadholder. The States Party's opponents, the Orangists, were aligned with the Stadholder William III (1650-1702) as well as conservative elements within the Calvinist state church. The younger Mandeville received his earliest education at Rotterdam's *Ecole Illustre* where it is possible that he was instructed by either or both of the exiled French Huguenot intellectuals and rivals, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) and Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713). Bernard continued his education at the University of Leiden where he received a Doctorate of Philosophy in 1689 and a Doctorate of Medicine in 1691.

Sometime between 1691 and 1693 Mandeville – who dropped the preposition from his name in 1715 – settled in London. This move coincided with a decline in his family's fortunes in Rotterdam. This decline was apparently precipitated by the Costerman riot of 1690, a series of disturbances caused by the execution of Cornelis Costerman. Costerman, a respectable member of the citizen's militia, was executed for the murder of a tax farmer's agent in a struggle over a cask of wine for which excise had not been paid. The citizens of Rotterdam aligned with the States Party rioted in opposition to

Costerman's execution, which had been ordered by the Orangist city bailiff Jacob Van Zuijlen van Nievelt. The younger Mandeville's role in the riot is not entirely clear. Neither is the relationship between the riot and Mandeville's relocation to London. It is known that Mandeville's father Michael was banished from Rotterdam as a result of the conflict. Furthermore, we may be certain that Mandeville had settled in London by 1693, for in November of that year he was called before London's College of Physicians for practising without a license. Further biographical details are scanty. In February 1699 Mandeville married Ruth Elizabeth Laurence; the couple had two children, Michael (born a month after his parent's marriage on March 1, 1699) and a daughter Penelope for whom a date of birth is unknown. Mandeville died on January 21, 1733 and was survived by his wife and two children. The bulk of his estate – consisting primarily of a £500 annuity from the South Sea Company – went to his son Michael, while £100 of the annuity went to his wife and twenty shillings was set aside for his daughter to purchase a ring. Mandeville's personal papers appear to have been lost to historians though his will and a personal letter to Thomas Parker, the Earl of Macclesfield (1666-1732), are extant.<sup>1</sup>

Mandeville produced his first writings while living in the Dutch Republic. Most notably, in 1689 he defended a dissertation advocating Descartes's conception of animals as machines entitled *Disputatio philosophica de brutorum operationibus*. Rudolf Dekker has made an interesting case for Mandeville's participation in the production of a libellous tract, *The Sanctimonious Atheist*, during the Costerman Riot of 1690.<sup>2</sup> If this

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Dekker, "Private Vices, Public Virtues' Revisited: The Dutch Background of Bernard Mandeville," *History of European Ideas* 14, no. 4 (1992): 481-97; Harold J. Cook, "Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of 'The Clever Politician'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 1 (1999): 117; HEF, 2-4; Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 802-5, 858; FBK I, xvii-xxxii, and *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Mandeville, Bernard," accessed February 2, 2011, <http://oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/17926>.

<sup>2</sup> HEF, 3 and Dekker, "Dutch Background of Bernard Mandeville," 485.

account is accurate, Mandeville displayed his penchant for satire at a young age. However, barring new discoveries about Mandeville as an author, it would seem that Mandeville's literary career did not begin in earnest until after his relocation to England.

The first of Mandeville's known English works appeared in 1703: *The Pamphleteers: A Satyr*, a defence of the memory of William III, and *Some Fables after the Easie and Familiar Method of Monsieur de la Fontaine*, a translation of twenty-seven of Jean de La Fontaine's (1621-1695) fables with the addition of two of Mandeville's own fables entitled "The Carp" and "The Nightingale and The Owl". In 1704 Mandeville published a second edition of La Fontaine's fables under the new title *Aesop Dress'd*, as well as *Typhon: or the Wars Between the Gods and Giants*, a satirical poem in imitation of the French satirist Paul Scarron (1610-1660).

In 1705 Mandeville published the 433-line doggerel poem entitled *The Grumbling Hive: Or, knaves turn'd honest*. The poem was a critical analysis of the social nature of civic prosperity and may be summarised by the line "thus every Part was full of Vice, Yet the whole Mass a Paradise".<sup>3</sup> Mandeville returned to the themes established in the *Grumbling Hive* in 1709 when he was responsible for several numbers of the *Female Tatler*, a satirical response to Richard Steele's periodical, *The Tatler* (1709-1711). Steele (1672-1729), an Irish born moralist and politician, used the character of Sir Isaac Bickerstaff – the "Censor of Great Britain" – to advance the idea that public prosperity was dependent upon private virtue. Mandeville further developed his satirical critique of Bickerstaff in *The Virgin Unmask'd: Or, Female Dialogues betwixt an Elderly Maiden Lady, and her Niece* (1709). This was followed in 1711 by *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*.

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<sup>3</sup> FBK I, 24.

In 1720 Mandeville published *Free Thoughts on Religion, The Church, and National Happiness*. Mandeville's anti-clerical position is on full display in the *Free Thoughts*: he advances a number of criticisms of revealed religion, calls for greater religious toleration and pursues a conception of the role of the Church as subordinate to the state reminiscent of that of Benedict de Spinoza in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670). Though the *Free Thoughts* stops short of any explicit support for deism or atheism, it was a controversial work and ended Mandeville's employment as a Whig propagandist under the patronage of Lord Macclesfield, a position Mandeville had held since the 1714 publication of *The Mischiefs that Ought Justly to be Apprehended from a Whig-Government*.<sup>4</sup>

Of his many publications, Mandeville is undoubtedly most famous as the author of *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714, 1723, 1729). The *Fable* would earn Mandeville a reputation as one of the most notorious and controversial authors writing in English in the eighteenth century. The *Fable* included the essay *An Enquiry into the origin of Moral Virtue*, a reproduction of his 1705 poem the *Grumbling Hive*, and twenty clarifying remarks that utterly dwarfed the original poem. A second edition of the *Fable* appeared in 1723 containing two additional remarks as well as alterations to those appearing in the first edition. Two essays, *A Search into the Nature of Society* and *An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*, were also added. It was the 1723 edition of the *Fable* that brought Mandeville fame or, more accurately, infamy; it was almost immediately decried as promoting vice and the destruction of religion. In 1729 Mandeville published *The Fable of the Bees, Part II*, a continuation and elaboration of the themes of the first volume presented as six dialogues between the characters Horatio

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<sup>4</sup> HEF, 6.

and Cleomenes. The arguments of the *Fable* were given a final book-length rehearsal in 1732 when Mandeville published *An Enquiry Into the Origins of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War*. The *Origins of Honour* consisted of four more dialogues between Cleomenes and Horatio and elaborated on Mandeville's conception of the Christian warrior, an idea introduced in the first volume of the *Fable*.

## I

Mandeville's biography offers tantalizing clues about his character. His possible tutelage under Bayle, his participation in the Costerman riot and the proximity of his son's birth to the date of his marriage lend credence to his reputation as a religious infidel, a politically dangerous author and a hedonistic promoter of vice. Unfortunately, no aspect of his personal life is documented enough to offer real insight into his beliefs and so the explanatory promise of Mandeville's biography is negated by its sparseness of detail. Historians investigating Mandeville are denied the opportunity of playing armchair psychologists; Mandeville's life and actions cannot be measured by the metric of his writings. More substantively, we are denied answers to a number of questions that a more thorough biographical profile – specifically in the form of personal correspondence or character sketches by acquaintances – may have provided. This gap in Mandeville's biography is particularly relevant for discussions concerning his religious convictions. Though Mandeville repeatedly emphasized that he proceeded from nothing but the strictest of religious principles, both his contemporaries and subsequent historians have nevertheless found his statements on religious matters to be suspect. As a result, Mandeville's religious sincerity has long been questioned.

The goal of this thesis is to ask whether Mandeville was a Christian, a deist or an atheist. Despite his protests of religious sincerity, orthodox Christian arguments appear in Mandeville's writing as either a means of deflecting criticism from his work or, more often, as a method of heaping satirical ridicule upon the followers of the Christian faith. The question, therefore, ultimately centres on whether Mandeville was a deist or an atheist.

Most historians have categorized Mandeville as a deist. Given the variety of beliefs included under the rubric of "deism", it is difficult to oppose this conclusion without producing some new and definitive proof that Mandeville held a more radical form of unbelief. A recent study of the English deists by Wayne Hudson provides one useful way of thinking about this problem. Hudson rejects a binary of belief versus unbelief, preferring instead to articulate a plurality of deisms that could accommodate a spectrum of heterodoxy and freethought.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he defines unbelief as "an inability to accept religious tenets" while disbelief is a more forceful position: the "positive conviction that religious tenets are false".<sup>6</sup> In Hudson's formulation, all deists participated in the disbelief of religious doctrines while unbelief was a less common and often painful subsequent state. Hudson asserts that the unbelieving individual, who was incapable of accepting religious doctrines, may even have longed for the ability to do so.<sup>7</sup> It seems useful to consider Mandeville within the former category of disbelief, as proposed by Hudson, rather than the latter category of unbelief. This approach allows for an investigation of atheism in Mandeville's texts without speculating about internal states

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 115.

<sup>6</sup> Hudson, *The English Deists*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

that we cannot access with any certainty. However, in place of Hudson's term "disbelief", I will use the term "unbelief". Generally, unbelief is the more commonly used term and, having noted my intended meaning, I feel that it will be less confusing overall to retain the more common usage.

## II

An examination of the terminology of unbelief provides insight into the historiographical problems surrounding the history of atheism. The term "atheist" came into modern use in Latin in 1502 but did not enter English until 1561. The vocabulary of unbelief also came to include the terms "libertine" (French, 1544; English, 1621), and "deist" (French, 1564; English, 1621). Terms such as "priestcraft" (1657), "materialist" (1668), "freethinker" (1692), and "pantheist" (1705) appeared in English first while "agnosticism" and "fideism" did not appear until the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Atheist, libertine, and deist are all terms that have been used to describe Mandeville.

The existence and proliferation of atheism in early-modern Europe is contested ground within the intellectual history of the period. In Lucien Febvre's 1942 text *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, he argued that atheism was intellectually impossible in the sixteenth century because the century lacked the mental tools – the appropriately scientific sense of the impossible – to make atheism a viable philosophical stance.<sup>9</sup> Although subsequent historians have shown that Febvre's study of *mentalités* and his conception of strict ontological limitations presents a flawed account of what was possible for the sixteenth-century mind, finding solid evidence of

<sup>8</sup> David Wootton, "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 4 (1998): 704.

<sup>9</sup> Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 354-79.

the existence of early-modern atheists remains distinctly difficult. Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* and David Wootton's *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* provide two of the most insightful accounts of sixteenth-century unbelief. Wootton presents Sarpi (1552-1623) as developing a fiercely atheistic materialism in his private works – the *Pensieri filosofici* – and Wootton argues that it is only by seeing Sarpi as an atheist that we can understand Sarpi's later career as a politician and an historian. In a different vein, Ginzburg's portrait of the Friullian miller Domenico Scandella (1543-1599), commonly known as Menocchio, presents a case of peasant heterodoxy laden with anti-Christian ideas rather than the more thoroughgoing atheism of Wootton's Sarpi. Menocchio's heterodoxy was highly naturalistic and even contained a materialistic conception of God. Ginzburg's recognition of peasant heterodoxy is the source of his critique of Febvre, whom he saw as failing to incorporate a sense of class distinction within his study of mentalities. The implication of Ginzburg's criticism is that the mental world of pre-industrial European peasants and artisans was not necessarily identical to that of the humanists or other educated people of the period. As a consequence, it is possible that the people of the sixteenth century were capable of broader religious conceptions than Febvre was willing to credit them with.<sup>10</sup>

Febvre's argument has played an important role in shaping the discussion surrounding the history of atheism. Indeed, Febvre may be placed at the head of the

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<sup>10</sup> David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-7, 13-43, and Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tadeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xiii-xxvi. See also John Edwards, "Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria circa 1450-1500," *Past and Present* 120 (1988): 3-25. Edwards argues that despite the importance of religious doctrine in shaping the lives and ideas of medieval peoples, the evidence shows that no doctrine was universally unquestioned and all forms of doubt were always potentially on the table.

contemporary historiographical tradition that has focused on how modern atheism emerged and developed in the seventeenth century. Perhaps the best approach to this subject is Charles Alan Kors' *Atheism in France, 1650-1729*. Kors sees the appearance of modern atheism as a consequence of the "fratricidal war" between Aristotelians and Cartesians over the strength of their respective proofs for the existence of God.<sup>11</sup> The destructive conflict between these philosophical sects produced the intellectual tools that enabled an atheist to make independent critical arguments. This perspective suggests that modern atheism has both a place and a time of birth that may be located with some degree of certainty. In contrast, rather than argue for the emergence or creation of modern atheism, Wootton has insisted upon a long tradition of heterodoxy that fell under a changing rubric of "atheism". Atheism is thus a living concept that has undergone a process of change. This process has resulted in the narrower sense of atheism common today. According to Wootton, prior to Pierre Bayle's *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* (1682) – in which Bayle made the case for a moral society of atheists – the vast majority of unbelievers understood religion as a necessary tool for maintaining the social order. Concerned for their own self-preservation, atheists also habitually dissimulated their unbelief. For Wootton, Bayle's philosophy opened the door to the expression of avowed atheism.<sup>12</sup>

Kors' study presents important and compelling arguments for how the principles of modern atheism developed. However, Wootton's conception of a broader and longer tradition of unbelief has far greater explanatory value for understanding how thinkers

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729: The Orthodox Sources of Unbelief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 265-96.

<sup>12</sup> David Wootton, "New Histories of Atheism," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 26.

such as Mandeville – a figure located in a transitional period of the history of unbelief – engaged with various doctrines, orthodoxies and heterodoxies. Chapter two will provide an initial analysis of Mandeville’s interaction with a number of both religious and religiously suspect traditions, suggesting that his interaction with these traditions is indicative of unbelief.

An investigation of the history of atheism must address the problem of dissimulation. Wootton advocates a methodology wherein historians seek access to true beliefs by reading between the lines of controversial works. Wootton has provided six criteria which historians may apply to texts in order to determine their suitability for this methodology:

- (1) a text in which conventional sentiments seem to be at odds with unconventional ones;
- (2) contemporary readings of the text that see it as suspect;
- (3) a declared interest in ‘writing between the lines’;
- (4) statements by the author (...) that seem to be intended to confirm suspicions about his own literary procedures or his own private convictions;
- (5) independent contemporary evidence that the author was believed to be irreligious or at least moved in irreligious circles; and
- (6) manuscript evidence that shows that the author had more radical views than he dared to publish.<sup>13</sup>

Wootton’s criteria provide a general template for pursuing the study of Mandeville within the context of unbelief. However, Wootton’s second criterion – one that most certainly applies to Mandeville – must be applied with care for fear of misuse. Febvre argues that in the sixteenth century the term “atheism” was used as a term of abuse rather than as a signification of actual atheism.<sup>14</sup> Michael Hunter has shown that in the seventeenth-century English context, the accusation of atheism was often a product of broader cultural

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<sup>13</sup> Wootton, “New Histories of Atheism,” 36-7. Wootton’s criteria for reading texts “between the lines” appears to be, at least in part, a response to Quentin Skinner’s critique of that approach in his seminal essay “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8 no. 1 (1969): 21-2.

<sup>14</sup> Febvre, *Problem of Unbelief*, 131-46.

anxieties and was not an indication that the figure in question was necessarily an atheist.<sup>15</sup> The possibility that Mandeville's critics were engaged in rhetorical hyperbole must not be ignored, but neither should we fail to investigate their accusations. The substantive issues broached by Mandeville's critics will be addressed in Chapter three.

The history of unbelief is more than simply the history of atheism. Deism was an important component in seventeenth and eighteenth-century heterodoxy and it is necessary to acknowledge that Mandeville has been typically included within the ranks of the deists. This suggests that an understanding of deism is important for articulating why Mandeville should not, in fact, be considered a deist. First, we must account for distinctions within the category of deism. Hudson, for example, counts Mandeville, John Locke (1632-1704), Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Bolingbroke (1678-1751), David Hume (1711-1776 ) and several others, as deists *in* England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The former are thus distinguished by Hudson from what he classes as the *English* deists: Charles Blount (1654-1693); John Toland (1670-1722); Anthony Collins (1679-1729); Mathew Tindal (1656-1733); Thomas Woolston (1669-1733); Thomas Morgan (d. 1743); Thomas Chubb (1679-1747); and Peter Annet (1693-1769).<sup>16</sup> Hudson does not explain why he includes the Scottish Hume and the Irish Toland in his lists of English writers but in the case of the deists *in* England he appears to be referring to Britain as a whole and in terms of the *English* deists he appears to be referring to a select group of writers who wrote in English, that match a specific type of discourse that he classifies as English deism. This

<sup>15</sup> Michael Hunter, "The Problem of 'Atheism' in early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985): 135-57.

<sup>16</sup> Hudson, *English Deists*, 2. Hudson contests the idea of "English deism" as articulated by Leslie Stephen and seems to prefer to read figures like Blount, Toland and Collins as working within the "open-ended, still developing character of the early Enlightenment" in such a way as to defy easy categorization. See Hudson, *English Deists*, 117-8.

would seem to account for his inclusion of both Hume and Toland. Of more substantial importance is that Hudson places Mandeville within the general definition of deism but appears to understand Mandeville's deism as somehow different from "English deism". As noted previously, the terms "deist" and "deism" are intimately connected to the language of unbelief in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, atheism and deism were generally synonymous through much of the early-modern period. For example, John Leland's (1691-1766) *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (1754) includes within the category of deist both those writers whose primary goal is "to set aside revelation, and to substitute mere natural religion" as well as those whose intent was to promote "no religion at all".<sup>17</sup> While the definitions of deism and atheism may have begun to take on their formal, separate connotations after 1680, as Wootton suggests, we can see in Leland's definition that even twenty-one years after Mandeville's death there was room within the definition of deism for characteristics closely resembling what might now simply be considered atheism.

Jonathan Israel includes deists as part of what he describes as the radical Enlightenment – a period extending from approximately 1680 to 1750 – but makes the limiting exception that the radical deists were those "rejecting Providence, the immortality of the soul, and reward and punishment in the hereafter".<sup>18</sup> This definition of deism may be compared to that of a "Christian deist" such as Thomas Morgan. Jeffrey Wigglesworth notes that for Morgan, "the saving power of Jesus Christ" was

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<sup>17</sup> John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century* (London, 1754), v.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 471.

foundational to his conception of deism.<sup>19</sup> As we will see, Israel's description of the radical deists fairly characterizes Mandeville. The question remains, however: why should a writer who denies providence or the afterlife be considered a deist rather than an atheist? Hudson provides an answer to this question when he argues that, despite the problem of definition, the terminology is worth maintaining as part of a fidelity to actor's categories and the contemporary conceptions of who the deistic authors were and what they stood for.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Wigglesworth argues that the variety of meanings located within the term "deist" does not render the term meaningless.<sup>21</sup> Hudson and Wigglesworth call on historians to avoid treating deists as a homogenous group or deism as a single set of beliefs. Instead, they ask us to consider each "deist" as an individual. This approach allows historians to appreciate a variety of deisms rather than fixate upon one canonical definition of "deism" within which an individual author may be said to fit more or less comfortably. This position is analogous to that of historians like Wootton, Ginzburg, Gregory and Hunter within the historiography of atheism and heterodoxy.

### III

Despite remaining an important and controversial figure throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, Mandeville's notoriety faded soon thereafter. While he came under Sir Leslie Stephen's scrutiny in the seminal *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, he was not a subject of further academic interest until F.B. Kaye produced his now standard edition of the *Fable of the Bees* in 1924.<sup>22</sup> Since that time, Mandeville has

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey R. Wigglesworth, "The Disputed Roots of Salvation in Eighteenth-Century English Deism: Thomas Chubb and Thomas Morgan Debate the Impact of the Fall," *Intellectual History Review*, 19, no. 1 (2009): 42.

<sup>20</sup> Hudson, *English Deists*, 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Wigglesworth, "Disputed Roots of Salvation," 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> HEF, 243.

been recognized as having contributed to a number of themes central to the idea of Enlightenment.

Stephen, like many of his eighteenth-century predecessors, characterized Mandeville as a “cynical and prurient writer” but admitted that a “vein of shrewd sense runs through his book, and redeems it from anything like contempt”.<sup>23</sup> Focusing primarily on Mandeville’s relation to Shaftesbury and their different insights into public morality, Stephen argued that Mandeville’s significance was in illustrating the problematic implications of Shaftesbury’s account of morality. Furthermore, Stephen identified as significant Mandeville’s decision to eschew both theology and unreasonable optimism in his philosophy. Mandeville’s naturalistic account of man in society and his willingness to pursue the ugly facts of human history made him scientifically superior to Shaftesbury in Stephen’s mind. While Shaftesbury was guilty of being “put off by flimsy rhetoric”, Mandeville’s vision “anticipates, in many respects, the views of modern philosophers”.<sup>24</sup> So, while Mandeville’s ideas were prurient they had, for Stephen, the advantage of accuracy and were therefore significant to the development of English thought.

Kaye’s introduction to the *Fable* identifies Mandeville as influencing three fields of thought: literature, ethics and economics.<sup>25</sup> In Kaye’s estimation, Mandeville’s ethical system was essentially utilitarian. Mandeville rejected the ability of religion to provide an objective basis for virtue and morality; instead he adopted an understanding of morality that identified virtue with social utility.<sup>26</sup> In terms of religion, Kaye positions Mandeville within a tradition alongside Pierre Bayle, emphasizing the “incompatibility of religion not

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<sup>23</sup> Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902), 2:33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8, 40.

<sup>25</sup> FBK I, cxviii.

<sup>26</sup> FBK I, lx.

only with reason but with human nature in general”.<sup>27</sup> Looking at Mandeville’s use of morally rigoristic language, Kaye finds that Mandeville has created a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the moral rigorism of the theologians. That said, Kaye claims that Mandeville never fully expressed the implications of this *reductio ad absurdum* and that there is a tension between Mandeville’s acceptance of “vice” in society and his stated preference for moral rigour.<sup>28</sup> In essence, Kaye sees Mandeville as following a secular notion of morality and virtue based on a philosophical utilitarianism informed by older, theological traditions of rigorism. Stephen and Kaye’s respective investigations illustrate the naturalistic or secular basis of Mandeville’s ethics.

Later historians, particularly M.J. Scott-Taggart, Jacob Viner and Malcolm Jack followed a similar line of enquiry. Each of these authors has expanded the discussion initiated by Stephen and Kaye. Scott-Taggart criticizes Kaye’s interpretation of Mandeville’s supposed *reductio ad absurdum* and argues that while Mandeville’s contemporaries perceived him as insincere, Kaye’s account rendered Mandeville a fool.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Scott-Taggart identifies Mandeville as a sincere moralist “who deserves to be taken seriously, if only because he was amongst the first to pose in an important way the problem of how we can find values if we accept a naturalistic explanation of the fact of morality”.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Viner argues that were Mandeville sincere in his rigorism, there would be a “manifest inconsistency between his satirical purposes and his procedures as a writer”.<sup>31</sup> Failing to find inconsistency in Mandeville’s argument, Viner concludes that

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., xliv and Elias J. Chiasson, “Bernard Mandeville: A Reappraisal,” *Philological Quarterly* 49, no.4 (1970): 490.

<sup>28</sup> FBK I, lii-lxi, cxxv.

<sup>29</sup> M.J. Scott-Taggart, “Mandeville: Cynic or Fool?,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no.64 (1966): 221-2.

<sup>30</sup> Scott-Taggart, “Cynic or Fool?,” 232.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Viner, “Introduction to *A Letter to Dion*,” by Bernard Mandeville (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1953), 5.

Mandeville was insincere in his moral rigorism. Finally, Malcolm Jack criticizes Kaye for over-emphasizing the role of religion in Mandeville's work. Jack claims that Mandeville's treatment of religion reflected his psychological interest in the phenomena of religion rather than the content of the faith itself. Jack argues, therefore, that Mandeville was occupied by worldly rather than otherworldly affairs.<sup>32</sup>

The tension concerning religion within the Mandeville historiography is, as we have seen, centred on the question of the sincerity of Mandeville's appeals to faith and religious morality. Elias Chiasson argues that Mandeville was sincere and that his rigorism is best understood within an older tradition of Christian humanism. Chiasson claims that Mandeville's rigorism was intended to stress the limits of human reason and the unique character of grace in response to the "platonizing deists" and their "increasingly optimistic view of man".<sup>33</sup> In essence, Chiasson conceives of Mandeville as something more akin to a fideist than a deist or an atheist. His reappraisal of Mandeville's religiosity parallels the work of scholars such as Elisabeth Labrousse, Walter Rex and Richard Popkin who made major contributions in the 1960s to the reevaluation of Pierre Bayle, who was an important influence on Mandeville. In response to previous traditions perceived to have too strongly emphasized the irreligious character of early Enlightenment thought, these historians viewed Bayle as an orthodox Calvinist. A younger generation of historians including Gianluca Mori, David Wootton, and Gianni Paganini have revived and strengthened the case for Bayle's irreligion (see below, pp. 33-5). Similarly, the religiosity of Bernard Mandeville has received renewed attention.

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<sup>32</sup> Malcolm Jack, "Religion and Ethics in Mandeville," in *Mandeville Studies: New Explorations in the Art and Thought of Dr. Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733)*, ed. Irwin Primer (The Hague: Martinus Nihoff, 1975), 42.

<sup>33</sup> Chiasson, "Mandeville: A Reappraisal," 519.

At the head of this re-appraisal of Mandeville is Hector Monro's *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford, 1975). Monro's analysis of Mandeville's texts provides a plausible argument for reading Mandeville within an atheistic framework.<sup>34</sup> However, Monro's argument is primarily based on the evidence found in Mandeville's writings; he does not pursue in any great detail the ideas and authors that constituted Mandeville's intellectual context. Although Monro's narrow focus does not undermine his argument, an investigation of the writers who influenced Mandeville's work allows us to identify the rich intellectual traditions with which Mandeville self-consciously interacted. Mandeville can be placed within religiously sceptical debates both preceding and contemporaneous to him. This is the perspective of both Maurice Goldsmith and E.G. Hundert. Goldsmith recreates the English ideological context in which Mandeville wrote, while Hundert fits Mandeville within the broader European intellectual scene. Hundert, like Goldsmith, has an eye on Mandeville's place within English thought but expands the sphere of debate in which Mandeville participated and shows more clearly the continental sources of Mandeville's radical arguments.<sup>35</sup> While neither Goldsmith nor Hundert address the possibility of Mandeville's atheism directly, Hundert points to Mandeville as fitting fully within contemporary descriptions of the "Epicurean atheist".<sup>36</sup>

Hundert's reassessment of Mandeville's influences and intellectual commitments appears to have resurrected Mandeville's standing within a wider European context. Subsequent historians interested in the development of Spinozism, Epicureanism and other radical ideas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have made frequent use of

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<sup>34</sup> Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 148-77, 249-67.

<sup>35</sup> M.M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville's Social and Political Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-45, and HEF, 1-15.

<sup>36</sup> HEF, 46-7, 102.

Mandeville and have assigned him an increasingly important role in the period's developments. Jonathan Israel identifies Mandeville as part of the Spinozistic movement which he regards as the basis for early Enlightenment radicalism. The connection to Spinoza and the perception of radicalism in Mandeville's work leads Israel to query the nature of Mandeville's religiosity and to ask how the absence of a Christian worldview may have affected his moral and ethical arguments.<sup>37</sup> This line of questioning, emphasizing the impact of Epicurus on Mandeville's thought, is followed in new scholarship by authors such as Hans Blom and Avi Lifschitz. Blom is particularly interesting for his criticism of the notion that Mandeville was an Epicurean. Like Chiasson and Jack, Blom accepts the sincerity of Mandeville's moral critique. Following Israel, Blom emphasizes the importance of the intellectual milieu of the Dutch Republic for understanding Mandeville's thought. However, Blom makes the unique argument that the Dutch – and subsequently Mandeville – derived their discourses concerning sociability from an older Augustinian and Stoic tradition. Thus, for Blom, the easy appeal to Epicureanism as a primary influence misses the substantial influence of these other, more established, intellectual traditions.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Lifschitz explores the revival of the Epicurean theory of the origins of language and finds Mandeville's significance lies in his refusal to clothe his Epicurean account in Christian dressing. Ignoring Adam, the Deluge and the Tower of Babel, Mandeville provides a purely naturalistic account of the development of language.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 623-7.

<sup>38</sup> Hans W. Blom, "The Epicurean Motif in Dutch Notions of Sociability in the Seventeenth Century," *SVEC* 12 (2009): 31-2.

<sup>39</sup> Avi Lifschitz, "The Enlightenment Revival of the Epicurean History of Language and Civilization," *SVEC* 12 (2009): 207-8, 215.

This study will follow the line of questioning established by Hundert and will explore the role of a variety of European intellectual traditions that may have influenced Mandeville. The ultimate goal is to consider Mandeville's philosophy specifically in the context of his unbelief. Monro has already made a significant contribution to the case for Mandeville's atheism. The distinctiveness of my approach is in pursuing Mandeville's putative atheism in its broader, continental context.

## Chapter 2: The Passions and the Origin of Moral Virtue

My investigation will begin with a discussion of an issue central to Mandeville's work: his conception of the passions and society. We will examine the contents of the first volume of the *Fable*, in particular, the *Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue* and the Remarks, added by Mandeville to clarify and expand upon the argument of the *Grumbling Hive*. It is in the first volume of the *Fable* that Mandeville initially gives full voice to his conception of society as a compound of masks and self-interest. Therefore it is here that a search for Mandeville's atheism must begin. Though Mandeville's explanatory arguments are not consistent across the breadth of the *Fable*'s two volumes, the creation of human sociability and the over-arching power of the passions are foundational concepts that persist in all of Mandeville's major works. The goal of this chapter is to explore, in general terms, Mandeville's moral philosophy, to illuminate his most important sources, and to demonstrate how ideas steeped in religion came to serve a profoundly secular vision of society. The three intellectual currents I will discuss are Scepticism, Epicureanism and Dutch republicanism.

### I

The decisive moral problem confronted by Mandeville in the *Fable* is that contemporary society both acted, and was predicated, upon principles contradictory to the Christian religion upon which it was purportedly based. The preface to the first edition states the goal of the *Fable*: "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 wish'd for

in a Golden Age”.<sup>1</sup> The essence of Mandeville’s conception of morality may be summarized in the statement, “it is impossible to judge of a Man’s Performance, unless we are thoroughly acquainted with the Principal and Motive from which he acts”.<sup>2</sup> However, Mandeville understands humans to be composed of “a compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no”.<sup>3</sup> The primacy of the passions is a central concern of Mandeville’s. In the opening essay of the *Fable – the Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue* – he argues that vice and virtue have historically been defined in relation to what was beneficial to society. Vice, then, was “every thing, which, without Regard to the Publick, Man should commit to gratify his Appetites” while virtue was “every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature should endeavour the Benefit of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good”.<sup>4</sup> Virtue is therefore defined as self-denial. However, in societies ignorant of the Judeo-Christians deity, “what carried so many of them to the utmost Pitch of Self-denial, was nothing but their Policy in making use of the most effectual Means that human Pride could be flatter’d with”.<sup>5</sup> Self-denial, however, is largely illusory and Mandeville spends the remainder of the *Enquiry* dissecting a variety of seemingly virtuous actions in order to expose the indulgence of a passion at their root. He concludes by arguing that some people can “from no other Motive but their Love of Goodness, perform a worthy Action in Silence” and these people “have acquir’d more refin’d

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<sup>1</sup> FB 1714, *Preface*, [6].

<sup>2</sup> FBK I, 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Notions of Virtue than those I have hitherto spoke of”.<sup>6</sup> However, even among these most virtuous individuals “we may discover no small Symptoms of Pride, and 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”.<sup>7</sup> Mandeville thus reduces all virtue to the effects of the passions. In Remark O he then separates virtue from the passions when he states that “I am willing to pay Adoration to Virtue wherever I can meet with it, with a Proviso that I shall not be obliged to admit any as such, where I can see no Self-denial”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, without explicit evidence that an action comes from an act of conscious self-denial, we must assume that the passions are at the root of even the most socially useful deed.

The primacy Mandeville assigned to the passions and his subsequent emphasis on the necessity of self-denial was largely a response to trends in English political and moral thought in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. Maurice Goldsmith has characterized this period as marking the development of an “ideology of politeness” which derived its power from Machiavellian republican notions of civic virtue imported by men like James Harrington (1611-1677) in his work *Oceania* (1656).<sup>9</sup> One articulation of this ideology was the emergence of organizations such as the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1699. This society, and others of its kind, which began by engaging in social efforts to extirpate private vices such as drinking (particularly among the lower classes) were, by 1710, establishing charity schools for the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>9</sup> Goldsmith, “Public Virtue and Private Vices: Bernard Mandeville and English Political Ideologies in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9, no. 4 (1976): 480-90. See also J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 333-552.

children of the poor.<sup>10</sup> Examples of the ideology of politeness may be found in the work of Mandeville's earliest English and Irish opponents, Richard Steele and Jonathan Swift (1667-1745).<sup>11</sup> Mandeville criticized Steele's insistence upon the congruence of private virtue with public prosperity. This criticism touched upon a number of themes central to the *Fable* as well as to Mandeville's later works. In his critique, Mandeville attributed social utility to a variety of actions commonly considered vicious. He also emphasized the role of self-love in forming and maintaining society, and asserted that immorality, atheism and libertinism were characteristics of social elites rather than the common failing of the lower classes.<sup>12</sup> The prominence of figures like Steele's character Isaac Bickerstaff and the various reforming societies made them easy targets for Mandeville's critique, but he found his greatest foil in the work of Shaftesbury. Mandeville identified a tension in his early opponents between calls for a more rigorously moral society and the realities of a commercially prosperous society. In Shaftesbury, Mandeville found a philosophy steeped in a Stoicism that depicted a "designed, orderly and harmonious cosmos, the notion of natural human sociability, [and] optimism in the face of evil".<sup>13</sup> Identifying Shaftesbury explicitly, Mandeville asserts that "two systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship's and mine".<sup>14</sup>

Mandeville's primary points of contention with Shaftesbury involve the question of human sociability and the idea of natural, or inherent, virtue. Contrasting Shaftesbury with all preceding moralists – and himself – Mandeville argues that Shaftesbury,

<sup>10</sup> M.M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville's Social and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21-3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, 25-6, 36-46, and HEF, 119-20.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourses and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>14</sup> FBK I, 324.

“Fancies, that as Man is, made for Society, so he ought to born with a kind Affection to the whole ... and a Propensity to seek the Welfare of it”.<sup>15</sup> In the *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Shaftesbury argues that sociability is natural and that morality is innate in human nature and thus objective. In one of the key essays of the *Characteristicks – An Enquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit* – Shaftesbury makes the case that a “sense of Right and Wrong ... being as natural to us as *natural Affection* itself, and being a first Principle in our Constitution and Make; there is no speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief, which is capable *immediately* or *directly* to exclude or destroy it”.<sup>16</sup> Here we find an expression of both of the concepts that Mandeville found problematic in Shaftesbury’s thought: that an objective sense of virtue is as certain and guaranteed as the naturalness of human sociability. Shaftesbury grounds his conception of an objective and universal sense of the good in the idea that morality was guaranteed by the natural order of creation.<sup>17</sup>

For Mandeville, humans are not naturally sociable.<sup>18</sup> He emphasizes this point repeatedly, presenting humanity as akin to all “untaught Animals” who “are only solicitous of pleasing themselves, and [who] naturally follow the bent of their own Inclinations, without considering the good or harm that from their being pleased will accrue to others”.<sup>19</sup> His rejection of natural sociability is connected to his rejection of natural virtue. In the *Search into Society*, this doctrine is directed specifically at

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 323-4.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, vol. 2 (Farnborough, Hants.: Gregg International Publishers, 1968), 44.

<sup>17</sup> Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, 52-3 and Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 110.

<sup>18</sup> HEF, 117-126. Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 180-3.

<sup>19</sup> FBK I, 40.

Shaftesbury. Mandeville states that “the Generality of Moralists and Philosophers have hitherto agreed that there could be no Virtue without Self-Denial; but a late Author, who is now much read by Men of Sense, is of a contrary Opinion, and imagines that Men without any Trouble or Violence upon themselves may be naturally Virtuous”.<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, Mandeville identifies humans as passionate creatures whose faculties are not equipped to overcome emotions. The absence of natural sociability is indicative of the primacy of the passions over our reason. Self-interest therefore determines evaluations of right and wrong in human interactions rather than an instinctive sense of virtue which Shaftesbury called our “moral sense”.<sup>21</sup>

Mandeville locates the conflict between our nature and Shaftesburian notions of natural virtue in the very origins of human society. His rejection of human sociability is similar to that of Hobbes. Mandeville notes that “no species of Animals is, without the Curb of Government, less capable of agreeing long together in Multitudes than that of Man”; still, “such are his Qualities, whether good or bad, I shall not determine, that no Creature besides himself can ever be made sociable”.<sup>22</sup> Though the description of the process by which humans founded society changes between the first and second volume of the *Fable*, the mechanism remains the same: the manipulation of the passions. Among the passions to which Mandeville attributes special significance, few are as important as pride. In the *Enquiry*, the origin of virtue is located in the use of flattery deployed by skillful politicians whose goal of serving their own self-interest has the effect of convincing the rest of humanity to subordinate their passions to the interests of the community as a whole. Thus for Mandeville, “the nearer we search into human Nature,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>21</sup> See Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, vol. 2, 28-30, 52-3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 41.

the more we shall be convinced, that the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride".<sup>23</sup>

Mandeville maintains that virtue and morality cannot be measured objectively and are not discreet things to which we are naturally inclined. Notions of good and bad behaviour are, therefore, the result of social conventions developed by individual countries or peoples. Mandeville expresses this notion in his account of the transformation of English burial practices, analyzing the factors contributing to their reception and adoption:

At first nothing could be more shocking to Thousands of People than that they were to be buried in Woolen, and the only thing that made the Law supportable was, that there was room left for People of some Fashion to indulge in their Weakness without Extravagancy; considering the other Expences of Funerals where Mourning is given to several, and Rings to a great many. The Benefits that accrues to the Nation from it is so visible that nothing ever could be said in reason to condemn it, which in few Years made the Horror conceived against it lessen every Day. I observed that Young People who had seen but few in their Coffins did the soonest strike in with the Innovation; but those who, when the Act was made, had Buried many Friends and Relations remained averse to it the longest, and I remember many that never could be reconciled to it to their dying Day. By this time Burying in Linen being almost forgot, it is the general Opinion that nothing could be more decent than Woollen, and the present Manner of Dressing a Corps: which shews that our Liking or 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 Superior to us.<sup>24</sup>

This position reflects a thoroughgoing cultural scepticism. Mandeville proceeds from this argument to enumerate a variety of customs among different peoples in order to show that morality and custom are synonymous. Having thus discredited objective, external measures of values, and by extension, natural morality, Mandeville is able to characterize a number of practices conventionally regarded as moral evils such as gambling, prostitution and drinking – the various private vices from the subtitle to the *Fable* – as

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 329-30.

being socially beneficial. Such a moral relativism owes a great deal to the philosophical tradition of scepticism.

The sceptical argument from custom supports a utilitarian conception of society. The good represents what is useful to society in daily life, rather than a transcendent category. As a result, actions commonly considered wrong and that may be called morally evil, may in fact be mechanisms necessary for social prosperity. Moreover, our actions are not necessarily related to the principles to which we publicly declare our adherence. Instead, we act as our nature and our individual passions dictate. Mandeville adopted this doctrine most directly from Bayle's *Various Thoughts*, wherein Bayle addresses the tension between belief and action. According to Bayle:

man is not set on a certain action rather than another on account of the general knowledge he has of what he should do but rather on account of the general knowledge he brings to bear on each thing when he is on the point of acting. Now this particular judgement can indeed conform to the general ideas one has of what one should do, but most often it does not. It almost always accommodates itself to the dominant passion of the heart, to the inclination of the temperament, to the force of adopted habits, and to the taste for or sensitivity to certain objects.<sup>25</sup>

Both Bayle and Mandeville may have drawn their view of the disjunction between action and belief from René Descartes (1596-1650). In the *Discourse on Method* (1637) Descartes argues for custom as the basis of action; to understand custom it is better “to observe what [people] do rather than what they say, not only because in the corruption of our morals there are few people who are willing to say all they believe, but also because many do not know what they believe”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert Bartlett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 167-8.

<sup>26</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting One's Reason and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 13.

Bayle and Mandeville may also have derived their analysis from the Jansenists. The notion that our actions do not flow directly from our principles was articulated in Pierre Nicole's *Moral Essays* (1671-78).<sup>27</sup> In the essay "Of Charity, and Self-Love", Nicole (1625-1695) argues that charity may be imitated by self-interest:

'Tis this which inclines those who are sensible of the hatred of Men, and who love not to expose themselves thereunto to endeavour to withdraw as much as in them lies, their Self-Love from the sight of others, to disguise and counterfeit it, never to shew it under its natural shape, to imitate the Behaviour of those who would be intirely exempt from it; that is to say, Persons animated with the spirit of Charity, and who would not act but through Charity.<sup>28</sup>

Here too we see the gap between stated and real motivations. However, for Nicole the ability of self-love to imitate charity is evidence both of God's providence as well as humanity's necessary dependence on God's mercy. As Dale van Kley notes, Nicole makes the case that charity and self-love can intermingle. Our dependence on self-love in the imitation of charity reflects both our fallen condition as well as our utter inability to attain authentic goodness independently of God. In this condition, unable to distinguish concupiscence from grace, Nicole argues that we must persist in a state of humility and fear knowing that it is God alone who can render an act virtuous.<sup>29</sup> Nicole's pessimistic view of the workings of the passions in society leaves us entirely at the mercy of God and thus reaffirms the central role of providence in human affairs. A similar pessimism is evident in the *Maxims* (1665) of François de la Rochefoucauld (1613-1680). Again, our conceptions of moral actions are not in keeping with the motivations that instigate them: "what we take to be virtues are frequently but the concatenation of various actions and

<sup>27</sup> See Dale van Kley, "Pierre Nicole, Jansenism, and the Morality of Enlightened Self-Interest," in *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany*, ed. Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 69-80.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Nicole, *Moral Essays, Contain'd in Several Treatises on Many Important Duties*, vol. 3 (London, 1696), 86.

<sup>29</sup> Van Kley, "Nicole, Jansenism, Morality," 76-7.

divers interests arranged in a certain pattern ... it is not always valour which makes men valiant, nor chastity that renders women chaste".<sup>30</sup>

The close similarity of Mandeville's position to the rigorism of a Jansenist like Nicole and a moralist like La Rochefoucauld may be taken to imply that his opposition to Shaftesbury was derived from religious principles. However, Mandeville uses rigorism as a satirical pose to expose the failings in the optimistic philosophy of his opponents. While he is quite happy to use the pessimistic moral precepts of the Jansenists, he does not assert that the gap between stated beliefs and motivations illustrates our utter dependence on God's mercy. Instead, as Hundert observes, Mandeville characterizes this tension as the "ideal conceptual space within which to examine the hidden dynamics of commercial sociability".<sup>31</sup> Thus, while Mandeville declares himself in favour of an austere morality, the manner in which he articulates his system and the lessons he draws from it are distinctly different from those of Nicole and the Jansenists. The outcome of the ascendancy of our pride and self-love is not humanity's dependence upon God's mercy. Instead, life in a prosperous society depends upon accepting the necessary existence of certain discomforts, be they moral or physical. For example, Mandeville uses a hyperbolic definition of luxury that imitates the austerity of his French predecessors. He argues that "if we once depart from calling every thing Luxury that is not absolutely necessary to keep Man alive, that then there is no Luxury at all".<sup>32</sup> However, in Remark X, he challenges the implications of his definition of luxury, asserting that a society stripped of luxury loses its claim to greatness. To have a society that is both great and

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<sup>30</sup> Odette de Mourgues, *Two French Moralists: La Rochefoucauld & La Bruyère* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 49-51, and François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld, *The Maxims of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld*, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon (London: Millington, 1957), 31.

<sup>31</sup> HEF, 119.

<sup>32</sup> FBK I, 108.

honest would require a people “contented to be poor and hardy”, but “if they would likewise enjoy their Ease and the Comforts of the World, and be at once opulent, potent, and flourishing, as well as a Warlike Nation, it is utterly impossible”.<sup>33</sup> To illustrate this point Mandeville enumerates the characteristics that marked the martial greatness of the Spartan commonwealth and concludes that “certainly there never was a Nation whose Greatness was more empty than theirs: The Splendor they lived in was inferior to that of a Theatre, and the only thing they could be proud of, was, that they enjoy’d nothing”.<sup>34</sup> Spartan greatness was empty because it did not allow for luxury. The state abhorred wealth and individual distinction. Mandeville gleefully points out that such a condition would be unacceptable in Britain:

From all these Circumstances it is plain, that no Nation on Earth was less effeminate; but being debarred from all the Comforts of Life, they could have nothing for their Pains but the Glory of being a Warlike People inured to Toils and Hardships, which was a Happiness that few People would have cared for upon the same Terms: And though they had been Masters of the World, as long as they enjoyed no more of it, *Englishmen* would hardly have envy’d them their Greatness.<sup>35</sup>

Mandeville’s focus on Sparta is significant. The Greek state was a favourite example for republican proponents of civic virtue and Mandeville’s criticisms were clearly intended to render incoherent the notion that a thriving commercial society such as England could function as it did under such austere moral and political principles.<sup>36</sup> Mandeville sheds the cloak of the French moralists. He uses their formulation of morality to attack his English counterparts and his language makes his preference clear: a great society is one that embraces worldly comforts. Mandeville abandons his own hyperbolic definition of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 246-7.

<sup>36</sup> Goldsmith, *Private Vices*, 40-6.

luxury in favour of equating true greatness with the presence of wealth, and the accumulation of wealth is impossible without the influence of our passions.

## II

There are a number of possible sources for Mandeville's scepticism. One of these is Jansenism. While the Augustinian Jansenists rejected the radical scepticism of the Pyrrhonians they adopted sceptical arguments as a means of articulating their own conception of God.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the most famous, and radical, instance of scepticism in Jansenist thought is the well-known wager – that it is better to wrongly believe in God than to wrongly disbelieve – formulated by Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées*.<sup>38</sup> The wager presents us with the profoundly sceptical proposition that we cannot know of God's existence through reason. Our well-being is tied to making a leap beyond reason into faith. Scepticism could, therefore, have reached Mandeville without originating from a religiously suspect source. It is likely, however, that Mandeville derived aspects of his scepticism from the tradition associated with the erudite libertines' revival of Pyrrhonism. Kaye's introduction to the *Fable* assesses Mandeville's debt to both the Pyrrhonists and the Jansenists. It is worth revisiting the connection in the pursuit of Mandeville's unbelief.<sup>39</sup>

The erudite libertines worked in a period of intellectual flux and, as the intellectual avant-garde of their day, they led attacks on the old scholastic Aristotelian system as well as on other contemporary intellectual structures. They were the generation that followed upon the sceptics Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and Pierre Charron (1541-1603) and

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Popkin, *History of Scepticism: From Savanarola to Bayle*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14 and HEF, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 2.

<sup>39</sup> FBK I, 1, xxviii-xciv.

included in their ranks figures such as Pierre Gassendi (1591-1655), Gabriel Naudé (1600-1653) and François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588-1672).<sup>40</sup> While their philosophical and epistemological radicalism is not immediate evidence of religious insincerity, the implications of the sceptical radicalism of the erudite libertines must not be overlooked.<sup>41</sup> The generation of historians who came after Labrousse, Popkin and Rex reassessed the outlook of the erudite libertines, and emphasized the libertines' covert dedication to undermining traditional theology, morality and metaphysics. The project of the erudite libertines was founded on a rejection of religious constraints on temporal pleasure, and was expressed through the careful deployment of classical learning.<sup>42</sup> Tullio Gregory has produced a checklist for identifying libertinism among seventeenth-century French philosophers:

First, an erudition that recovers and makes use of classical antiquity well beyond Renaissance humanist traditions concerned with reconciling pagan and Christian. Second, a detached scepticism that rejects the dogmatic, finding in the critical exercise of reason its proper task, and in doubt both the natural condition of the human race and the foundation of 'libertas philosophandi'. Third, a radical relativism strengthened by the experience of the diverse that denies universal values and reduces ethical norms and religious practices to historical origins. Fourth, an elitist understanding of culture and wisdom as the possession of the 'esprit fort', the free person, and not therefore communicable to the common man ... Fifth and last, a continual appeal to nature as the area within which every natural phenomenon can be located, and as the zone proper to mankind.<sup>43</sup>

Gregory expands his first criterion by noting that the choice of author and text from classical antiquity was very important to the libertines. The classical authors constituting

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<sup>40</sup> Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 80. Gassendi's membership in the ranks of the erudite libertines is contested. See in particular, Margaret J. Osler, "When did Pierre Gassendi Become a Libertine?," in *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion*, eds. John Brooke and Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 169-92.

<sup>41</sup> Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 95-7.

<sup>42</sup> Tullio Gregory, "'Libertinisme Érudite' in Seventeenth-Century France and Italy: The Critique of Ethics and Religion," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1998): 323; David Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century European Philosophy*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 200, and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 14-5.

<sup>43</sup> Gregory, "Critique of Ethics and Religion," 329.

the libertine's ideal library included Diogenes Laertius (*fl. c. 3<sup>rd</sup>C c.e.*), Diodorus Siculus (*fl. c. 1<sup>st</sup>C b.c.e.*), Plutarch (*c. 46-120 c.e.*), Lucian (*c. 120-180 c.e.*) and, crucially, the sceptic Sextus Empiricus (*c. 160-210 c.e.*), Epicurus (*c. 341-271 b.c.e.*) and his follower Lucretius (*c. 94-55 b.c.e.*). This form of classical erudition fostered the perception among the libertines of an intellectual history informed by atomism, Epicureanism and scepticism. These traditions were the foundation of the erudite libertines' belief in the political origins of religion and provided the intellectual material for even the most radical of conclusions. The author of the anonymous *Theophrastus redivivus* (*c.1650*) perceived the entirety of the history of philosophy to be a struggle of atheistic reason against superstitious religion. This work drew primarily from classical sources, but utilized some sixteenth century thinkers as well, such as Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576), Jean Bodin (1530-1596) and Michel de Montaigne.<sup>44</sup>

Historians such as Wootton, Gianluca Mori and Gianni Paganini have made significant contributions to the study of Pierre Bayle's work within the context of erudite libertinism.<sup>45</sup> Beside the direct link to several figures connected to erudite libertine thought, Mandeville shares with Bayle a crucial characteristic identified by Gregory in his examination of the criteria for libertinage. Wootton positions Bayle solidly within a tradition extending from Montaigne and Charron through Naudé, La Mothe Le Vayer and Patin. This tradition deployed "formidable scholarship" to demonstrate the relative rather than objective value of moral precepts. Wootton argues that Bayle's treatment of sexual

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 325-8.

<sup>45</sup> Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," 197-226; Gianluca Mori, "Bayle, Saint-Evremond, and Fideism: A Reply to Thomas M. Lennon," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 2 (2004): 323-34, and Gianni Paganini, "Towards a 'Critical' Bayle: Three Recent Studies," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 510-20.

morality, along with the plurality of voices Bayle deploys in the *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) renders a libertine reading of the Frenchman far more illuminating than the attempt to read him as an orthodox Calvinist controversialist.<sup>46</sup>

Wootton's characterization of Bayle's libertinism may be cautiously applied to Mandeville. We find the most general issue, moral relativism, expressed most notably in the *Search into the Nature of Society*.<sup>47</sup> A crucial passage concerning the change in burial habits has been quoted above. Mandeville makes other important and relativistic observations in the same discussion:

In the Works of Nature, Worth and Excellency are as uncertain: and even in Humane Creatures what is beautiful in one Country is not so in another. How whimsical is the Florist in his Choice! Sometimes the Tulip, sometimes the Auricula, and at other times the Carnation shall engross his Esteem, and every Year a new Flower in his Judgment beats all the old ones, tho' it is inferior to them both in Colour and Shape. Three hundred Years ago Men were shaved as closely as they are now: Since that they have wore Beards and cut them in vast Variety of Forms, that were all becoming when fashionable as now they would look Ridiculous ... What Mortal can decide which is the handsomest, abstract from the Mode in being ...<sup>48</sup>

In a subsequent passage Mandeville extends the relativistic conception of cultural habits to the sphere of morality, arguing that:

In Morals there is no greater Certainty. Plurality of Wives is odious among Christians, and all the Wit and Learning of a Great Genius in defence of it has been rejected with contempt: But Polygamy is not shocking to a Mahometan. What Men have learned from their Infancy enslaves them, and the Force of Custom warps Nature, and at the same time imitates her in such a manner, that it is often difficult to know which of the two we are influenced by ... Which is the best Religion? is a Question that has caused more Mischief than all other Questions together. Ask it at *Peking*, at *Constantinople*, and at *Rome* and you'll receive three distinct Answers extremely different from one another, yet all of them equally positive and peremptory. Christians are well assured of the falsity of the Pagan and the Mahometan Superstitions; as to this point there is a perfect Union and

<sup>46</sup> Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," 202-4, 207-17, 225-6. For arguments positing Bayle's orthodoxy see Elisabeth Labrousse, *Bayle*, trans. Denys Potts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Walter Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), and Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 283-302.

<sup>47</sup> Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 178-81.

<sup>48</sup> FBK II, 327-8.

Concord among them; but enquire of the several Sects they are divided into,  
Which is the true Church of Christ? and all of them will tell you it is theirs,  
and to convince you, go together by the Ears.<sup>49</sup>

Mandeville here articulates a thoroughly sceptical and relativistic argument about the construction of positive moral values. He does not oppose the idea of the existence of moral codes but demands that we recognize that these codes are contingent and the products of different social conditions and contexts.

Two of the Remarks in the first volume of the *Fable* suggest that Wotton's reading of Bayle's treatment of sexual morality applies to Mandeville as well. In Remark C, Mandeville presents the case of a man whose lust for a woman is satisfied by adhering to cultural norms of courtship. The man, were he to "tell a Woman, that he could like no body so well to propagate his Species upon, as her self, and that he found a violent Desire that Moment to go about it" would find that the consequences of his actions would be to be "call'd a Brute, the Woman would run away, and himself never be admitted in any civil Company".<sup>50</sup> Everyone, we are told, would rather stifle their passion than suffer this outcome. However, Mandeville asserts that "a Man need not conquer his Passions, it is sufficient that he conceals them".<sup>51</sup> Instead of indulging his passions openly the "Fashionable Gentleman", fitted with the same passion as the brute, abides by custom and "first addresses the Lady's Father", demonstrating his ability to care for her. Upon gaining access to her company, "by Flattery, Submission, Presents, and Assiduity, he endeavours to procure her Liking to his Person" and, assuming successful courtship:

The Lady in a little while resigns her self to him before Witnesses in a most solemn manner; at Night they go to Bed together, where the most reserv'd

<sup>49</sup> FBK I, 330-1. Monro follows J.C. Maxwell in treating this passage as Mandeville's "*reductio ad absurdum* of Shaftesbury's assimilation of moral and aesthetic judgements", Monro, *Ambivalence of Mandeville*, 180, and J.C. Maxwell, "Ethics and Politics in Mandeville," *Philosophy* 26, no. 98 (1951): 242-52.

<sup>50</sup> FBK I, 72.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Virgin very tamely suffers him to do what he pleases, and the upshot is, that he obtains what he wanted without having ever ask'd for it.

The next Day they receive Visits, and no body laughs at them, or speaks a Word of what they have been doing. As to the young Couple themselves, they take no more Notice of one another ... than they did the day before ... and having done nothing to be asham'd of, are look'd upon as, what in reality they may be, the most modest People upon Earth.<sup>52</sup>

What is most noteworthy about this passage is Mandeville's insistence upon the masking of passions rather than the control of them. This is a crucial factor in understanding his concept of both society and morality. No less important is the extreme relativism of Mandeville's position, made more explicit later in the passage when he states that "The Man that gratifies his Appetites after the manner the Custom of the Country allows of, has no Censure to fear".<sup>53</sup>

In Remark H, Mandeville defends the more relaxed customs of other countries. Turning his attention to feminine chastity, Mandeville provocatively argues that, though it is ironic, prostitution is the result of the dress of fashionable, chaste women. This observation leads Mandeville to an appraisal of the more permissive rules surrounding prostitution in both his native Dutch Republic and in Italy. Most fascinating is the conclusion of the section. Mandeville gives one final example – that of the pre-Reformation indulgence of clerical concubines on the payment of a fine – and notes that though the general assumption was that "*Avarice was the Cause of this Shameful Indulgence ... it is more probable their design was to prevent their tempting modest Women, and to quiet the uneasiness of Husbands, whose Resentments the Clergy do well to avoid*".<sup>54</sup> The preceding passage, drawn almost verbatim from the 1708 English translation of Bayle's *Various Thoughts*, illustrates the close connection between

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

Mandevilles's conception of sexual morality and that of Bayle.<sup>55</sup> Mandeville concludes that "there is a Necessity of sacrificing one part of Womankind to preserve the other, and prevent a Filthiness of a more heinous Nature ... Chastity may be supported by Incontinence, and the best of Virtues want the Assistance of the worst Vices".<sup>56</sup>

Remarks C and H also illustrate Mandeville's debt to Bayle. The other characteristic Wootton identified to ascribe erudite libertinism to Bayle was the plurality of voices found in his work. Bayle published only one of his works, the *Dictionary*, under his own name; the rest were published either anonymously or under an assumed identity. A notable example is the *Various Thoughts*, wherein Bayle posed as an orthodox Catholic writing to a doctor of the Sorbonne. In the *Dictionary*, Bayle inserts his opinions within a dense framework of footnotes, in which there are often numerous voices speaking. The entries themselves are cross-referenced. As Wootton puts it, "Bayle has thus produced a radically decentred text which lends itself to an infinite variety of subjective readings".<sup>57</sup>

Mandeville's texts display a similar strategy. He frequently employed the dialogue form to lend his voice to other characters. Mandeville used dialogues across the whole of his literary career including the second volume of the *Fable* and its putative sequel the *Origin of Honour*. The interpretive issues that arise from Mandeville's use of the dialogue will be explored below. We need to consider first and foremost the role of the dialogue in distancing an author from his or her arguments. The dialogue had long helped authors hoping to evade criticism or punishment for their ideas, as in the case of Galileo's 1632 work, *A Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. Bayle himself utilized

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<sup>55</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Miscellaneous Reflections, Occasion'd by the Comet Which Appear'd in December 1680. Chiefly Tending to explode Popular Superstitions*, vol. 2 (London, 1708), 335-6. See also FBK I, 99 for Kaye's comment on Mandeville's slight alteration of the text.

<sup>56</sup> FBK I, 100.

<sup>57</sup> Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," 203.

the dialogue form in at least one of his most controversial discussions. Tackling the problem of Pyrrhonian scepticism, Bayle presents the issue in the form of a dialogue between two *abbés*. The deeply fideistic conclusion Bayle reaches – that arguing with the sceptics is pointless and that scepticism may only be defeated by drawing men from reason to faith – is one step removed from the actual conversation; it is the insight of a theologian attending the debate of the *abbés*.<sup>58</sup> Although Mandeville employed the dialogue form before and after the appearance of the first volume of the *Fable*, it was not the primary literary device he relied on in that text. However, the dialogue did play a limited role in the first volume. In Remark P, for example, Mandeville criticizes our hubris and the assumption of humanity's supremacy in the natural order in a dialogue between a Roman merchant and a lion. Questioning man's primacy over nature and the distinction between human and beast, Mandeville uses the dialogue, to remove his authorial voice from the text. This allows him to criticize the assertions of both sides of the argument while still making a critical and controversial point.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Mandeville, like Bayle, relies on anonymity. Unlike Bayle, who adopted a Catholic persona in the *Various Thoughts*, Mandeville did not misrepresent his identity, but the decision to publish some of his work anonymously provided him with the opportunity to speak in a manner that would otherwise not be open to him.

### III

Mandeville drew on the moral theories of writers like Nicole and La Rochefoucauld in order to counter the popular ideas of contemporaries such as Shaftesbury and Steele. His satirical use of French ideas was designed to expose the falsity of emerging English

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<sup>58</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, ed. and trans. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 196-204.

<sup>59</sup> FBK I, 176-81.

concepts of innate morality and natural sociability. However, satirical criticism was not the whole of Mandeville's contribution to eighteenth-century discourses concerning social morality.

Ideas drawn from Epicureanism were critical to Mandeville's evolving conception of society. There are two elements from the Epicurean tradition that we must examine in order to better understand Mandeville's work. The first is the critical role of pleasure and the passions and the second concerns humanity's origins in a state of nature.

Epicurus was rehabilitated as part of the natural philosophy of the seventeenth century in large part through the work of Pierre Gassendi. His revival of Epicureanism provided an alternative to the still dominant school of scholastic Aristotelianism. Mandeville's concept of morality and society differs from that of Gassendi. In particular, it lacks the Christianized quality that pervaded Gassendi's work. Epicureanism was characterized by "theories of empirical investigation, [a] disdain of metaphysics, atomism and the mechanical philosophy, an ethics based on *voluptas* [pleasure], and the reduction of law to custom".<sup>60</sup> While Gassendi argued for Epicurus' compatibility with Christianity, by Mandeville's time Epicureanism was still commonly regarded as potentially leading to materialism and atheism. Hundert locates Mandeville's naturalistic account of the origins of society, the *Fable's* "most basic and influential argument", within Epicureanism.<sup>61</sup>

As a moral philosophy, Epicureanism emphasizes pleasure as the meaning or *telos* of the universe. Though Epicurus' understanding of pleasure is a matter of scholarly debate, a common reading first established by Cicero (106-43 b.c.e.) supposes that there are two

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<sup>60</sup> Tullio Gregory, *The Critique of Ethics and Religion*, 325.

<sup>61</sup> HEF, 48.

kinds of pleasure within Epicureanism: kinetic and static.<sup>62</sup> Epicurean pleasure is not hedonistic. Instead, it is an austere form of pleasure characterized by the absence of pain. Moreover, as the absence of pain is the ultimate experience of life, the experience of pleasure frees humanity from all other needs, including life itself. As Lisa Sarasohn explains, “pleasure makes a human being self-sufficient in the face of death”.<sup>63</sup> This self-sufficiency is a crucial component of the Epicurean explanation of free will. While the location of freedom in Epicurus is ambiguous – it may be located in either the swerve of our component atoms or within our human rationality – the key tenet is that pleasure is intimately linked to freedom.<sup>64</sup> Gassendi adopted a notion of pleasure similar to that of Epicurus and emphasized in his work that it is the attraction to pleasure, rather than the avoidance of pain, that is the motivating factor for human actions. For Sarasohn, it is this formulation that makes Gassendi distinct from another important figure in the revival of Epicureanism, namely Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes’s conception of pleasure placed a greater emphasis on the fear of pain, thus elevating the power of the passions. Driven by passions, humans constantly seek to indulge new hedonistic pleasures, unable to use reason to recognize pleasure as a fulfilled state.<sup>65</sup> In Hobbes we find that “the Passions that incline men to Peace, are fear of death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See Boris Nikolsky, “Epicurus On Pleasure,” *Phronesis* 46, no. 4 (2001): 440-65. Nikolsky argues against the idea of kinetic and static pleasures in the Epicurean system, and makes the case for a singular state of pleasure caused by external stimulus, locating the source of this misreading in the work of either Carneades or one of his followers.

<sup>63</sup> Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 55-6. See also J.M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 100-26, and Phillip Mitsis, *Epicurus’ Ethical Theory: The Pleasure of Invulnerability* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 11-58.

<sup>64</sup> Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 51-8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-30.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 93.

The Hobbesian notion of the state of nature is characterized by the idea of war: “during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man”.<sup>67</sup> Like Hobbes, Gassendi conceived of a state of war as a consequence of the basic laws of nature, specifically the law which states that each person is a sovereign unto themselves. However, Sarasohn notes that Gassendi believed that war was in fact relatively rare because the atomized individual was also a “potential member of the social organism”.<sup>68</sup> Unlike Hobbes, Gassendi considered humanity to have a natural sense of sociability.

In Mandeville we can see a balancing of the influence of Hobbes and Gassendi. Mandeville adopts Hobbes’s rejection of human sociability but follows Gassendi in downplaying the actual presence of conflict within the state of nature. Emphasizing humanity’s timidity and fear, Mandeville argues that “Man as he is a fearful Animal, naturally not rapacious, loves Peace and Quiet, and he would never Fight, if no body offended him, and he could have what he fights for without it”.<sup>69</sup> Although this suggests Mandeville followed Gassendi, it is reasonable to see the ideas of both Hobbes and Gassendi at work in Mandeville’s articulation of the Epicurean state of nature. Like Hobbes, Mandeville emphasizes the passions and their role in governing our behaviour. Indeed, the power of the passions represents an important break from Epicureanism in Mandeville’s thought. In the *Free Thoughts*, Mandeville argues that “when once we reflect on what passes within us ... our wills shall not seem to be so free, as is commonly

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>68</sup> Sarasohn, *Gassendi’s Ethics*, 152.

<sup>69</sup> FBK I, 348.

imagin'd".<sup>70</sup> Given a choice a person may claim "with a good conscience, that they had acted from a principle of free will, though it seems plain to me, that each of them was prompted to what he did, and over-rul'd by a predominant passion".<sup>71</sup>

Mandeville's exploration of humanity's fearful nature and the role of fear in the foundation of society is not fully expressed in the first volume of the *Fable*. Indeed, society is depicted as arising more from the self-interest of key individuals, namely the dexterous politicians and lawgivers of the *Enquiry*. While the critical role of fear in the establishment of human society is thoroughly explored only in the second volume, the first volume does at least contain a characterization of fear and pleasure as primordial causes of human behaviour. From the outset, we can identify an Epicurean influence on Mandeville's conception of the passions. In volume one, the role of fear is best illustrated in Remark R. Here Mandeville addresses the issue of how to create effective soldiers, and establishes the principle that humans are not naturally rapacious. However, this retiring quality is reserved for the state of nature. Once in society, humans find room for the free play of their pride and "as his Knowledge increases, his Desires are enlarg'd, and consequently his Wants and Appetites are multiply'd".<sup>72</sup> The multiplication of desires in turn enlarges the human capacity for anger: "Hence it must follow, that he will be often cross'd in the pursuit of them, and meet with abundance more disappointment to stir up his Anger than in his former Condition, and Man would in little time become the most hurtful and noxious Creature in the World".<sup>73</sup> In order to curb the tendency towards violence caused by our entry into society, it would be necessary for primitive

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<sup>70</sup> FT, 97.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>72</sup> FBK I, 206.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

governments to reassert the primacy of fear through the threat of punishment. Mandeville concludes that “the only useful Passion then that Man is possess’d of toward the Peace and Quiet of Society, is his Fear, and the more you work upon it the more orderly and governable he’ll be”.<sup>74</sup> Fear encourages the members of society to sublimate their passions and rewards the ability to dissimulate pride or self-interest. Skilful dissimulation is a necessary trait for the satisfaction of our individual desires. With the state guaranteeing punishment against extreme deviations from social conventions, fear thus works as a passive guarantee of social stability.

Mandeville assigned fear an active role in driving other passions, namely those of honour and shame. In Remark C Mandeville denies that honour can have an objective definition and defines it simply as “nothing else but the good Opinion of others, which is counted more or less Substantial, the more or less Noise or Bustle there is made about the demonstration of it”.<sup>75</sup> In Remark R, Mandeville explains how the skillful politician can encourage a warlike spirit within the people, and revives honour as a key mechanism. Natural bravery or anger soon gives way to fear, which checks the warlike nature of the individual. However, a synthetic or counterfeit bravery may be promoted by appealing to honour. In this context, honour is more correctly understood as the fear of shame. Through flattery, politicians are able to trick people into “mistaking Pride for Courage” and hence:

If but one in Ten can be persuaded openly to declare, that he is possess’d of this Principle [courage], and maintain it against all Gainsayers, there will soon be half a dozen that shall assert the same. Whoever has once own’d it is engaged, the Politician has nothing to do but to take all imaginable Care to flatter the Pride of those that brag of, and are willing to stand by it, a thousand different ways: The same Pride that drew him in first will ever after oblige him to defend the Assertion, till at last the fear of discovering

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 63-4.

the reality of his Heart, comes to be so great that it out-does the fear of Death it self. Do but increase Man's Pride, and his fear of Shame will ever be proportion'd to it; for the greater Value a Man sets upon himself, the more Pains he'll take and the greater Hardships he'll undergo to avoid Shame.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, fear becomes the active principle of behaviour, masked by the language of honour. However, fear is also a driving mechanism behind the pursuit of pleasure, which in Mandeville's formulation is the satisfaction – temporary though it may be – of the dominant passion. We can see that Mandeville adopted some of the Epicurean ethical system, but he did so in a way that accentuated the fleeting and hedonistic implications attributed to Epicureanism by its critics rather than the austere ethical system of either Epicurus or Gassendi.

#### IV

The Dutch Republic provided Mandeville with a wealth of material to utilize and criticize in his work. Two aspects of Mandeville's writings relate directly to the intellectual and cultural milieu of the Dutch Republic, namely his indebtedness to Dutch Republican theory and his use of the literary form of the fable. A brief exploration of the Dutch influence on Mandeville will serve to unite several of the themes and traditions discussed in this chapter and will provide further insight into the intellectual toolkit that Mandeville used in his critique of the optimistic, reforming English moral philosophy of Shaftesbury and Steele.

As we have seen, Mandeville was born and raised in the Dutch Republic, and was educated at the University of Leiden which was located in the home town of the radical republican theorists Johan and Pieter de la Court. The character of the de la Courts' republicanism is complicated but a central theme in their thought is the role of self-

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 209.

interest and the passions in the construction of a prosperous republic. The role of the passions and self-interest in Dutch republicanism has been interpreted by historians as deriving from Cartesian-Epicurean Spinozism or, alternately, from Augustinian Stoicism mixed with Epicurus.<sup>77</sup> Regardless, the significant and central role of the passions in Mandeville's work indicates that he absorbed a great deal from his youth in the Dutch Republic, and that he continued to engage with, and respond to, trends in Dutch republican thought throughout his career. What exactly Mandeville hoped to attain from his use of Dutch republican ideas is not clear. Hundert argues that Mandeville's intent was to "render incoherent" the ideological assumptions of the de la Courts – particularly the notion of the "beneficent control of the passions for the common good" – and that he sought to "demolish" their notion that a republic was the only system of government capable of directing the passions to their proper end.<sup>78</sup> Despite positing Mandeville as a critic of the de la Courts' brand of republicanism, Hundert reserves judgement on Mandeville's specific political inclinations. He addresses Mandeville's role as a Whig propagandist but does not pursue the character of his Whig ideology beyond noting the religious scepticism of the *Free Thoughts*.<sup>79</sup> Harold Cook is ambiguous on the subject of Mandeville's political inclinations, preferring to trace the influence of the Dutch tradition through Mandeville's family connections to the republican States party. However, Cook emphasizes the role of the clever politician in directing the passions, a role that he attributes to republican ideology, its attendant Epicureanism and Mandeville's supposed

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<sup>77</sup> See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 258-64, and Hans W. Blom, "The Epicurean Motif in Dutch Notions of Sociability in the Seventeenth Century," *SVEC* 12 (2009): 46-51.

<sup>78</sup> HEF, 28-9.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

education at the hands of Pierre Bayle.<sup>80</sup> Israel, in contrast, cites Mandeville's commitment to "greater equality" as evidence of his "republican preference".<sup>81</sup> Israel bases his assertion on the differences between France, England and Holland outlined in the *The Virgin Unmask'd: Or, female dialogues betwixt an elderly maiden lady, and her niece ...* (1709), as well as some notions apparently drawn from Remark P of the first edition of the *Fable*.

Israel's reading of Mandeville is strange. The remarks he cites from *Virgin Unmask'd* do not advocate republicanism, though Mandeville does contrast republicanism favourably to French absolutism. Mandeville states that "France is the reverse of Holland, and the People of the lowest Rank, are as fawning Slaves of the first, as they are unmannerly Brutes of the latter".<sup>82</sup> This is followed by the assertion that if the wealth of a group of nations is counted as equal, then the poor will be most wealthy in a commonwealth but still better off in a limited monarchy than in an absolute one.<sup>83</sup> While this would suggest that Israel is correct in his reading, Mandeville's utilitarian understanding of the role of the poor in the national economy does not support this understanding. This subject will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter, but it should be noted that in Mandeville's *Vindication of the Book* (1723) he asserts as a central part of his thesis that "all hard and dirty Work ought in a well-govern'd Nation to be the Lot and Portion of the Poor, and that to divert their Children from useful Labour ... is a wrong Method to qualify them for it".<sup>84</sup> It therefore seems inappropriate to read

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<sup>80</sup> Harold J. Cook, "Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of 'The Clever Politician'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 1 (1999): 113-6, 122.

<sup>81</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 624.

<sup>82</sup> MVU, 164.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>84</sup> FBK I, 409.

Mandeville's political outlook as tending towards a radical form of republicanism as Israel suggests. This point does not negate the intellectual connection that Israel demonstrates between Mandeville and the ideas of the de la Courts and Spinoza. Instead, it indicates that Mandeville was interested in Dutch republican ideas because of their potential value for criticizing the political and moral theories of his English contemporaries. Dutch republicanism was a useful resource but it was not a political philosophy to which Mandeville subscribed.

Mandeville's Dutch education is likely the source of his appreciation for French erudite libertinism, Epicureanism and Cartesianism. Rudolf Dekker's work has shown that Mandeville's family was intimately connected with the anti-Orangist States Party in Rotterdam and that they may have been directly involved in the Costerman Riot of 1690.<sup>85</sup> The events described by Dekker suggest that Mandeville was sympathetic to republicanism from a young age. Similarly, Mandeville's connection with the Whigs in England is intriguing because of the tradition of republicanism within that party. However, Mandeville's interaction with the Whigs came after the Revolutionary settlement and by the time of his writing, the Court Whig faction with which Mandeville was affiliated was closely tied to the interests of the Crown. Indeed, as we have seen, Mandeville's earliest work in English is a defence of the reign of William III – the Orangist Stadholder of Holland as well as the king of England – entitled *The Pamphleteers: A Satyr*. Mandeville addresses the issue of the ideal form of government twice in the *Fable's* first volume. In the opening of the *Grumbling Hive* he speaks of the bees as “not Slaves to Tyranny, Nor rul'd by wild *Democracy*; But Kings, that could not

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<sup>85</sup> Rudolf Dekker, “‘Private Vices, Public Virtues’ Revisited: The Dutch Background of Bernard Mandeville,” *History of European Ideas* 14, no. 4 (1992): 481-98.

wrong, because Their Power was circumscrib'd by Laws".<sup>86</sup> Later, in the *Nature of Society* he argues that "Monarchy without doubt was the first" form of government while "Aristocracy and Democracy were two different Methods of mending the Inconveniencies of the first, and a mixture of these three an Improvement on all the rest".<sup>87</sup> While this shows that Mandeville was more inclined to support a constitutional monarchy than a radical republican model, it is not certain that Mandeville held this view with absolute sincerity. Rather, it seems that Mandeville – influenced by his inclination towards sceptical relativism – was interested in government insofar as it effectively harnessed the power of the state in the development and aggrandizement of the nation's wealth. Mandeville's political ideas were influenced by his intellectual connections to the Dutch republic and the States Party. However, as we have shown, Israel is mistaken in interpreting Dutch republican influence on Mandeville as evidence that Mandeville was himself committed to a radical republican ideology.

What Mandeville adopted from both the Dutch republicans and the French Epicureans was the literary form of the fable. In a recent article, Arthur Weststeijn has detailed how the de la Courts used the fabulist literary tradition as a means of presenting their political plea for "frankness" in a form that was ambiguous because its meanings were open to a variety of interpretations. For Weststeijn, the "opaqueness" of the fabulist tradition gave it the power to rock traditional authority. Fables thus served the political ambitions of men like Traiano Boccalini (1556-1596) and the anti-Orangist ideology of writers such as Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) and the radicalism of the de la Courts, for whom the "openness to different readings" inherent in the fable form "offered a

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<sup>86</sup> FBK I, 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

façade behind which the author could escape from the censorship and loathing of his or her inconvenient truths”.<sup>88</sup> We have already seen this notion of the value of dissimulation in our discussion of Bayle’s influence on Mandeville.

Also crucial to our discussion of Mandeville is Weststeijn’s identification of two traditions of fables adopted by the de la Courts. One tradition, the early seventeenth-century political fable developed by Boccacini, eschewed the Aesopian use of animals, opting instead for significant figures from the recent Italian past placed within various situations on the fictitious Mount Parnassus. The other, the classical Aesopian tradition, was revived in Holland by van den Vondel and in France by La Fontaine.<sup>89</sup> The dual influence of these traditions is apparent in Mandeville’s work, although it must be noted that the French influence is more explicitly evident than the Dutch, as is often the case in Mandeville’s writing. Two of Mandeville’s early works engage with the intersecting traditions identified by Weststeijn. In 1704 Mandeville released a revised, retitled and expanded second edition of *Aesop Dress’d* – his translation of the fables of La Fontaine – as well as *Typhon*, Mandeville’s imitation of Scarron. Both of these early works show Mandeville engaged in the satirical style that made the *Fable* infamous. The de la Courts and Mandeville both translate and present a classic fable of foolish frogs who, dissatisfied with their king (a log) receive a stork for a king who subsequently eats the frogs. However, Mandeville and the de la Courts draw distinctly different morals from the same story. The de la Courts use the fable to show the folly of breaking with the republican tradition by giving power to a warrior capable not only of defeating foes but also of tyrannizing his subjects. As Weststeijn notes, the fable is deliberately though never

<sup>88</sup> Arthur Weststeijn, “The Power of ‘Pliant Stuff’: Fables and Frankness in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republicanism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (2011): 20-1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-8.

explicitly directed at William III.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Mandeville is intent on criticizing English Tories and Jacobites, perhaps also poking a slight jab at some of his Whig fellow travellers. He concludes: “Thank God, this Fable is not meant to Englishmen; they are content, And hate to change their Government”.<sup>91</sup> The affirmation of the status quo in Mandeville’s presentation of the fable of the frogs provides further evidence that Mandeville’s ideological commitment was not to republicanism but to political stability.

The use of the form of the fable was an important facet of Mandeville’s literary career. The Aesopian fable of the *Grumbling Hive* forms the foundation of the larger *Fable* and, even though Mandeville’s later and more significant work abandoned the lyric form in favour of sustained prose and dialogue, fables appear in Mandeville’s work at important junctures. Significantly, in the first volume of the *Fable* we find in Remark T the fable of the small beer and in Remark P there appears the Aesopian dialogue between two characters, the Roman merchant and the lion mentioned above. A brief exploration of the fable of the small beer reveals the role of dissimulation in Mandeville’s literary style. The fable follows in the tradition of Boccacini and is part of Mandeville’s discussion of luxury. The story is set in a “whimsical Country”, that, though externally devout, is subject to the moral evil of thirst. The people of this country accept that “every one was born Thirsty more or less” and thus allow for the moderate consumption of small beer.<sup>92</sup> The paradox arises from the admission that everyone has thirst, yet “he that took the least Drop of it to quench his Thirst, committed a heinous Crime, while others drank large Quantities without any Guilt, so they did it indifferently, and for no other Reason than to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 15-6.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *Aesop Dress’d: or, A Collection of Fables Writ in Familiar Verse* (London, 1704), 78.

<sup>92</sup> FBK I, 235.

mend their Complexion”.<sup>93</sup> Mandeville condemns those who would promote a prosperous and wealthy nation but who nevertheless denounce those who profit and become rich from that prosperity. However, the fabulist element of the tale allows for the fable to double as a criticism of religion and the hypocrisy apparent between displays of outward piety and actual practice.

Mandeville’s use of the fable as a literary form is a product of his immersion in both Dutch and French literary cultures. However, his use of both the Aesopian and Boccacian style of fable suggests that Mandeville was willing and able to follow the lead of the republican ideologues of his native country. That said, he rarely adopted anyone’s ideas or approaches wholesale. While he adopted the literary style and some of the doctrines of his republican countrymen, he resisted completely appropriating their program. This may be because Mandeville was opposed to the ultimate goals of men like the de la Courts; indeed, he may have seen their ideas as a failure in the wake of the catastrophe visited upon the Dutch in 1672. Alternately, he simply may have recognized that the cultural milieu of his adopted England was not consistent with the doctrines of the Dutch republicans and, favouring the sceptical habit of abiding by the customs of the country where he lived, he may have tailored his system for his immediate reading audience.

## V

By way of conclusion we may now summarize Mandeville’s conception of the role of moral virtue in human society. First, the arguments drawn from devout sources such as Pierre Nicole can be seen as satirical tools employed against the morally optimistic works of deists such as Shaftesbury or Christian moralists such as Steele. Secondly, in

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

constructing a positive system of social morality Mandeville builds on the work of Pierre Bayle, the Epicureanism and Pyrrhonism of Bayle's erudite libertine predecessors, and seventeenth-century Dutch republicanism. Mandeville's interpretations of his influences provide evidence that he was insincere in his proclamations that knowledge of the "true Deity" leads to an understanding of true virtue.<sup>94</sup> Instead, we find evidence that morality is not a product of God's Providence but is a product of the accumulated customs of each individual country or society. Virtue is, therefore, culturally contingent and its role is that of regulating the passions in order to preserve social stability. The presence of moral relativism and satirical piety in Mandeville's work is suggestive of heterodoxy, but this does not constitute sufficient evidence to reach a conclusion about Mandeville's unbelief. We must therefore explore Mandeville's system in comparison with the arguments of his contemporary critics in order to better understand where and how Mandeville deviates from the orthodoxy of his peers.

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<sup>94</sup> FBK I, 50.

### Chapter 3: Charity Schools and Mandeville's Critics

The expanded second edition of the *Fable* that appeared in 1723 was almost immediately attacked by critics as a dangerous and irreligious work. In addition to censuring the book itself, many critics impugned the author as a libertine, a freethinker and an immoralist. In several instances Mandeville was accused of atheism. George Bluet (*fl. c.* 1725) saw Mandeville's opinions as having had "their rise with Atheism itself".<sup>1</sup> Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) criticized Mandeville in his *Alciphron* (1732). In the second dialogue of that work, Mandeville's argument is presented by the atheist and libertine character, Lysicles, which clearly demonstrates Berkeley's assessment of the author of the *Fable*. In addition, both Berkeley and the Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson (1669-1748), sought to have the *Fable* formally suppressed for its supposed atheism.<sup>2</sup> In 1724, William Law (1686-1761) published *Remarks upon a Late Book Entituled the Fable of the Bees* in which he begged Mandeville not to take offence if he sometimes spoke "as if I was speaking to a Christian".<sup>3</sup> In the same year, Mandeville was accused of undermining both Christianity and natural religion in John Dennis' (1657-1734) *Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs: or, Remarks on a Book intituled the Fable of the Bees*.<sup>4</sup> One of the more clever accusations of atheism directed against Mandeville

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<sup>1</sup> George Bluet, "An Enquiry whether A general Practice of Virtue tends to the Wealth or Poverty, Benefit or Disadvantage of a *People*," in *Private Vices, Publick Benefits? The Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville*, ed. J. Martin Stafford (Solihull, UK: Ismeron, 1997), 297.

<sup>2</sup> J. Martin Stafford, "Introduction to *Alciphron*," in Stafford. *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 529-31 and, HEF, 2, 132.

<sup>3</sup> William Law, "Remarks upon a Late Book Entituled the *Fable of the Bees* (1724)," in Stafford. *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> John Dennis, "Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs: or, Remarks on a Book intituled, the *Fable of the Bees* (1724)," in Stafford. *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 147.

appears in the prefatory introduction to Alexander Innes' (*fl. c. 1728*) *Arete-logia*.<sup>5</sup>

Innes's preface suggests that Mandeville suffers from a "delerious *Infidelity*" and advocates adopting a supposed Muslim tradition that required an aspiring Jew converting to the faith to first become Christian: "I believe there will be no Impropry in taking the like Method with you, in order to bring you over to a Belief of the Christian Revelation: We must first of all perswade you to be a good *Moral Heathen*".<sup>6</sup>

The catalyst for the wave of criticism directed against Mandeville appears to have been his critique of the charity-school system, *An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools*, added to the 1723 edition of the *Fable*. In Mandeville's *Vindication of the Book* he asserts that his discussion of charity schools and "publick stews" was the source of his critics' ire: "the first Impression of the Fable of the Bees, which came out in 1714, was never carpt at, or publickly taken notice of; and all the Reason I can think on why this second edition should be so unmercifully treated, tho' it has many Precautions which the former wanted, is an Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools, which is added to what was printed before".<sup>7</sup>

## I

Mandeville develops three arguments against charity schools. First, he presents charity as a prime example of the dominance of the passions over authentic virtue. Two passions in particular are singled out: pity and pride. Pity, he argues, is a passion that

<sup>5</sup> This work is actually Archibald Campbell's (1691-1756) *An Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*, which Innes, a preacher-assistant at St. Margaret's, published under his own name while holding the manuscript for Campbell. The "Prefatory Introduction" does not appear in the copy of Campbell's text in my possession so I have cited the work under Innes' name and title. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Campbell, Archibald," accessed December 12, 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/4476>.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Innes, *Arete-Logia or, An Enquiry in the Original of Moral Virtue* (Westminster, 1728), xxvii, i-ii.

<sup>7</sup> FBK I, 409.

“comes in either at the Eye or Ear, or both” and does not depend on the morality of the individual but affects “not only a Man of humanity, of good Morals and Commiseration, but likewise an Highwayman, an House-Breaker, or a Murderer”.<sup>8</sup> Mandeville does not perceive pity as a negative quality. It is an unconscious reaction to suffering, and cannot be counted as a virtue even when it simulates an act comparable to one that is charitable. Pity is introduced as a significant passion in the *Enquiry* and is characterized as “the most gentle and the least mischievous of all our Passions”.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, pity is “as much a Frailty of our Nature, as Anger, Pride, or Fear”.<sup>10</sup> In what may be a response to Pierre Nicole’s conception of self-love imitating charity (see above, pp. 28-9), Mandeville claims that pity is “of all our Weaknesses ... the most amiable, and bears the greatest Resemblance to Virtue”.<sup>11</sup> This remark is given a satirical edge when Mandeville emphasizes that pity is a passion and a weakness:

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. It has help’d to destroy the Honour of Virgins, and corrupted the Integrity of Judges; and whoever acts from it as a Principle, what good soever he may bring to the Society, has nothing to boast of but that he has indulged a Passion that has happened to be beneficial to the Publick. There is no Merit in saving an innocent Babe ready to drop into the Fire: The Action is neither good nor bad, and what Benefit soever the Infant received, we only obliged our selves; for to have seen it fall, and not strove to hinder it, would have caused a Pain, which Self-preservation compell’d us to prevent: Nor has a rich Prodigal, that happens to be of a commiserating Temper, and love to gratify his Passions, greater Virtue to boast of when he relieves an Object of Compassion with what to himself is a Trifle.<sup>12</sup>

Especially notable in Mandeville’s discussion of pity is the centrality of the role of social utility in determining the value of an action derived from a passion. This is evident in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Mandeville's characterization of judicial integrity but it also figures in his reference to the honour of virgins. As we have seen, Mandeville equates honour with the "good opinion of others".<sup>13</sup> The protection of honour is, therefore, simply the maintenance of our standing within society.

Pity is not the only passion that allows an individual to feign charity. Mandeville notes that a beggar "trusts not to one Passion only", for "he flatters your Pride with Titles and Names of Honour and Distinction".<sup>14</sup> In addition, the beggar appeals to avarice with language that diminishes the value of the gift and promises extravagant reciprocation.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, pride and the desire for remembrance are at the root of most large-scale charitable acts. According to Kaye, Mandeville's lengthy critique of the posthumous endowment of a new hospital in the *Essay on Charity* was directed at Dr. John Radcliffe (1650-1714). Radcliffe's gift of eighty-thousand pounds to the University of Oxford led to the construction of several buildings, including an infirmary.<sup>16</sup> As part of Mandeville's satirical exposé of the presence of pride in apparently charitable acts, he characterizes Radcliffe's endowment as theft from properly deserving heirs.<sup>17</sup> As is Mandeville's habit, he employs a moral rigorism that exposes most actions as having originated in base motivations and uncontrolled passions. Pride fascinates Mandeville and plays a significant role in his critique of charity. Furthermore, the critique of pride is similar to that of pity. Mandeville's analysis of how actions instigated by an individual's pride may

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 262n.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 261, 266.

resemble charity shows that the value of giving is located in its social utility rather than its contribution to our spiritual redemption.

Donna Andrew notes that Mandeville agreed with his contemporaries in condemning posthumous giving.<sup>18</sup> However, Mandeville approached this position differently than his peers. Rather than being concerned with the moral value of deathbed giving, Mandeville asserted that the money given away by the dying would serve the nation better if it were distributed to the heirs of the deceased. It is Mandeville's second argument against the charity-schools that develops this point fully, treating learning as a poor tool for encouraging morality: "As to Religion, the most knowing and polite Part of a Nation have every where the least of it".<sup>19</sup> In Remark C, Mandeville asserts that good manners and social refinement are not a product of religion but rather of the indulgence of the passions.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, ignorance is more likely than education to preserve piety among the poor. In a summary of his understanding of the economy Mandeville writes: "I have named Ignorance as a necessary Ingredient in the Mixture of Society", and in an analogy comparing the body politic to a bowl of punch (Remark K), Mandeville declares that "the Water I would call the Ignorance, Folly and Credulity of the floating insipid multitude".<sup>21</sup> He argues that education is a responsibility of those parents capable of tending to their duty and that the children of parents incapable of fulfilling their duty are not deserving of help. Thus, socially subsidized education for the children of the destitute "looks like a Reward for being Vicious and Unactive, a Benefit commonly bestow'd on

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<sup>18</sup> Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> FBK I, 269.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 249, 105.

Parents, who deserve to be punished for shamefully neglecting their Families”.<sup>22</sup> We find here an early and important exploration of self-sufficiency as a moral issue.<sup>23</sup>

In Mandeville’s formulation, the prosperity of the nation relies on the existence of the labouring poor, who will be happier and more pliant if they are ignorant of the possibilities that education or, more precisely, literacy, provide. In the *Vindication*, Mandeville cites this as his primary thesis: “I confess that it is my Sentiment, that all hard and dirty Work ought in a well-govern’d Nation to be the Lot and Portion of the Poor, and that to divert their Children from useful Labour ... is a wrong Method to qualify them for it”.<sup>24</sup> In order to support the English state, its economy and the social order, Mandeville claims that education should be limited to those citizens whose parents have the wherewithal to provide it while the remainder – the majority – should remain ignorant and labour for the benefit of the minority.<sup>25</sup> This sentiment is a reprise of ideas from the *Fable*. Remark Q emphasizes the connection between necessity and productivity. Humanity is naturally slothful and when necessity is absent, so is labour. For example, if “an Artificer” is willing to delay working because he has “two Shillings left of his last Week’s Pay; why should we imagine he would go to [work] at all, if he had fifteen or twenty Pounds in his Pocket?”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in Remark K Mandeville argues that “Prodigality has a thousand Inventions to keep People from sitting still, that Frugality would never think of”.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in order to maintain the productivity of the nation, the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>23</sup> See Jeremy Schmidt, “Charity and the Government of the Poor in the English Charity-Schools Movement, circa 1700-1730,” *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 775-6.

<sup>24</sup> FBK I, 409.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 105.

poor “ought to be kept from starving” but “they should receive nothing worth saving”.<sup>28</sup>

Were someone to rise from this impoverished state through their own labour, they should not be impeded. However, though saving and frugality is “the wisest course for every Person in the Society ... it is the Interest of all rich Nations, that the greatest part of the Poor should almost never be idle, and yet continually spend what they get”.<sup>29</sup> Thus we find in Mandeville a philosopher who employs both Christian and heterodox tools to criticize and satirize the moral preoccupations of a self-declared religious nation in pursuit of the highly secular goal of the aggrandizement of a self-interested commercial society.

## II

Mandeville’s conception of charity schools and of social utility provides an interesting perspective on his radical perception of how commercial society was to be best managed. Jeremy Schmidt, drawing on the work of Donna Andrew, points to the charity school movement as a means by which to police the poor.<sup>30</sup> Connecting the zeal for charity schools to an older tradition of Christian charity first described by John Bossy, Schmidt argues that the charity school movement of the early eighteenth century – and the homiletic literature surrounding fund-raising appeals for the schools – reflects a deep seated conception of a “*societas christiana*”.<sup>31</sup> The sermons of the promoters of charity schools articulated a view of society that saw “God as absolute proprietor and governor” and “the wealthy [as] not just wealthy; they are entrusted with an *office* under the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 193-4.

<sup>30</sup> Jeremy Schmidt, “Charity and the Government,” 775-6. Bossy’s exploration of the “social miracle” of medieval Christianity and its transformation from the Reformation onwards appears in John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 57-75, 140-52.

<sup>31</sup> Schmidt, “Charity and the Government of the Poor,” 783.

governing authority of God to obey his will for the provision of others”.<sup>32</sup> Within this worldview the concept of charity changed in the eighteenth century from a virtuous act predicated on the legitimate claims of the poor, to a concern for the commercial interests of the state and the maintenance of a working class.<sup>33</sup>

Andrew notes that Mandeville was not the first to address the connection between prosperity and charity. He was preceded by a group identified as the “arithmeticians” who conceived of a mass of labouring poor, kept, through labour, in a state of beneficial, productive and providential poverty rather than the unproductive poverty of the non-labouring poor.<sup>34</sup> Mandeville’s significance, according to Andrew, is that he “compelled his opponents to provide a systematic and popularly accessible account of how Christian morality could be united with the practice of a worldly pursuit of wealth and power”.<sup>35</sup> In the context of the worldview that fostered the charity school movement, Mandeville made a radical break from the Christian mindset of his English contemporaries in his conception of the social control of the working poor. Mandeville balanced the doctrines of traditional Christian charity (as described by Bossy) with the demands of a fully secular and capitalistic conception of charity.

Hundert argues that the Middlesex Grand Jury’s presentment of the *Fable* reflected the language of the Old Whigs, whose ideology was defined by civic virtue and the predominance of landed property over monied interests.<sup>36</sup> However, in attempting to understand Mandeville in the context of unbelief, it is useful to consider Mandeville’s

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 766.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 776.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>36</sup> HEF, 9.

conception of charity and his conflict with his critics. Mandeville's critics represent a religious worldview seeking to accommodate a newly commercial society. Mandeville, on the other hand, represents the emerging secular worldview that would, in the long term, come to adopt commercial interests as ends in themselves. Religion – consciously or not – functions in this secular worldview simply as a means of social control. Mandeville's radicalism appears to rest on his thorough adoption of the secular attitude in advance of his fellow countrymen.

The controversial character of the *Fable* was firmly established in the minds of Mandeville's contemporaries and, for many of them, the work displayed a shocking degree of irreligion. The goal of the remainder of this chapter is to investigate the work of Mandeville's critics and to evaluate what their critical responses offer to an analysis of unbelief in his work. My goal is not to discuss how Mandeville's critics misread him or misunderstood his satire, but rather to identify what it is about the *Fable* that so many perceived as problematic and to investigate whether those concerns provide evidence for a reading of Mandeville's work as atheistic.

### III

The Middlesex Grand Jury's presentment against Mandeville states that the *Fable* establishes "a General Libertinism" and "the *Universities* are decried, and all *Instructions of Youth* in the Principles of the Christian Religion are exploded with the greatest Malice and Falsity".<sup>37</sup> This, combined with the *Fable*'s propensity to "run down Religion and Virtue" as "detrimental" to both state and society in favour of "all kinds of Vices, as being necessary to *Publick Welfare*" prompted the Grand Jury to declare that Mandeville's principles lead inexorably to the "Subversion of all Religion and Civil

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<sup>37</sup> FBK I, 385.

Government”.<sup>38</sup> Defending the value of the charity schools, the author of the *Abusive Letter* concludes that Mandeville’s attack on the schools cannot rest on an honest critique of either the work or the merits of the schools. Rather “the *True Cause* of all their Enmity to the poor Charity-Schools; ’tis levell’d against *Religion* ... which *this Confederacy* is resolved to destroy”.<sup>39</sup> These two early attacks on the *Fable* precipitated Mandeville’s *Vindication of the Book*. The *Vindication* was first published in the *London Post* in August 1723 and was appended to all editions of the *Fable* from 1724 on.<sup>40</sup> In the preface to the post-1723 editions of the *Fable*, Mandeville writes that the author of the *Abusive Letter* “shews a fine Talent for Invectives, and great Sagacity in discovering Atheism, where others can find none”.<sup>41</sup> After these early criticisms, other authors took up the defence of the charity school movement against Mandeville. Many of these writers defended their positions in explicitly Christian terms. The general theme of their criticism is that charity schools are consistent with the duties of a Christian and, contrary to Mandeville, not detrimental to the productivity of the nation. The pupils in the charity schools are assumed to come from a state of unproductive destitution and are trained to enter into productive labour following their education.

In John Dennis’ formulation, the charity schools succeed primarily by instilling the “Principles and Doctrines of the Christian Religion”, a faith which “teaches a profound Humility”, emphasizing that servants “be Obediant and Humble”.<sup>42</sup> Samuel Chandler’s (1693-1766) critique of Mandeville also stresses the value of the charity schools in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>40</sup> J. Martin Stafford, “Editor’s Introduction” in Stafford. *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> FBK I, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis, “Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs,” 155.

instilling humility and thankfulness in the children of the poor.<sup>43</sup> For Bluet, the value of the charity schools is obvious, and Mandeville's criticism of the schools is misplaced. Moreover, Bluet sees Mandeville's opposition to the charity schools as evidence that what he truly regrets is the absence of slaves, a working class kept in a low station that provides cheap labour for the English state.<sup>44</sup> Contesting Mandeville's argument that charity schools produce inflated labour costs due to the raised expectations of the educated poor, Bluet argues that it is in fact the English propensity to luxury that contributes to the higher costs of both living and manufacture. He asserts that Mandeville avoids this conclusion in order to attribute the higher costs to pride.<sup>45</sup> Bluet concludes that charity schools are the best institutions for the promotion of liberty; those who oppose the schools should consider their motivations and notice that Mandeville, the chief critic of the schools, has the "*professed Design ... to shew the Usefulness of VICE and ROGUERY*".<sup>46</sup> Bluet's position directly contradicts Mandeville's proposition that piety is better preserved by ignorance than knowledge, while humility is best maintained through services rendered "from Inferiors to Superiors", superiors "not only in Riches and Quality, but likewise in Knowledge and Understanding".<sup>47</sup>

What Mandeville's critics found so problematic about the *Fable* was Mandeville's perception of morality and its implications for religion. Denying the connection between private morality and public success, and championing a relativistic conception of social values, Mandeville posed a direct challenge to common assumptions about the role of

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Chandler, *Sermon Preach'd for the Benefit of the Charity-School in Gravel-Lane, Southwark, Jan. 1728* (London, 1728), 28-31.

<sup>44</sup> Bluet, "An Enquiry," 357-63.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>47</sup> FBK I, 289.

religion in society. William Law, aghast at Mandeville's suggestion that humanity is indistinguishable from animals by virtue of the predominance of the passions, identified Mandeville's thesis as an affront to the dignity of man, which Law believed was affirmed by the scriptural account of God's creation of man in His own image.<sup>48</sup> For Law, the origin of moral virtue is to be found in the origin of reason, truth and goodness, all of which "are in their Natures as Eternal as God".<sup>49</sup> Law argues that the "Will of God ... makes moral Virtue our Law, and obliges us to act reasonably".<sup>50</sup> Thus, in contrast to the moral relativism proposed by Mandeville, Law presents a notion of morality based on an eternal and externally guaranteed law of moral virtue. Law was not alone in adopting this position in response to Mandeville. Innes' preface to *Arete-logia* focuses on the eternal nature of virtue, claiming that "we may as reasonably imagine; that the *three Angles* of a *Triangle* should be equal to two right *Right Angles* in one *Age*, and unequal in *another*, as that *Moral Virtue* should not always be the same".<sup>51</sup>

Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752), who was one of the most intellectually significant of Mandeville's contemporary adversaries, sought (like Mandeville) to explicate human nature based on observation. Butler, however, staunchly opposed the thesis of the predominance of the passions, arguing instead that such a conceptualization reflected the character of beasts rather than humans.<sup>52</sup> In the sermon "Upon Human Nature", the innate quality of moral virtue is emphasized through an argument based on matters of fact derived from observed behaviour. Mandeville insisted that his doctrines were formed by

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<sup>48</sup> Law, "Remarks on the Fable of the Bees," 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>51</sup> Innes, *Arete-Logia*, xxx.

<sup>52</sup> HEF, 126-7.

observing humanity as it really was; Butler's assertions were a means of contesting Mandeville on his own rhetorical ground.<sup>53</sup> Butler, proclaiming humanity's natural sociability, argues that benevolence is a reflection in society of human self-love. Benevolence is, therefore, innate: "if there be in Mankind any Disposition to Friendship; if there be any such thing as Compassion ... this is itself Benevolence ... be it ever so short, be it in ever so low a Degree ... it proves the Assertion, and points out what we were designed for, as really as though it were in a higher Degree and more extensive".<sup>54</sup> As a consequence of humanity's natural sociability, Butler understands virtue as emerging from a rationally calculated sense of self-love and self-interest. Essentially, if we understood self-love properly we would see that virtue is our self-interest. This premise contradicts Mandeville's insistence that self-denial rather than the indulgence of the passions is the metric for authentic virtue (see above, pp. 21-2).<sup>55</sup>

As we have seen, Mandeville drew from Pierre Nicole the idea that self-love can imitate charity. Mandeville elaborated on this point, asserting that the skilful dissimulation of our desires allows us to gratify our passions; this balance is the mechanism of human sociability. However, this sociability is not virtuous as it is predicated on the indulgence of our self-interest rather than upon self-denial. By contrast, Butler argues that a full understanding of our self-love would lead us to comprehend not only the inherent value of virtue itself but also the value of moderation in the pursuit of our pleasures. Analyzing self-love, Butler maintains that indulgence does not lead to happiness. He writes:

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (London, 1726), 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 23 and HEF, 131.

Take a survey of Mankind: The World in general, the Good and Bad, almost without Exception, equally are agreed, that Religion being out of the Case, the Happiness of the present Life consists in a Manner wholly in Riches, Honours, sensual Gratifications; insomuch that one scarce hears a Reflection made upon Prudence, Life, Conduct, but upon this Supposition. Yet on the contrary, that Persons in the greatest Affluence of Fortune, are no happier than such as have only a Competency; that the Cares and Disappointments of Ambition for the most Part far exceed the Satisfaction of it; as also the miserable Intervals of Intemperance and Excess, and the many untimely Deaths occasioned by a dissolute Course of Life: These things are all seen, acknowledged, by every one acknowledged; but are thought no Objection against, though they expressly contradict, this universal Principle, that the Happiness of the Present Life consists in the one or other of them.<sup>56</sup>

Consequently, Butler establishes a notion of self-love guided by reason and revelation. In a later sermon discussing the Christian and natural obligation to forgive our enemies, Butler notes the positive roles of passions such as fear and resentment and places them within the context of addressing wrongs. Regarding the distinction between the legitimate airing of grievances and the immoral gratification of a passion, Butler maintains that we must not be blinded by that “false self-love, which is the Weakness of our Nature”.<sup>57</sup> Butler’s conception of self-love does not have a direct equivalent in Mandeville. In the latter’s formulation there is one distinction: between those who can conceal their self-love effectively and those who cannot. Butler’s view of morality is more nuanced than the views articulated by many of Mandeville’s critics but the implications are largely the same. There is a rational, providential basis for morality. The language of self-love itself is directed towards the notion that a rational understanding of our God-given self-interest must naturally lead us to virtue.

Bluet asserts that Mandeville’s system owes its chief debt to ancient atheism and the scepticism of figures such as Pyrrho of Elis, Aristippus, Theodorus and Sextus Empiricus. He also makes a perceptive allusion to Mandeville’s debt to French authors,

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<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 21-2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

explicitly noting Montaigne and Bayle's influence on the *Fable* while citing "several *French Writers*" as plausible transmitters of the dangerous ideas of antiquity.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear who Bluet refers to, but it may be the erudite libertines whose influence we have already explored. Regardless, what makes the *Fable* especially problematic in Bluet's estimation is that, beyond adopting the condemned ideas of his classical and French sources, Mandeville cloaks his immorality by inserting "so many Cautions and Limitations ... as the Reader will certainly believe to be as inconsistent with his real Opinions, as these Opinions are with common Sense or Honesty".<sup>59</sup> Mandeville's inconsistencies are, therefore, little more than preemptive countermeasures to ensure that "whenever he should be charged with the Wickedness of his Opinions, though it would be difficult to defend *them*, it might be easy however to quote other Expressions that are very harmless".<sup>60</sup>

#### IV

Mandeville's critics recognized the *Fable* as a work that subverted their understanding of religion and its societal role. The common perception of the *Fable* as a threat to the religious foundation of society provides compelling ground for reading the *Fable* as a work representing what may be characterized as a "practical atheism". The contemporary conception of Mandeville as an atheist rested on an understanding that his system represented an abandonment of Christian moral principles. Ostensibly Mandeville had, therefore, also abandoned belief in God and the economy of divine reward and punishment. Within the rhetoric of the period, this would place Mandeville within the ranks of the practical atheists, who were seen more as moral reprobates than as reasoned

<sup>58</sup> Bluet, "An Enquiry," 301.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 303.

disbelievers.<sup>61</sup> Mandeville's conception of sociability and social control, as articulated in his critique of the charity school movement, was antithetical to the defence of Christian duty and traditional notions of charity championed by thinkers who were only just beginning to contend with the social concerns of a commercial economy. The defence of the charity schools is informed by an ideology supporting innate and eternal notions of virtue, promoted by writers such as Butler, Law, Berkeley and Bluet. It is interesting that the conception of a fixed morality is also present in the deistic writings of Shaftesbury. When Mandeville's sceptical, relativistic understanding of morality is contrasted with those of his contemporaries, we begin to get a sense of the radical intellectual space Mandeville occupied. Bluet's accusation of obfuscation suggests that at least some of Mandeville's critics did not think that he was naively defending dangerous precepts based on faulty reasoning; rather, they recognized that he was engaged in a deliberate assault on both religion and morality.

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<sup>61</sup> See Michael Hunter, "The Problem of 'Atheism' in early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985): 135-57.

## Chapter 4: Mandeville on Atheism

Thus far our reading of Mandeville's unbelief has focused on the implications of his critical philosophy. This chapter concludes that discussion by presenting an exposition of Mandeville's depiction of the nature of atheism and the character of atheists. The aim is to illustrate the radical lengths to which Mandeville went to articulate his secular vision of society.

### I

In the *Free Thoughts*, religion is defined as “an acknowledgement of an immortal power, that, superior to all earthly dominion, invisibly governs the world”.<sup>1</sup> Of Christians, Mandeville writes: “whoever allows of the Old and New Testament, how differently soever from others he may construe some passages of either, so he but believes the whole to be the word of God, ought to be call'd a christian, even before he is baptized”.<sup>2</sup> Of atheism and deism he has this to say:

He who believes, in the common acceptation, that there is a God, and that the world is rul'd by providence, but has no faith in any thing reveal'd to us, is a deist; and he, who believes neither the one nor the other, is an atheist. Of these I don't believe there are many, and I would have no man so uncharitable as to think any man guilty of atheism, who does not openly

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<sup>1</sup> FT, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3. Mandeville's addition of “even before he is baptized” to his definition of Christianity is curious and is not explained. The best explanation for the addition is that Mandeville coupled his belief that there is a disjunction between stated beliefs and the actual motivations behind human behaviour (see above, pp. 28-9, 54-6) with his inclination for religious toleration. As Chapter II of the *Free Thoughts* shows, Mandeville sees outward signs of devotion as poor indicators of piety. Furthermore, in Chapter IV (“On Mysteries”), Mandeville argues against both states and individuals forcing dissenters to adhere to disputed doctrines. He does so on the grounds that Church doctrine was “drawn up by uninspired Men” and that individual doctrines may have been worded in specific ways to purposefully “puzzle an Adversary” as in the case offered by Mandeville of the Arian heresy (see FT, 52-3, 84). It therefore seems reasonable to read Mandeville as asserting that baptism, inasmuch as it is simply an external display of piety, is not a necessary marker for membership within the Christian community. However, Mandeville's explanation is ambiguous and does not indicate whether an individual is a Christian if they simply declare their piety or whether we must somehow access their true beliefs in order to apprehend if a person is rightfully to be called a Christian.

profess it. Were we to judge of a man's belief, by strictly examining into his actions, faith would be scarcer than can be easily imagin'd.<sup>3</sup>

Mandeville's conception of Christianity is a broad one while his definition of atheism is very strict. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is not controversial.

Mandeville shared a broad notion of toleration with writers like Spinoza and Bayle, though he seems to have gone further than the English theorist John Locke by extending toleration to the irreligious:

If we consider how easily it may be bore with, without any detriment to the publick tranquillity, and we compare the peaceful maxim laid down [in the preceding chapter] to the height of barbarity, by which only schism can be cured, persecution must appear to us as a remedy abundantly worse than the disease; and the more a man knows of the world, either from reading or experience, the more he shall be convinc'd, that not only reveal'd as well as natural religion, but likewise humanity, reason, the interest of mankind, their peace and felicity and almost every thing in nature pleads for toleration, except the national clergy in every country.<sup>4</sup>

As both a States Party partisan in his youth and a Whig propagandist in his English literary career, it is easy to understand how Mandeville might have developed a definition of religion that suited his understanding of toleration.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting the casual anti-clerical jab at the end of the above quotation. This is characteristic of Mandeville's work in general and, while it is central to his critique of religion, it is such a common sentiment from the period that it cannot be taken as a sure sign of unbelief.

A second explanation for the strictness of Mandeville's definition of atheism and his general definition of religion is that Mandeville may have sought to muddy the rhetorical waters in order to present a radical notion of both religion and morality that might still be

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

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent discussion of the development of arguments for toleration in both Britain and the Dutch Republic see John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and 'Early Enlightenment' Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

considered deserving of toleration. The particularly interesting piece of this puzzle is Mandeville's demand that only those who explicitly proclaim atheism be accused of it. This is a departure from the psychological analysis found in the *Fable* that it is possible to know internal motivations through reason and experience. However, the concept of the "moral atheist" is consistent with Mandeville's argument, drawn from Bayle, that beliefs and actions are inconsistent (see above, pp. 27). Mandeville is not, however, content to leave himself open to the accusation of atheism. He expands his definition of atheists to include the two standard early-modern categories:

... speculative atheists are those unhappy people, who, being too fond of knowledge or reasoning, are first deluded into scepticism, till, unable to extricate themselves from the mazes of philosophy, they are at last betray'd into a disbelief of every thing they cannot comprehend, and become the most convincing evidences of the shallowness of human understanding. The number of these has always been very small; and, as they are commonly studious, peaceable men, the hurt they do to the publick is inconsiderable. To make this not appear a paradox, we are but to reflect on what it is men are govern'd by in the conduct of their lives, and we shall find, that very few act from the principles they profess, whilst all the rest are sway'd by their passions and inclinations; and therefore it ought not to appear more strange to us, that an atheist should be a quiet moral man, than that a christian should lead a very wicked life.

Practical atheists are generally libertines, who first have been guilty of all manner of vice and profaneness, and afterwards, not daring to reflect on the enormity of their sins, or the punishment they deserve from the vengeance of heaven, lay hold on atheistical arguments, to skreen themselves from their own fears, and only deny God, because they wish there was none.<sup>6</sup>

The atheist, in this formulation, is no threat to society. The speculative atheist is quite evidently not threatening but even the practical atheist may be socially useful, given Mandeville's maxim of private vices and public benefits. Mandeville's defence of the possibility of the moral speculative atheist is drawn from Bayle's *Pensées diverses*:

But to assert something more solid, and which does not leave as mere conjecture what I have advanced concerning the morals of a society of atheists, I note that those few persons who have openly professed atheism among the ancients – a Diagoras, a Theodorus, an Euhemerus, and some others – did not live in a manner that led to cries against the libertinage of

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<sup>6</sup> FT, 4-5.

their morals. I do not see that they were accused of having been distinguished by the dissoluteness of their life as well as by the horrible deviations of their reason. I find, to the contrary, that their good life appeared so admirable to Clement of Alexandria that he believed himself obliged to dispute the validity of the charge of atheism brought against them.<sup>7</sup>

Mandeville's debt to Bayle for his characterization of the peaceable atheist is a telling example of the former's use of continental ideas in his English writings. As both Hunter and Berman have noted, the usual tactic in decrying atheism among English moralists was to deny the possibility of speculative atheism and to elide immorality with atheism in general.<sup>8</sup> Mandeville accepts the existence of speculative atheism and, furthermore, asserts that the speculative atheist is not immoral. But he does not call for universal toleration. Like other advocates for toleration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mandeville maintained that some groups should *not* be tolerated. In Mandeville's view, "it is on this head only that papists and *Non-Jurors* ought to be excluded; but this being the business of the state, the clergy has nothing to do with it".<sup>9</sup> Though he uses language that condemns atheism, the implication of Mandeville's argument is that atheists who do not harm society are deserving of toleration by the state.

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert Bartlett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 214.

<sup>8</sup> David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-43, and Michael Hunter, "The Problem of 'Atheism' in early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985): 144.

<sup>9</sup> FT, 269. Mandeville's argument that toleration is a matter of state is likely drawn from Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670). Spinoza argued that in modern societies – particularly Christian societies not bound by the laws of the Hebrews – ecclesiastical power necessarily rests with the sovereign from whom "the entire practice of religion and the sacred ministry ensued". See Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 249. By excluding Catholics from toleration, Mandeville's also echoes John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. For Locke, Catholics are excluded because they "deliver themselves up to the Protection and service of another Prince". See John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 51.

## II

Atheism and atheists appear at several points in the second volume of the *Fable* but receive their fullest treatment in the sixth and final dialogue. It is a complicated exchange and we must first decide which of the characters speaks for Mandeville. In the preface, Mandeville insists that Cleomenes is his representative and that Horatio, as the antagonist, should not be taken as the author's mouthpiece. Mandeville asserts that he should not be blamed for anything said by Horatio and can only be faulted where Cleomenes' responses are insufficient.<sup>10</sup> On the following page, Mandeville remarks that similar precautions taken in the first volume of the *Fable* were unsuccessful, but that the presence of this explicit apology in the second volume should put readers on their guard. In the sixth dialogue, Horatio is exasperated by Cleomenes' insistence upon offering a naturalistic account of social development while still holding to the Biblical account of creation. As the exchange progresses, Cleomenes dismisses the materialistic, Epicurean explanation of the order of nature produced by chance. Horatio introduces the idea of God and creation linked with nature; Cleomenes describes this idea as Spinozist.<sup>11</sup>

Horatio appears to be winning the debate, forcing Cleomenes to acknowledge that pagan and Christian explanations of man's origin are equally absurd and that there are no proofs against the Epicurean explanation of origins based on chance. Cleomenes changes the direction of the conversation and suggests that atheism and superstition arise from the same source: improper education. Cleomenes returns to the subject of origins after this short digression and ends the discussion with a sceptical, even fideistic argument, stating

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<sup>10</sup> FBK II, 21-2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-12.

that we may not know for certain the validity of the Biblical account of creation and Moses' reception of revelation, but neither can we prove otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

Cleomenes' argument about atheism and superstition poses an interesting set of problems. What Cleomenes argues is that without education in the "true Religion" the lower classes will drift into rank superstition. He states that "there is no absurdity so gross, nor Contradiction so plain, which the Dregs of the People, most Gamesters, and nineteen Women in twenty, may not be taught to Believe, concerning invisible Causes".<sup>13</sup> The better classes, on the other hand, "if their Youth has been neglected, and they are not well grounded in the Principles of the true Religion, are prone to Infidelity ... and if Persons of this sort fall into the hands of Unbelievers, they run great Hazard of becoming *Atheists* or *Scepticks*".<sup>14</sup> The consequences of unbelief – immorality and more importantly, indifference to the sanctity of oaths – are countered by Cleomenes when he states: "I don't believe, there is any Wickedness that the worst Atheist can commit, but superstitious Men may be guilty of it".<sup>15</sup> This argument, along with Mandeville's statements concerning atheists in the *Free Thoughts*, implies that atheists are capable of being functional, moral members of society. The potential morality of atheists undermines existing arguments, particularly Locke's, against the toleration of atheists. Locke argued that atheists are unable to take oaths, saying that "Promises, Covenants, and oaths, which are the Bonds of Humane Society, can have no hold upon an Atheist".<sup>16</sup>

Mandeville's decision to place his argument for the moral atheist in Cleomenes' mouth

<sup>12</sup> FBK II, 312, 315-6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 312-3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 314-5. This statement is a summary of the argument contained in sections 144-146 of the *Various Thoughts* and is further evidence of the of Bayle's strong influence on Mandeville. See Bayle, *Various Thoughts*, 178-81.

<sup>16</sup> Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 51.

raises questions about what Mandeville intended to achieve in this exchange and which character represents the author's true opinion. In this instance, it seems the passage was meant to strengthen Horatio's argument against the veracity of the Biblical account of the origins of humankind and to provide an opportunity for Cleomenes to express scepticism and relativism in morality. What Mandeville introduces finally is the sceptical point that the origin story from the *Pentateuch* is the best, most reasonable account. Even though we cannot prove it, neither can we prove any other system with certainty.<sup>17</sup> Embedded within this weak resolution is the lingering presence of the sceptical argument from custom. Rather than prove religion or argue that faith is innately valuable in promoting moral behaviour, Mandeville presents an argument for Christianity that rests on its customary standing among European nations.

There is no apparent reason for Mandeville to have reintroduced the idea of the moral atheist. Cleomenes' position in the origins debate would have been stronger had he stuck to the fideistic argument and simply held his ground against Horatio's Epicurean and Spinozist objections. By emphasizing the role of education in inculcating religion and by returning to the notion of the moral atheist (who is identified solely with the upper classes), Mandeville undercuts the value of the argument that Christianity provides the truth about human origins and morality. In the *Free Thoughts*, he argues for the necessity of a civil religion. The national church ought to be given preferential treatment by the state and its temples and schools should be preserved. Simultaneously, Mandeville calls for the state to control the clergy.<sup>18</sup> The role of the Church in this formulation is to manipulate and regulate society. If religion is to be inculcated by education, as

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<sup>17</sup> FBK II, 317-8.

<sup>18</sup> FT, 272-3.

Cleomenes suggests, it would follow that a state is best controlled if the origin story upon which its social morality is purportedly based is given preferential treatment. The argument in favour of a civil religion is consistent with Mandeville's analysis in the *Enquiry* and his emphasis on the political origins of virtue and religion. Religion, in Mandeville's formulation, has its origins in the formation of society and is established by the civic authority. Therefore, the religion of the civil authority should be treated as the norm or custom of the state and should be privileged. This idea owes a significant debt to the erudite libertine analysis of the political origins of religion, a topic that will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter.

It should be noted that Cleomenes suggests that atheists might be moral in response to Horatio's assertion that he believes no speculative atheists exist.<sup>19</sup> Which character is to be read as Mandeville's mouthpiece? Given the weakness of some of Cleomenes' replies to Horatio (e.g. his diversion from the central question of human origins), it seems unlikely that the former always represents Mandeville's voice. Mandeville may be under the influence of Bayle, deploying multiple voices as a means of deflecting criticism. That said, to assume that Horatio sometimes speaks for Mandeville introduces the difficult task of identifying those places in the text where this might occur. Despite the methodological problems raised by the proposition that Mandeville was inconsistent in his use of spokesmen, it is evident that he sometimes found it useful to have Horatio deliver a controversial point.

The sixth dialogue fits several of the criteria outlined by Tullio Gregory for identifying erudite libertinism (see above, pp. 32). The libertine sense of classical erudition is evident in Mandeville's deployment of Epicurus, and Horatio's argument that

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<sup>19</sup> FBK II, 314.

the Epicurean cosmogony cannot be refuted. Cleomenes' admission that he struggles with the tension between faith and reason is an additional clue that scepticism played a role in Mandeville's thinking process. Finally, the assertion that the common folk would slide into superstition without proper education while the upper class would drift into atheism, exemplifies the cultural elitism of the libertines.

### III

The portrayal of the atheist and of atheism in the second volume of the *Fable* raises more questions than it answers, and so we must look to Mandeville's final major work, *The Origin of Honour*, to refine our understanding of his position. The third dialogue of the *Origin of Honour* addresses Christianity and the military and presents an example from Bayle used previously by Mandeville in the first volume of the *Fable*: the Christian soldier. For both Bayle and Mandeville, the Christian soldier is the clearest example of a man acting against his stated principles. The discussion surrounding atheism in this dialogue is entirely at odds with the definition of atheism Mandeville provides in the *Free Thoughts*, and refutes the idea that an atheist is incapable of maintaining oaths, an argument present in the second volume of the *Fable*. In the third dialogue of the *Origin of Honour*, Cleomenes asserts that "in the Management of Human Creatures, the Fear of an invisible Cause, which they are all born with, was always to be consulted; and that no Multitudes can ever be govern'd ... if those, who attempt to rule over them, should neglect to take Notice of, or but any Ways seem to slight the Principle of that Fear".<sup>20</sup> Cleomenes emphasizes this point in his disagreement with Horatio's assessment that an atheist is better than a devil worshipper:

*Hor.* It is better to have no Religion, than to worship the Devil.

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<sup>20</sup> OH, 153.

*Cleo.* In what Respect is it better?

*Hor.* It is not so great an Affront to the Deity not to believe his Existence, as it is to believe him to be the most Cruel and the most Malicious Being that can be imagin'd.

*Cleo.* That is a subtle Argument, seldom made Use of but by Unbelievers.

*Hor.* Don't you think, that many Believers have been worse Men, than some *Atheists*?

*Cleo.* As to Morality, there have been good and bad Men of all Sects and Persuasions; but before we know any Thing of Men's Lives, Nothing can be worse in the Civil Society than an Atheist, *cæteris paribus*. For it would be ridiculous to say, that it is less safe to trust to a Man's Principle, of whom we have some Reason to hope, that he may be with-held by the Fear of Something, than it is to trust to one, who absolutely denies, that he is withheld by the Fear of any Thing. The old *Mexicans* worship'd *Vitzliputzli*, at the same Time that they own'd his Cruelty; yet it is highly probable, that some of them were deterr'd from Perjury for Fear of being punish'd by *Vitzliputzli*; who would have been guilty of it, if they had not been afraid of any Thing at all.<sup>21</sup>

In this exchange Mandeville remains consistent in his argument that religion is necessary for governing society, with the introduction of an important nuance, namely that an atheist is only odious to society when we are unsure about that person's character. Put another way, a person of known restraint who is an atheist may be tolerated. However, individuals of unproven character must be assumed to need the constraining influence of religion.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, societies in general need religion though some individuals may be moral without the fear of divine punishment. Furthermore, Mandeville's definition of the atheist has narrowed to include only the speculative atheist. This is implicit in the quotation above but is explicit just prior to the exchange when Cleomenes says that "none can be deem'd Atheists but those, who pretend to have absolutely conquer'd, or never been influenced by the Fear of an invisible Cause, that over-rules Human Affairs".<sup>23</sup> The practical atheist has disappeared and now only the speculative atheist remains. The emphasis on generality in Mandeville's assertion of the necessity of civil religion is re-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 154-5

<sup>22</sup> Hector Monro, *The Ambivalence of Bernard Mandeville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 164-6

<sup>23</sup> OH, 154.

emphasized in Cleomenes' claim that he can prove "that in a well disciplin'd Army, Acts of devotion, and an outward Shew of Religion may do vast Service for the obtaining of Victory, tho' the General who appointed and order'd them, was an *Atheist*".<sup>24</sup>

Mandeville's description of the manipulation of pride and fear in order to make men tractable in the *Origin of Honour* is consistent with his overall system as developed across both volumes of the *Fable*. What is remarkable in the third dialogue is the characterization of the atheist general. This man must be "a great Genius, daring to the highest Degree, indefatigable, supple to his Interest, and ready to act any Part, and put on any Disguise" in pursuit of his aims.<sup>25</sup> Gaining recognition, the capable atheist would adjust his behaviour to reflect the professed moral character of the army:

If he serves among Puritans, who pretend to a stricter Morality, and to be more religious than their Neighbours, and himself is an artful Man, as soon as he is taken Notice of, he'll fall in with the Cant in Fashion, talk of Grace and Regeneration, counterfeit Piety, and seem to be sincerely Devout.<sup>26</sup>

Rising to power within the army through his reputation and the natural opening of opportunities created by war, the atheist would harness the clergy to pressure the army's soldiers to pursue virtue. The truly skilful atheist could even develop the ability to "counterfeit Enthusiasm when he pleases".<sup>27</sup> As a result:

It is certain, that a man of vast Parts and superlative Ambition might, by the Divine Permission, perform, take Care, and compass all this, tho' he was an *Atheist*; and that he might live and die with the Reputation of a Saint, if he was but circumspect and wise enough to conceal himself so entirely well, that no Penetration of watchfulness of Mortals could ever discover his real Sentiments. There is no Achievement to be expected from Soldiers, which they would not perform for such a General; and his Name would be sufficient to still the greatest Profligate in an Army with a Religious Enthusiasm, if he disbelieved not an Invisible Cause.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 179-80.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 183.

This final description of the able atheist general reveals that Mandeville's position is the logical conclusion of the argument for the political origins of religion. Moreover, it cannot be objected that the army context cannot be generalized. At the very end of the third dialogue Cleomenes defends hypocrisy on the grounds that it is widespread. We are given two kinds of hypocrites, the malicious and the fashionable. The first are hypocrites with an eye to mischief but the latter:

without any motive of Religion, or Sense of Duty, go to Church, in Imitation of their Neighbours; counterfeit Devotion, and, without any design upon others, comply occasionally with all the Rites and Ceremonies of Publick Worship, from no other Principle than an Aversion to Singularity, and a Desire of being in the Fashion. The first are, as you say, the worst of Men: but the other are rather beneficial to Society, and can only be injurious to themselves.<sup>29</sup>

The final statement seems disingenuous in the context of Mandeville's description of the atheist general, for it is little more than a gesture towards Christian orthodoxy after his radical characterization of an individual who would be called a great man in society. The necessity of religion, as Mandeville shows here, has nothing to do with morality. Thinking back to Gregory's analysis of the erudite libertines in Chapter 2 (see above, pp. 32-3) we see Mandeville expressing here an important point about society, reminiscent of the *Theophrastus Redivivus* and its characterization of all philosophers as atheists. The great general, any great man, and society as a whole rely on the maintenance of custom rather than an honest devotion to truth. The actions of any great individual through history are legitimately suspect from a religious standpoint; no expression of piety from those in power should be taken at face value. The religious scepticism of this position is glaring. All claims to the value and importance of true religion are undermined. Religion is simply a political tool for the manipulation of the lower orders of society.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 201-2.

## IV

Even though Mandeville's own religious beliefs are open to interpretation, there is no doubt that he was profoundly inimical to organized religion. His anti-clericalism and his sceptical stance on morality leave little doubt that he was unwilling to sincerely aver Christianity as a system. Mandeville's work exhibits a form of practical unbelief that places him firmly within the camp of the radical deists described by Jonathan Israel. Furthermore, Mandeville's moral philosophy is free from concerns over a divine economy of right and wrong, and is fully occupied with the problems of this world rather than the promise of a future state. However, little can be said at this point about Mandeville's understanding of metaphysics. In *Free Thoughts*, the work one would expect was most likely to contain a discussion of metaphysics, Mandeville is silent on the matter. Instead he pursues an argument about the social role of the clergy and promotes the value of toleration. In the *Fable*, the appearance of a question about religion is almost uniformly coincident with an argument that is either disingenuous or contradictory. Were we to take Mandeville's word on the necessary criteria for ascribing unbelief we would doubtless have to declare that Mandeville was a sincere and devout Christian for he talks the talk of a pious man of faith. However, it is apparent that Mandeville is talking out of the side of his mouth when he declares his fidelity to the Christian religion. We may say with some certainty that Mandeville is a staunch unbeliever when it comes to matters of official religious doctrine. The next two chapters will explore how Mandeville's discussion of the natural world reveals something about his understanding of the metaphysical question of the existence and attributes of God and how Mandeville's definitions of religion and atheism influence his understanding of providence.

## Chapter 5: The Natural History of Society

Mandeville's historical narrative is predicated upon the axiomatic belief that reason and observation can provide insight into the natural history of human sociability. Natural history, in this context, may be understood as part of the complex of theories – common among Enlightenment *philosophes* – that human nature and behaviour may be explained in a scientific manner.<sup>1</sup> An historical argument is vital to Mandeville's theory. For values to be relative rather than absolute, they must be historically contingent and open to demonstrations of change. The *Enquiry*, the *Nature of Society* and many of the Remarks explore how values were introduced and how they changed. The second volume of the *Fable* engages with the issue of human origins in a more sustained manner and this results in some important changes to Mandeville's historical narrative. Whether these changes were a response to criticisms, the result of a changing intellectual focus or a combination of the two is not altogether clear nor of particular salience here. What is important is Mandeville's display of a deep ambivalence towards the Christian narrative of the human past. This is exemplified in his exploration of the state of nature and the socializing role of fear, the most explicitly Epicurean facet of Mandeville's intellectual persona.

There are three topics that Mandeville covers in his historical narrative that are important for this discussion: the general history of the origins of society; the origin of language; and the origins of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent summary of the role of the "science of man" in Enlightenment thought, see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 11-21.

## I

In the first edition of the *Fable*, society originated in the efforts of great rulers and lawgivers – Mandeville’s famous “dextrous politicians” – who appealed to the vanity and pride common to all humanity.<sup>2</sup> This appeal to pride, according to Mandeville, was the origin of the concepts of virtue and vice and the development of these concepts were instrumental in rendering humans tractable for society. Thus, moral virtues – and by extension, society – “are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride”.<sup>3</sup> As the *Fable* expanded and evolved, the dextrous politician was assigned a less significant role and by 1723 a vision of social change as a lengthy and natural, non-providential process had emerged. In the *Nature of Society*, Mandeville notes that humans were first made tractable by the dynamics of the family. He observes that “it is probable that in the Wild State of Nature Parents would keep a Superiority over their Children, at least while in Strength, and that even afterwards the Remembrance of what the others had experienc’d might produce in them something between Love and Fear, which we call Reverence”.<sup>4</sup> This familial hierarchy supports Mandeville’s assertion in the same passage that the first form of government was certainly a monarchy.<sup>5</sup> In the second volume of the *Fable*, Mandeville fully commits to an evolutionary vision of history divorced from the idea of the dextrous politician.

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<sup>2</sup> FBK I, 45-7, and Harold J. Cook, “Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of ‘The Clever Politician’,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 1 (1999): 101-24.

<sup>3</sup> FBK I, 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Mandeville shares his understanding of monarchy as emerging from the family as the first form of government with Locke. Comparisons between the state and the family were common among early-modern political theorists but the explicit connection between family hierarchies and monarchies as the first form of government is not as common. Notably, neither Hobbes nor Spinoza, both significant influences on Mandeville in other respects, make the connection between family hierarchy and monarchy. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 198-9.

In a 1966 lecture to the British Academy, F.A. Hayek assigned Mandeville the status of a “mastermind”, providing two reasons. One was that Mandeville made Hume possible. The other was that Mandeville achieved a “definite breakthrough ... [with] the twin ideas of evolution and of the spontaneous formation of an order, conceptions which had long been coming”.<sup>6</sup> Hayek’s attribution of evolutionary thought to Mandeville succinctly captures the nature of the change that occurs between the first and second volumes of the *Fable*. A “great man” conception of human history gives way to one that envisions change as a part of a random and lengthy processes.

Mandeville attempts to reconcile the change in his conception of history in the *Origin of Honour*. He redefines his “moralists and politicians” and states that he gave “those Names promiscuously to All that ... have endeavour’d to civilize Men”, for in reality “Human Wisdom is the Child of Time ... it was not the Contrivance of one Man, nor could it have been the Business of a few Years”.<sup>7</sup> Kaye argues that Mandeville’s conception of history was at root always evolutionary. He interprets Mandeville’s use of the dextrous politician as allegorical and insists that “to miss this point would be to miss an essential element in Mandeville, which is a precocious feeling for evolution”.<sup>8</sup> However, Kaye errs in seeing Mandeville’s argument in the second volume of the *Fable* as a clarification rather than as a significant alteration. Mandeville’s primary interest in the first volume is in exploring how the human ego – an entity altered by the transition from the state of nature to society – is malleable in the pursuit of self-interest. For Mandeville, this malleability is the core of society’s success. The dextrous politician is a

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<sup>6</sup> F.A. Hayek, “Lecture on a Mastermind: Dr. Bernard Mandeville,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* vol. LII (1966): 139, 126.

<sup>7</sup> OH, 40-1.

<sup>8</sup> FBK I, 1, xiv-lxvi, 47n.

useful explanatory device that requires limited explanation as it is not too far rhetorically from the idea of God as a dispenser of knowledge and morality. However, it seems reasonable to argue that when Mandeville returned to the subject in order to defend and clarify his system, he saw that the dextrous politician was a device built on shaky logical foundations and therefore recast his narrative of the origins of human society, choosing firmer theoretical and rhetorical ground.

Hundert recognizes the change in Mandeville's narrative. He sees a persistent explanatory tension between the individualistic explanation given in the first volume and the evolutionary model given in the second.<sup>9</sup> While a tension exists between the two arguments, the issue is not persistent. Rather, the change represents a *caesura* between Mandeville's position in the first volume and that in the second. Mandeville retains the psychological profile of humankind introduced in the first volume while altering his analysis of the manner in which humanity moves from the state of nature into society.

Without a doubt, Mandeville did come to an evolutionary understanding of human development. Mandeville's most striking explanation of the phenomenon is his portrayal of advances in the art of shipbuilding. Mandeville holds a "First-Rate Man of War" to be "vastly superior to any other moveable body of human Invention" but he asserts that it is not the product of a miracle or of genius. Rather, "it is certain, that none of these Labours [perfecting the ship] require any other, than working Men of ordinary Capacities" and observes that "we often ascribe to the Excellency of Man's Genius, and the Depth of his Penetration, what is in Reality owing to length of Time, and the Experience of many Generations".<sup>10</sup> In what may be a subtle rejection of his own conception of the dextrous

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<sup>9</sup> HEF, 76-80.

<sup>10</sup> FBK II, 142.

politician Mandeville eschews rational and schematic explanations of the origins of art in favour of random development:

The Chevalier *Reneau* has wrote a Book, in which he shews the Mechanism of Sailing, and accounts mathematically for every thing that belongs to the working and steering of a Ship. I am persuaded, that neither the first inventors of Ships and Sailing, or those, who have made Improvements since in any Part of them, ever dream'd of those Reasons, any more than now the rudest and most illiterate of the vulgar do, when they are made Sailors, which Time and Practice will do in Spight of their Teeth.<sup>11</sup>

Here Mandeville asserts that human arts – including society, which was among the first – are processes governed by unconscious and unintended development. Dextrous politicians have no place here because they could have none of the insight or knowledge of causes necessary for manipulating humanity to serve their self-interested ends.

## II

What are the influences that account for Mandeville's evolutionary narrative?

Mandeville's initial discussion in the *Enquiry* locates pre-social humanity within a state of nature. The state of nature was an important part of both Epicurean philosophy and seventeenth-century notions of natural law. The most thorough classical Epicurean account of the state of nature is found in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Lucretius' narrative of the move from the state of nature to society relies on a concept of evolution based on the softening of our natures, caused by growing access to comforts. In the state of nature humans "were far tougher than the men of today, as become the offspring of tough earth", and these men were ignorant of society for they "could have no thought of the common good, no notion of the mutual restraint of morals and laws ... the individual, taught only to live and fend for himself, carried off on his own account such prey as

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 143. Kaye identifies the text cited by Mandeville in this quote as the *Théorie de la Manœuvre des Vaisseaux* (Paris, 1689) by Bernard d'Éliçagary (1652-1719).

fortune brought him".<sup>12</sup> It is with the appearance of family units and material comforts – luxuries as Mandeville defined them in the *Fable* – that humanity begins to develop in the direction of society:

As time went by, men began to build huts and to use skins and fire. Male and female learnt to live together in a stable union and watch over their joint progeny. Then it was that humanity first began to mellow. Thanks to fire, their chilly bodies could no longer so easily endure the cold under the canopy of heaven. Venus subdued brute strength. Children by their wheedling easily broke down their parents' stubborn temper. The neighbours began to form mutual alliances, wishing neither to do nor suffer violence among themselves. They appealed on behalf of their children and womanfolk, pointing out with gestures and inarticulate cries that it is right for everyone to pity the weak. It was not possible to achieve perfect unity of purpose. Yet a substantial majority kept faith honestly. Otherwise the entire human race would have been wiped out there and then instead of being propagated, generation after generation, down to the present day.<sup>13</sup>

For Lucretius, humankind enters into society voluntarily but it is not because humans are naturally sociable. Rather it is on the basis of self-interest. Changes in human temperament encourage sociability.

The Epicurean notion of the state of nature was revived in the seventeenth century with the birth of the modern theory of natural law. Natural law theory was a prominent component of seventeenth-century thought and was expounded most notably in the work of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Thomas Hobbes and Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694). It is probable that Mandeville read the works of all of these writers.<sup>14</sup> However, Mandeville makes the most direct use of Hobbes, referring to him by name in several instances. Importantly, Mandeville shares with Hobbes the foundational belief that man is not

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<sup>12</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham (New York: Penguin, 1951), 199, 200.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>14</sup> M.M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville's Social and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 47-8. In addition, Hundert suggests that Mandeville was familiar with Hobbes, for the theories of the latter were deployed by the de La Courts and Johan de Witt (1625-1672); HEF, 24-5.

naturally sociable but does not adopt Hobbes's conception of civil society and government.<sup>15</sup>

In Mandeville's narrative, human nature does not fundamentally change in the move from the state of nature to society. The fear of external dangers (e.g. wild animals) is the motivation for entering into social groups. Once in social groups, the fear of other humans, a fear of something internal rather than external to mankind, also becomes prominent. Mandeville portrays man's ability to overcome the danger of animals as evidence of providence. However, it is a curious conception of providence insofar as Mandeville attributes God's design to the natural order but all social and technological developments to human art.<sup>16</sup>

Mandeville's conception of providence dispenses with the idea of a plan for humanity. Instead, human history is the product of the ordered operations of the natural world and it is only through pride that we maintain the illusion that our species has a special relationship with the Creator:

It is owing to the Principle of Pride we are born with, and the high Value we all, for the Sake of one, have for our Species, that Men imagine the whole Universe to be principally made for their use; and this Errour makes them commit a thousand Extravagencies, and have pitiful and most unworthy Notions of God and his Works. It is not Cruelty, or more unnatural in a wolf to eat a piece of a Man, than it is in a Man to eat part of a Lamb or a Chicken.<sup>17</sup>

Mandeville has ousted humanity from a special and privileged place in the universe as well as the natural order of the earth:

But if it were of no other Use, being eight hundred thousand times bigger than the Earth at least, one thousandth part of it would do our Business as

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 625. Israel attributes Mandeville's debt in this matter to Machiavelli, Johan de la Court, and Spinoza rather than Hobbes.

<sup>16</sup> FBK II, 236-61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

well, if it was but nearer to us in Proportion. From this Consideration alone, I am persuaded, that the Sun was made to enlighten and cherish other Bodies, besides this Planet of ours. Fire and Water were design'd for innumerable Purposes, and among the Uses that are made of them, some are immensely different from others. But whilst we receive the Benefit of these, and are only intent on ourselves, it is highly probable. that there are thousands of things, and perhaps our own Machines among them, that in the vast System of the Universe are now serving some wise Ends, which we shall never know. According to that Plan of this Globe, I mean the Scheme of Government, in relation to the living Creatures that inhabit the Earth, the Destruction of Animals is as necessary as the Generation of them.<sup>18</sup>

Sceptical about the nature of morality and the role of religion, Mandeville effectively eradicates God from the narrative of the history of humanity. The organization of the universe is one that promotes life but not in a manner specifically interested in, or inclined towards, humans. Like the ancient atomists and the Epicureans, Mandeville's conception of nature is not necessarily atheistic. Rather, it is a vision of nature that excludes the interference of God in human affairs. Mandeville's vision of human history is therefore also non-teleological. Though he develops the idea of an organizing first principle which is absent in Epicureanism, this first principle is not primarily or even necessarily concerned with humanity. Human nature and human history are the results of the design and order of nature, rather than reflecting the goal of the designer. Providence is a synonym for an organizational structure beyond our comprehension: "the Words *fortuitous* and *casual*, have no other meaning, than what depends upon our want of Knowledge, Foresight, and Penetration".<sup>19</sup>

### III

The question of the origins of language frequently animated the imaginations of eighteenth-century philosophers and was linked intimately with questions about the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 244-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 263.

nature of consciousness and knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Many of the discussions and arguments that framed these questions were drawn from the work of seventeenth-century theorists such as Descartes and Locke.

In Mandeville's explanation of the origins of language we again find him adopting an Epicurean scheme. Lucretius' explanation of the origin of language follows an evolutionary model similar to his account of the origin of society. Language is a natural outcome of human needs: "for the various sounds of spoken language ... it was nature that drove men to utter these, and practical convenience that gave a form to the names of objects".<sup>21</sup> Of particular importance for Lucretius is the recognition that language is not the product of some great name-giver who passes along to humanity the names for all things:

To suppose that someone on some particular occasion allotted names to objects, and that by this means men learnt their first words, is stark madness. Why should we suppose that one man had this power of indicating everything by vocal utterances and emitting the various sounds of speech when others could not do it? Besides, if others had not used such utterances among themselves, from what source was the mental image of its use implanted in him? Whence did this one man derive the power in the first instance of seeing with his mind what he wanted to do? One man could not subdue a greater number and induce them by force to learn his names for things. It is far from easy to convince deaf listeners by any demonstration what needs to be done. They would not endure it or submit for long on any terms to have incomprehensible noises senselessly dinned into their ears.<sup>22</sup>

Lucretius' position raises a number of questions about the nature of the human mind.

What concerns us here specifically is the implication of the Epicurean argument for

thinkers in a Christian milieu. The Biblical account of the first giving of names is

precisely the kind of account that Lucretius criticized: "God formed out of the ground all

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Aarsliff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays in the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Lucretius, *Nature of the Universe*, 202.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

of the wild animals and all the birds of heaven. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name”.<sup>23</sup>

The account of the origin of language in Genesis does not necessarily present the problem of the great name-giver as formulated by Lucretius. Adam is supposed to be the first and only man at that time and thus it is reasonable to think that he would pass on the names to posterity. Prior to the seventeenth century, linguistic variety was explained historically in terms of the story of the Tower of Babel. However, in the seventeenth century writers and philosophers began to seriously challenge the Biblical narrative of human history. As a consequence, the origin of language came under scrutiny from perspectives not previously considered. A notable contribution to the reconsideration of the origin of language was Isaac La Peyrère’s (1596-1676) postulation of the existence of humans prior to Adam in his *Praeadamitae* (1655).<sup>24</sup>

Avi Lifschitz argues that in the wake of seventeenth-century Biblical criticism “if one wished to maintain the biblical account of Creation, the alternative [to the pre-adamite argument] was to relativise the significance and wisdom of Adam”.<sup>25</sup> This is precisely what major figures such as Hobbes, Locke and Leibniz did when they reconstructed the history of language.<sup>26</sup> Hobbes’s account of the origin of language is instructive. His reputation for unbelief makes it particularly striking that he would adopt a Scriptural explanation for the origin of language. In Hobbes’s characterization:

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<sup>23</sup> Genesis, 2:18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Avi Lifschitz, “The Enlightenment Revival of the Epicurean History of Language and Civilization,” *SVEC* 12 (2009): 212.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-7.

The first author of Speech was *God* himself, that instructed *Adam* how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight; for the Scripture goeth no further in this matter. But this was sufficient to direct him to adde more names, as the experience and use of the creatures should give him occasion; and to joyn them in such manner by degrees, as to make himself understood; and so by succession of time, so much language might be gotten, as he had found use for; though not so copious, as an Orator or Philosopher has need of. ...

But all this language gotten, and augmented by *Adam* and his posterity, was again lost at the tower of *Babel*, when by the hand of God, every man was stricken for his rebellion, with an oblivion of his former language. And being hereby forced to disperse themselves into several parts of the world, it must needs be, that the diversity of Tongues that now is, proceeded by degrees from them, in such a manner, as need (the mother of all inventions) taught them; and in tract of time grew every where more copious.<sup>27</sup>

Although Hobbes retains the Biblical account of the origin of language, he uses the narrative of the Tower of Babel to open the door to a naturalistic explanation of the proliferation of modern languages couched in terms of the satisfaction of human needs.

Lifschitz argues that Mandeville was the only early-modern theorist of the origin of language who deviated from the account offered by Scripture. As Lifschitz sees it, Mandeville appeals solely to natural processes in the development of human communication.<sup>28</sup> This is certainly true in the context of Mandeville's discussion of the origin of language in the sixth dialogue of volume two of the *Fable*. However, at the beginning of the fifth dialogue Cleomenes suggests that the presence of savages in a state of nature may be explained with reference to Biblical history, arguing that "what Distress some Men have been drove to, and how strangely our Race has been dispers'd and scatter'd over the Earth, since the Flood, we don't know".<sup>29</sup> Mandeville's gesture to the Biblical account of language disappears when he addresses the origin of language in depth:

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Lifschitz, "Epicurean History of Language," 215.

<sup>29</sup> FBK II, 197.

*Cleo.* By slow degrees, as all other Arts and Science have done, and length of time; Agriculture, Physick, Astronomy, Architecture, Painting, &c. From what we see in Children that are backward with their Tongues, we have reason to think, that a wild Pair would make themselves intelligible to each other by Signs and Gestures, before they would attempt it by Sounds: But when they lived together for many Years, it is very probable, that for the Things they were most conversant with they would find out Sounds to stir up in each other the Idea's of such Things, when they were out of sight; these Sounds they would communicate to their young ones; and the longer they lived together the greater Variety of Sounds they would invent, as well for Actions as the things themselves: They would find that the Volubility of Tongue, and Flexibility of Voice, were much greater in their young ones, than they could remember it ever to have been in themselves: It is impossible but some of these young ones would, either by Accident or Design, make use of this superior Aptitude of the Organs at one time or other; which every Generation would still improve upon; and this must have been the Origin of all Languages, and Speech it self, that were not taught by Inspiration.<sup>30</sup>

Mandeville thus accounts for the origin of language in purely naturalistic terms, and in doing so provides evidence for the distinct break he made with Christian tradition. His explanation for the origin of religion, which remains to be examined, is additional evidence of his unbelief.

#### IV

The revival of scepticism and Epicureanism in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe coincided with the late-humanist turn towards Tacitism and an emphasis on *raison d'état* in political thinking. Richard Tuck and Tullio Gregory have demonstrated that an important part of this transformation was the revival of political explanations for the origin of religion.<sup>31</sup> The modern tradition of reading politics into the origins of religion extends back to the work of Pomponazzi and Machiavelli.<sup>32</sup> In the *Discorsi* (c. 1513), Machiavelli makes the case that the religion of the Romans was introduced by

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 287-8.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31-64, and Tullio Gregory, "'Libertinisme Érudite' in Seventeenth-Century France and Italy: The Critique of Ethics and Religion," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1998): 327-32.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory, "Critique of Ethics and Religion," 327-32.

Numa Pompilius who, finding the Romans “completely wild” and “not domesticated”, turned to religion in order to train them to “live a sociable life and to practice the arts of peace”.<sup>33</sup> According to Machiavelli, Numa did so because he understood religion to be “essential for the maintenance of civilized way of life”.<sup>34</sup> This view of the political origins of religion was also a favourite of the erudite libertines, and was adopted by men such as Lucilio Vanini (1584-1619), François de La Mothe la Vayer (1588-1672) and the anonymous author of the infamous *Theophrastus redivivus*. In the work of the libertines, the idea was transformed to include the Euhemeristic argument that not only was religion of human origin but the gods themselves were also human creations.<sup>35</sup>

Mandeville’s early discussion of the origins of morality in the first volume of the *Fable* reflects the erudite libertine fascination with the political origins of religion. This is particularly evident in Mandeville’s account of the dextrous politician and the origin of morality as a “Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride”.<sup>36</sup> By locating the origin of moral virtue in the actions of politicians and lawgivers, Mandeville deviates from traditional theological theories that saw religion as the wellspring of morality and adhered closely to the intellectual line promulgated by the erudite libertines. Mandeville’s awareness of his deviation is reflected in his claim that he speaks “neither of *Jews* or *Christians*, but Man in his State of Nature and Ignorance of the true Deity”.<sup>37</sup>

Mandeville’s apology, however, is disingenuous, as was noted by his critic William Law, amongst many others. Law points out that an account of the origin of morality based on a

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<sup>33</sup> Nicolò Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 113.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Gregory, “Critique of Ethics and Religion,” 332.

<sup>36</sup> FBK I, 51.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

society separate from Christian revelation and history is as absurd as an author producing an “*Enquiry into the Origin of the World*” declaring “that it arose from a *casual Concourse of Atoms*” before asserting “that you did not mean the World, which *Jews and Christians* dwell upon”.<sup>38</sup> The implication of Law’s argument is that it is reasonable to apply Mandeville’s explanation of the political origins of morality to Christianity itself.

In the second volume of the *Fable*, Mandeville produces a detailed history of the origin of religion. This account is more thoroughly Epicurean and is quite similar to the argument formulated by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651). For Hobbes, the fear of unknown causes leads to a belief in an “agent *invisible*” and this psychological mechanism is the basis for the polytheism of the pagans.<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that Hobbes makes a distinction between the origins of pagan religions and that of Christianity. Mandeville makes an argument strikingly similar to Hobbes’s. In the fifth dialogue, Cleomenes explains the origins of superstition in terms of human ignorance. Crucially, Mandeville excludes revealed religion from this history by asserting that he is not speaking about religion, which is said to be solely a product of revelation.<sup>40</sup> This apology is less problematic than the one appearing in the first volume. However, in the context of the whole of Mandeville’s arguments – particularly those that will be discussed below – his distinction between religion and superstition is better understood as dissimulation than as a reflection of suppressed religious sincerity.

Mandeville’s explanation of the origin of superstition relies on the ignorance of causes. In the face of illness and natural calamities, the savage human:

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<sup>38</sup> William Law, “Remarks upon a Late Book Entitled the *Fable of the Bees* (1724),” in *Private Vices, Publick Benefits? The Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville*, ed. J. Martin Stafford (Solihull, UK: Ismeron, 1997), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> FBK II, 206.

[would] certainly begin to suspect some invisible Cause; and, as his Experience increased, be confirm'd in his Suspicion. It is likewise highly probable, that a Variety of different Sufferings, would make him apprehend several such Causes; and at last induce him to believe, that there was a great Number of them, which he had to fear.<sup>41</sup>

The crucial point is that superstition is rooted in fear. Events that are beneficial to humanity are assumed to be man made. In essence, Mandeville sees good fortune as leading to a primitive sense of property – the ownership of good fortune – whereas bad fortune is externalized and attributed to an invisible cause.<sup>42</sup> Although Mandeville's general claim regarding the human origins of the conception of the divine is adopted from Euhemerism, he follows Hobbes in giving this claim a more Epicurean slant by emphasizing fear or, conversely, the desire of pleasure, in identifying the impulses contributing to superstition. Religion – in the broad sense rather than the revealed sense to which Mandeville appeals – would only appear once humans had entered into groups, whereupon “willful Lies would be rais'd, concerning this Power, and some would pretend to have seen or heard it” while “nothing has happened in the World, of Priestcraft or Inhumanity, Folly or Abomination, that cannot be solved or explained, with the least Trouble, from these *Data*, and the Principle of Fear”.<sup>43</sup>

## V

From Mandeville's initial discussion of the origins of human society through to his narratives of the origin of language and superstition, the second volume of the *Fable* rests on the dual premises of the natural evolution of human nature and the random quality of that evolution. There are two ways to read Mandeville's position. One is that Mandeville is simply presenting a fideistically-informed deistic account of providence where our

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 210-2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 213-4.

reason compels us to acknowledge an intelligent first cause behind human developments. The second is that Mandeville uses the language of ineffable providence as a cover for his real argument, namely that human development is the product of purely natural forces and that change is progressive, occurring over long periods of time. Although there is no way of making a certain case for either of these interpretations, Mandeville's habit of satirical and disingenuous religious arguments militates against a deistic reading.

## Chapter 6: Materialism and the Soul

Three years after the eighth session of the Lateran Council (1513) condemned belief in the mortality of the soul and enjoined philosophers to produce arguments in favour of the soul's immortality, the Aristotelian Pietro Pomponazzi published his *On the Immortality of the Soul* (1516). In the *Immortality of the Soul*, Pomponazzi argues that Aristotle's view of the soul is that it is both material and mortal. Pomponazzi presents the problem in this way: while the intellect (which functions independently of the body) may participate in the immortality of God, the soul (which is dependent on the human body) is mortal. The soul is not mortal because of its inherent materiality; rather, the soul is mortal because its actions depend on a mortal substance (the body). It cannot survive the absence of that substance.<sup>1</sup> In the concluding chapter, Pomponazzi declares that "no natural reasons can be brought forth proving the soul is immortal, and still less any proving that the soul is mortal".<sup>2</sup> However, he also declares that because the immortality of the soul is an article of faith insisted upon by the Church, "we must assert beyond doubt the soul is immortal".<sup>3</sup> The reaction to Pomponazzi's reading of Aristotle was fierce, his presentation of the problem was condemned and the controversy that his work created persisted into the seventeenth century. The Lateran Council's injunction shaped

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Kraye, "Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525): Secular Aristotelianism in the Renaissance," in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 99-103; F.S. and E. Michael, "Two Early Modern Concepts of Mind: Reflecting Substance vs. Thinking Substance," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (1989): 35-7, and John Treloar, "Pomponazzi's Critique of Aquinas's Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul," *Thomist* 54, no. 3 (1990): 455-6.

<sup>2</sup> Pietro Pomponazzi, "On the Immortality of the Soul," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, trans. William Henry Hay II, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 377.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

the intellectual motivations of René Descartes and Pierre Gassendi. This chapter will examine the concept of the material soul as it appears in Mandeville's work.

## I

Mandeville's analysis of the soul incorporates elements of the ideas of Descartes, Gassendi and Hobbes. Mandeville was heavily influenced by Descartes in his early life and Cartesian elements continue to appear in Mandeville's work even late in his career. The Cartesian influence on Mandeville is unsurprising given that Cartesianism was at the peak of its academic influence in the Dutch Republic during Mandeville's student years at Leiden.

With the support of the Stadholder, William III of Orange-Nassau, the orthodox Calvinist Voetian bloc of Leiden's curators succeeded in having twenty Cartesian tenets officially banned in 1676. Despite this, the Cartesian camp – represented by Abraham Heidanus (1597-1678), Christopher Witchius (1625-1687) and Burchardus de Volder (1643-1709) – won the intellectual battle and, according to Jonathan Israel, the Cartesians “enjoyed an incomplete, and still fiercely challenged ... general ascendancy” in the universities and civic high schools, as well as the general intellectual life of the Dutch Republic during the period 1680-1720.<sup>4</sup> The ascendancy of Cartesianism shaped Mandeville's educational environment. Importantly, he studied under de Volder and wrote his *Disputatio philosophica* of 1689 under the latter's supervision.<sup>5</sup> In this period we find Mandeville strongly supporting the Cartesian distinction between mind and matter, as well as Descartes's characterization of animals as automata.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 623. In addition to linking Mandeville to the Cartesian tradition in the Dutch Republic, Israel also uses Mandeville's connection to de Volder as evidence of his debt to Spinozism.

Descartes conceived of the body and the soul as two distinct substances. He formulated this conception in response to the dominant, Aristotelian ideas of the scholastics, but he also aimed to defend the theological notion of the immortality of the soul. Focusing on the mind/body distinction, Descartes attributes life to the mechanical, extended substance of the body only while it contains its natural heat. Without this heat life ends, and Descartes asserts that “the soul takes its leave when we die only because this heat ceases and the organs which bring about bodily movement decay”.<sup>6</sup> This point is so significant for Descartes that he again emphasizes the primacy of the material body in matters of life and death by contending that “death never occurs through the absence of the soul, but only because one of the principal parts of the body decays”.<sup>7</sup> For Descartes, then, it is this natural heat rather than the soul that gives life to the body. It is important to stress that because of Descartes’s defence of the immortality of the soul, he does not equate the soul with life. The mechanical nature of death and the departure of the soul are critical components in understanding Descartes’s conception of the immortality of the soul. In a letter written in 1645 to Princess Elizabeth of Palatine (1618-1680), Descartes characterizes the soul as something that “subsists apart from the body, and is much nobler than the body, and is capable of enjoying countless satisfactions not to be found in this life”.<sup>8</sup> The superior substance of the soul is what allows humanity to face the notion of death without fear.<sup>9</sup>

Descartes rejects materialism in favour of a soul that is both immaterial and immortal, while Hobbes and Gassendi were instrumental in promoting materialist

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<sup>6</sup> CSM I, 329.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> CSMK III, 265-6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 266.

conceptions of the soul. These latter thinkers played pivotal roles in the Epicurean revival of the seventeenth century. The Epicurean Lucretius maintained that the mind and spirit are “interconnected and compose between them a single substance”.<sup>10</sup> While this single substance is said to be matter – which is “of very fine texture and composed of exceptionally minute particles” – Lucretius is explicit that this matter is not one single element.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while there are different elements involved in the composition of mind and body, both substances are in fact composed of a single basic material – atomic particles. When writing of the soul, Lucretius invoked the notion of “vital spirits” present in the whole body. These “vital spirits” are key to our material preservation because “the two [soul and body] are interlocked by common roots and cannot be torn apart without manifest disaster”.<sup>12</sup> This argument is both materialist and mortalist. The soul and mind are made of matter and are thus bound to the life of the body. Lucretius writes that “we are conscious that mind and body are born together, grow up together, and together decay”, and hence “it follows that death is nothing to us and no concern of ours, since our tenure of the mind is mortal”.<sup>13</sup> Here we see the moral implication of Lucretius’ argument. The corporeality and mortality of the soul, the mind and the body free us from the fear of the implications of death.

Epicureans argue for the materiality of both the mind and the soul on the basis that all substances are composed of atoms. Gassendi, whose overt goal was to revive Epicurean atomism, reconciled the Epicurean notion of the material soul with Christianity by offering a doctrine of a two-part soul. One part is the *animus*: a reasoning, immaterial

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<sup>10</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham (New York: Penguin, 1951), 100.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 109, 121.

soul implanted by God. This soul, which is incorporeal, is therefore indivisible, undissolvable and, consequently, immortal. The second soul is the *anima*: the animalistic and irrational soul that governs the nutritive and vegetative aspects of our being. This soul is mortal.<sup>14</sup> Gassendi may have felt the need to adopt a dual soul as a means of accommodating both Epicurean atomism and Catholic dogma. Despite Gassendi's deviation from what we might call orthodox Epicureanism, he nevertheless provides an Epicurean model for a sort of corporeal soul as well as a corporeal account of the motions of the human body. In the physics of his *Syntagma*, Gassendi argues that the motions of bodies are produced by heat and are thus evidence of the corporeality of the cause of motion:

Besides there is no reason to deny that there is a certain vital heat in the universe which may be considered its soul, so to speak, some part of which is distributed to everything; but this soul would not in fact be incorporeal since whoever says heat at the same time implies a subject of a corporeal nature for the heat to be in, for whatever is hot is a body. And the fact that the principle of action in bodies must be corporeal can be inferred from the fact that since corporeal actions are physical, they cannot be induced by any principle except a physical and corporeal one. And truly, since such a principle even as it creates itself, compels the body in which it resides to move itself and in many cases even to move an external body, it is impossible to conceive how it can bring itself to bear on a body if it lacks the mass or the sense of touch with which to touch something.<sup>15</sup>

Gassendi also defends the notion of an incorporeal intellectual soul when he states:

The human soul, insofar as it is intellect, or mind, and so incorporeal, does not stimulate actions except for intellectual, or mental, and incorporeal ones, and insofar as it is sentient, animate, and endowed with the power of moving bodies, and so is corporeal, does stimulate corporeal actions and moves its own body sometimes and sometimes also a foreign body.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 131, and Michael, "Two Concepts of Mind," 42.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Gassendi, *The Selected Works of Pierre Gassendi*, ed. and trans. Craig B. Brush (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation), 412-3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

We can see that the incorporeal soul is logically necessary in Gassendi's system. In addition to this logical necessity, Gassendi also sought to reconcile Epicurean and Christian conceptions of the soul. This may explain why he was not perceived as a dangerous figure by the majority of his contemporaries. Though there has been some scholarly work that has attempted to show that Gassendi's work was rife with libertinism, a conclusive case has not been made. Margaret Osler argues that the perception of Gassendi as a libertine was created in 1943, when René Pintard produced the first significant argument for this interpretation of his work.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Gassendi, Hobbes was unable to avoid having his work labelled dangerous. Richard Tuck has observed that Hobbes's pre-*Leviathan* publications were generally viewed as consistent with royalist Anglican interpretations of orthodoxy. But, from the publication of Hobbes's *Leviathan* until well after his death, he was identified by many of his contemporaries and those who came later as perhaps the arch-atheist of the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> Like Gassendi, Hobbes was deeply influenced by Epicureanism. Because of his friendship with Gassendi, he has been seen as one of the leading figures responsible for the introduction of Epicureanism to England.<sup>19</sup>

According to Hobbes, the notion that "the soul is in its own nature eternal, and a living creature independent of the body, or that any mere man is immortal otherwise than by the resurrection in the last day ... is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture".<sup>20</sup> Moreover, those scriptural figures counted as immortal and written in God's "Book of Life" were

<sup>17</sup> Margaret J. Osler, "When did Pierre Gassendi Become a Libertine?," in *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion*, eds. John Brooke and Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 188.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Tuck, "The Christian Atheism of Thomas Hobbes," in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 111-30.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 304.

alive because they “*lived to God*” not because of “a property consequent to the essence and nature of mankind”.<sup>21</sup> Hobbes poses an additional objection to God’s incorporeality when he argues that a term constructed out of contradictory components is meaningless. The phrase “*incorporeal substance*”, for example, is constructed of opposites. Therefore, “the two names of which it is composed, put together and made one, signify nothing at all”.<sup>22</sup> In order for a thing to exist it must be corporeal.<sup>23</sup> This doctrine has two theological implications. Either God is a corporeal entity, or we cannot have any rational knowledge of the nature of God. If God is corporeal, the soul must also be corporeal.

## II

We must examine the religious dimension of materialism in order to place Mandeville within the materialist tradition. This examination will focus on the materialist arguments produced by William Coward (1656/7-1725). Coward, like Henry Layton (1622-1705), John Toland and Anthony Collins, rejected the idea of the immaterial soul. Coward was a relatively minor character compared to Collins and Toland. His work demonstrates that materialism was not simply the philosophy of a select few Anglo-Irish thinkers but was instead a worldview that was widely known and debated (if not held) by early eighteenth-century English writers. The introduction of Epicurean ideas to England motivated other authors to oppose materialism on Christian grounds. One such individual was Thomas Creech (1659-1700), a writer made famous by his translation of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. Positioning Mandeville in relation to Creech and Coward clarifies their respective views of materialism and Christianity.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>23</sup> See Cees Leijenhorst, “Hobbes, Heresy, and Corporeal Deity,” in *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion*, eds. John Brooke and Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 193-222.

Though the accusation of heterodoxy tended to cling to writers who espoused the Epicurean system – one is inclined to think of the controversial figure of Hobbes – Thomas Creech managed to avoid this pitfall. Indeed, he was elected a fellow of All Souls College following the success of his translation of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, a work that ran to some six editions during Creech’s lifetime. Creech avoided controversy by producing a translation of Lucretius that was simultaneously an exposition of the poet’s work and a careful refutation of those parts of the Epicurean system that Creech held to be incompatible with Christianity.<sup>24</sup> He included sixty pages of critical notes at the end of his translation refuting a number of key Epicurean doctrines. Creech’s refutation of Lucretius’ account of the corporeality of the soul – an argument which appears in the third book of *De rerum natura* – serves as an important model for understanding Mandeville’s system.

In his capacity as both translator and critic, Creech attacked Lucretius’ concept of the soul in an attempt to prove both the soul’s incorporeality and its immortality.<sup>25</sup> Notably, Creech appeals to the operations of the soul, arguing that mere matter cannot be capable of the mental operation of apprehension. Put simply, matter requires the influence of external stimuli in order to produce action. The human mind, on the other hand, in the absence of the “*Ample Pressure on the Organs*” caused by external things, can still “consider the *Nature* of these *Objects*, compare their properties, and view their agreement which must be a *distinct Motion* from the former”.<sup>26</sup> Creech sees matter as incapable of independent action and thus incapable of thought. Mind, which is

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<sup>24</sup> T.F. Mayo, *Epicurus in England, 1650-1725* (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1934), 58-75.

<sup>25</sup> Mayo, *Epicurus in England*, 70.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Creech, “Notes Upon the Third Book,” in *Titus Lucretius Carus, of the Nature of Things. In Six Books*, 5th ed. (London, 1712), 29-30.

immaterial, works on matter because “*sublimary matter* is not *self-existent*, and therefore depends on something that is so”.<sup>27</sup> Action, and therefore, motion must be a product of a self-existent and incorporeal mind. This was a common argument for the soul’s immateriality in the seventeenth century. On this basis, Creech rejects Lucretius. Creech also rejects Descartes, whose work is “full of contradictions”.<sup>28</sup> In particular, Creech opposes the Cartesian doctrine of animals as machines. Descartes’s refusal to grant animals souls, claims Creech, is the by-product of a misunderstanding of the connection between immateriality and immortality:

*Immateriality* doth not infer necessity of *Existence*, or put the thing above the Power of him that framed it: And therefore, *Immortality* is a gift of the Creatour, and might likewise have been bestowed on *Matter*; and therefore *Beasts* may be allowed *Substances* capable of *Perception*, which may Direct, and Govern them, and Die, and be Buried in the same Grave with their Bodies. But we have such great evidence for the *immortality* of the *Mind* of Man, both from the Dispensations of *Providence*, and infallible *promises*, that I could not give a firmer assent, nor have a stronger ground for my *Opinion*, if the Proofs could be reduced to *Figures*, and proposed in *Squares*, and *Triangles*.<sup>29</sup>

Creech maintains that while we can prove the incorporeality of the soul and mind on the basis of reason and evidence, the knowledge of the immortality of the soul is derived from Revelation. While he notes that natural philosophy can account for some of the “distractions” concerning the immortality of the soul and the question of pain and suffering, it is the knowledge of the true deity that provides a full understanding of the soul’s immortality.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 30. It is unclear what Creech means by the term “sublimary” as he neither repeats the term nor defines it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “sublimary” as meaning either rare or exalted. Assuming this is the usage Creech intended, what he is saying is that even the most exalted matter must be worked upon by an external, immaterial force. I take this to mean that Creech is defining the soul as immaterial while the mind is an exalted or rare material that nonetheless requires the actions of an immaterial soul in order to carry out its operations. See *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, s.v. “Sublimary,” accessed June 28, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/Entry/192756?redirectedFrom=sublimary#eid>.

<sup>28</sup> Michael, “Two Concepts of Mind,” 39, and Creech, “Notes Upon the Third Book,” 30

<sup>29</sup> Creech, “Notes Upon the Third Book,” 32.

Creech introduced Lucretius' ideas to the English public but sought to mitigate what he perceived as the pernicious and anti-Christian elements of Lucretius' Epicureanism. However, materialism was not universally understood as being contrary to faith. William Coward defended the view that materialist conceptions of the soul were consistent with Christianity. As Ann Thomson observes, at least one of the more obscure English materialists saw within the materialism of men like Coward a means of further refuting Catholicism and advancing the cause of reformed religion.<sup>30</sup>

Coward's *Second Thoughts Concerning the Human Soul* presents an argument for the mortality of the soul based on the principles of philosophy, right reason and scripture. Coward was at the centre of English controversies over materialism at the turn of the eighteenth century and was identified by Jonathan Swift as one of the "freethinkers".<sup>31</sup> Coward's scriptural defence of materialism is lengthy and largely follows Hobbes's scriptural opposition to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.<sup>32</sup> Coward argues that the word "soul" hews so closely to the notions of personhood and mortal life that these concepts must be seen as synonymous.<sup>33</sup> This argument appears throughout the text. When it is first introduced, Coward, like Creech, notes that ancient philosophers saw the soul's immortality and its immateriality as inseparable.<sup>34</sup> Coward sees the entrance of these doctrines into Christian thought as resulting from the fusion of Christianity and state power and the subsequent rise of the Catholic Church and its clerics.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 132. The materialist in question is Evan Lloyd (*fl.* c. 1707). This Evan Lloyd should not be confused with the later poet of the same name.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> William Coward, *Second Thoughts Concerning the Human Soul* (London, 1702), 177-80.

<sup>34</sup> Coward, *Second Thoughts*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90.

Coward closes the section on the Scriptural basis for materialism by asserting that the mortality of the soul is a necessary proposition because of the revelation of the soul's resurrection in the Bible: "seeing *Eternal Life* is promis'd as a Reward to the Righteous, and the Gospel every where promises no other, I can see no reason why Man's Immortality can be asserted to begin before the General Resurrection, when this our Life shall be re-implanted, or restored to the dead Carcass, and we shall live with Christ in Glory Eternal".<sup>36</sup> Coward's doctrine of the materiality of the soul was profoundly controversial, as Thomson shows. Therefore, while a religious outlook may have been the foundation for Coward's materialism, materialism was not considered to be compatible with Christian orthodoxy.

### III

It is evident that the major disagreement in discussions about the nature of the soul is between those who call it immortal and immaterial and those who call it mortal and material. Gassendi blends Epicureanism and Christianity, positing a mortal animal soul and an immaterial and immortal soul given to humans by God. Thinkers who argued that the soul is material were considered dangerous and religiously suspect. One of the primary reasons for the debate over the nature of the soul was that an understanding of human nature was considered a prerequisite for understanding human behaviour. The most sustained commentary Descartes produced on the nature of the passions and the relationship between the soul and the body can be found in his *Passions of the Soul* (1649). The soul and the body have their own distinctive properties; the property of the soul is thought. The passions, a form of thought, are thus a product of the soul. Yet the passions are also evident in the physical reactions of the body, such as blushing: "what is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 239.

a passion in the soul is usually an action in the body”.<sup>37</sup> Of particular importance to Descartes is the primacy of our reason over the passions. He argues that “even those with the feeblest souls can acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them”.<sup>38</sup>

In the first volume of the *Fable*, the physiological character of the passions are not a central concern. The passions are fundamental to the human frame, according to Mandeville, who writes in the introduction that “I believe Man (besides Skin, Flesh, Bones, &c. that are obvious to the Eye) to be a compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no”.<sup>39</sup> Mandeville is opposed to Descartes’s insistence on the power of the will over the passions. In the first volume of the *Fable*, he does not elaborate on the mechanisms by which the passions affect us, but this issue is addressed in the *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711, 1730) and the second volume of the *Fable*. In the *Treatise*, which takes the form of a series of dialogues between the physician Philpirio and his patient Misomedon (with the late appearance of the latter’s wife, Polytheca), Mandeville explains his understanding of the ailment of hypochondria, which involves the interaction between soul and body:

*Phil.* If Matter cannot think, we may justly conclude, that we consist of a Soul and a Body. How they reciprocally work upon and affect one another, ‘tis true, we cannot tell, and whether the Soul be seated in some particular part of, or is diffus’d through all the Brain, the Blood, or the whole Body, is likewise not easie to be determined: But tho’ these things are mysterious to us, yet from the Experience we have of our Composition, and what every moment we may feel within ourselves, we can assert not only, that there must be an immediate Commerce between the Body and Soul; but likewise that the Action of Thinking in which all, that we know of the latter, consists, is to our certain Knowledge perform’d more in the Head than it is in the

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<sup>37</sup> CSM I, 328.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>39</sup> FBK I, 39.

Elbow or the Knee: From this we may further conclude, that the Soul acts not immediately upon Bone, Flesh, Blood, &c. nor they upon that, so there must be some exquisitely small Particles, that are the ... *Internucii* between them, by the help of which they manifest themselves to each other.<sup>40</sup>

Mandeville retains the crucial distinction between the mind and body and, although he equivocates on where exactly the mind is seated, he seems to accept that the head or the brain is the location confirmed by our experience. The animal spirits remain the mechanism by which the body and the soul interact. However, Mandeville disagrees with Descartes about the nature or function of the soul, the nature of the passions and even the mortality of the soul.

In the second dialogue of the *Treatise*, Mandeville clearly asserts that it is the function of the soul to think. However, in articulating this argument he modifies the Cartesian position by increasing the emphasis on the necessity of the corporeal body for the process of thinking:

*Phil.* I have asserted already that, the Soul consists in Thinking, of which Material is incapable, and do not say the Spirits that Think, but the Spirits that are employed in the Act of Thinking: We must consider the Soul as a skilful Artificer, whilst the Organs of the Body are her Tools; for as the Body and its most minute Spirits are wholly insignificant, and cannot perform that Operation, which we call Thinking, without the Soul, more than the Tools of an Artificer can do any thing without his Skill, so the Soul cannot exert her self without the Assistance of the Organick Body, more than the Artificer's Skill can be put in execution without the Tools.<sup>41</sup>

This position implies that the soul is mortal. Mandeville makes this implication explicit when he states that “it is utterly incomprehensible, that when the Body is dead Thought should remain” and “when we consider ... how absolutely necessary the Brain is, in the Act of Thinking ... it must be contradictory to human Reason, that any Part of Man should continue to think, when his body is dead and motionless”.<sup>42</sup> Postulating the

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<sup>40</sup> MT 3rd, 155-6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

mortality of the soul represents a major break from Descartes, for whom the immortality of the soul was an important and oft repeated theme. Moreover, as we have seen, the immortality of the soul had been established as dogma in 1513 by the Catholic Church and Christian philosophers were encouraged to prove it using the tools of reason.<sup>43</sup>

In Mandeville's formulation of the mind/body distinction in the *Treatise*, he adheres to the basic premise of Descartes's conception of the soul and body while abandoning Descartes's commitment to the immortality of the soul. This argument is elaborated upon and made explicit in the *Fable*. In an attempt to explain the origin of human "risibility" to Horatio, Mandeville's declared spokesman Cleomenes argues that while we know from experience that thoughts have an affect upon the body, "the Parts, the Instruments which that Operation is perform'd with, are so immensely far remote from our Senses, and the Swiftness of the Action is so prodigious, that it infinitely surpasses our Capacity to trace them".<sup>44</sup> Horatio asks flatly whether it is the soul that thinks and Cleomenes replies that "the Soul, whilst in the Body, cannot be said to think, otherwise than an Architect is said to build a House, where the Carpenters, Bricklayers, &c. do the Work, which he chalks out and superintends".<sup>45</sup> Cleomenes' assertion that the soul cannot think carries with it definite materialist implications. Thought arises from the conjunction of soul and body. The inference is that it is the function of the body to produce thoughts. In the passage from the *Treatise* quoted above, a distinction is made between whether the animal spirits produce thoughts or whether the animal spirits are themselves involved in the process of thought. Mandeville's argument retains the Cartesian notion of two substances and

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<sup>43</sup> CSM II, 4; Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88, and Michael, "Two Concepts of Mind," 3.

<sup>44</sup> FBK II, 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

assigns the power of thought to the mind but abandons the Cartesian argument for the immortality of the soul. This Cartesian claim is absent in the dialogue from the *Fable* quoted above. By making the process of thought dependent on the body, Mandeville elevates the importance of the animal spirits and makes explicit the materialist implication first found in the *Treatise*. In the *Fable* Mandeville denies that the soul is solely responsible for thought. Instead, the animal spirits become an integral element in thought's production.

In the second and third editions of the *Treatise* (both published in 1730, one year after the publication of the second volume of the *Fable*), there is an explicitly materialistic argument that is absent from the first edition of 1711. It appears that Mandeville introduced a passage into later editions of the *Treatise* in order to make it consistent with the *Fable*. In the first dialogue of the 1730 editions of the *Treatise*, the patient Misomedon makes an aggressive case for the possibility of thinking matter:

Yet this is a Frailty of Nature. For tho' we own our selves to be a Compound of Body as well as Soul, and the first is the only Part the Existence of which we are sure of, yet by the words, *I* and *we*, when we speak of our selves, and mean our own persons, *Socrates* tells in *Plato*, nothing is understood but the Soul. The Reason you'll tell me is because mere Matter cannot think. But this is *gratis dictum*; and tho' it has the Air of an unquestionable Axiom, yet it is built upon the falsest Supposition in the World, *viz.* That what we cannot comprehend is therefore impossible; for it could never have sprung from any other Origin, than our avow'd Incapacity of conceiving which way mere Matter should be made to think. When we have confess'd, what every body must be conscious of, that we are far from knowing all the Properties that may belong to Matter, is it, I beg of you, more easy to conceive that what is incorporeal should act upon the Body, & *vice versa*, than it is that Omnipotence should be able in such a manner to modify and dispose Matter, that without any other Assistance it should produce Thought and Consciousness? Nor is it clashing with Christianity to affirm, that we consist of nothing but what is corporeal, and that Man is wholly mortal. The Resurrection of the same Person (tho' we were only corporeal) must necessarily include the Restitution of Consciousness; and our firm Reliance on such a Resurrection, fully answers whatever Religion requires of us concerning the Belief of future Rewards and Punishments.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> MT 3rd, 50-1.

Mandeville appears to be drawing on a number of arguments for the compatibility of materialism and Christianity. In this passage, Mandeville echoes Locke's *Essay Concerning Understanding*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Coward's *Second Thoughts*.<sup>47</sup>

Mandeville asserts that neither reason nor religion militate against materialism. Rather, he claims that materialism conflicts with human self-love. Significantly, he contends that the doctrine of the immortal soul is the product of pride. In the first volume of the *Fable* we find a similar sentiment:

But we are all so desperately in Love with Flattery, that we can never relish a Truth that is mortifying, and I don't believe that the Immortality of the Soul, a Truth broach'd long before Christianity, would have ever found such a general Reception in human Capacities as it has, had it not been a pleasing one, that extoll'd and was a Compliment to the whole Species, the Meanest and most Miserable not excepted.<sup>48</sup>

In both the *Fable* as well as the later edition of the *Treatise*, Mandeville thus rejects the Cartesian conception of the soul presented in the first edition of the *Treatise*. The soul is deprived of its role in governing our thoughts. Instead, it is the physical processes of the body and the animal spirits which dictate our thoughts and produce the passions which, for Mandeville, ultimately govern us. In addition, he claims that the soul is not immortal and that the common belief in the immortal soul reflects human pride rather than the weight of empirical evidence.

#### IV

Why would Mandeville emphasize and maintain a more orthodox view in the *Treatise* and promote a more religiously suspect view in the *Fable*? One plausible explanation is that Mandeville felt compelled to circumvent British blasphemy laws such

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<sup>47</sup> See: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 542; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 303-305, and Coward, *Second Thoughts*, 172-85.

<sup>48</sup> FBK I, 230.

as the 1697 “Act for the more effectual suppressing of blasphemy and profaneness”, which carried the possibility of three years imprisonment. While the 1697 Act – specifically targeting anti-trinitarianism – omits any direct mention of atheism, it includes in its language prohibitions against denying that the “Christian Religion [is] true or [that] the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament ... be of Divine Authority”.<sup>49</sup>

Mandeville’s method of evading prosecution for blasphemy was to engage in an intentional piece of dissimulation. Placing controversial arguments in the mouth of his supposed interlocutor was a tactic that Mandeville regularly used in his work. In the preface to the second volume of the *Fable* Mandeville declares that “as it is supposed, that Cleomenes is my Friend, and speaks my Sentiments, so it is but Justice, that every Thing which he advances should be look’d upon and consider’d as my own; but no Man in his Senses would think, that I ought to be equally responsible for every Thing that Horatio says, who is his Antagonist”.<sup>50</sup> In a footnote to this passage, Kaye asserts that “this is a device by which Mandeville evades responsibility for unorthodox sentiments”.<sup>51</sup> We have already seen this stratagem of dissimulation at work in Cleomenes’ weak defence of the Biblical account of creation (see above, pp. 73-6).<sup>52</sup> Kaye argues that in such instances, “it is ... apparent that Mandeville has his tongue in his cheek and that Horatio is his real mouthpiece”.<sup>53</sup>

In the preface to the first edition of the *Treatise*, Mandeville makes a declaration about his spokesman similar to that found in the *Fable*:

<sup>49</sup> David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (London: Routledge, 1988), 35-6, 48-9; Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 36-7, and Act for the More Effectual Suppressing of Blasphemy and Profaneness, 1698, 9 Will. 3, c.35.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2n.

<sup>52</sup> FBK II, 21-2, 2n, 236-9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 2n.

In these Dialogues, I have done the same as *Seneca* did in his *Octavia*, and brought my self upon the Stage; with this difference, that he kept his own Name, and I changed mine for that of *Philopirio*, a Lover of Experience, which I shall always profess to be: Wherefore I desire my Reader to take whatever is spoke by the Person I named last, as said by my self; which I entreat him not to do with the Part of *Misomedon*, whom the better to illustrate his Distemper, I have made guilty of some extravagant Sallies, that in strictness I would not be accountable for.<sup>54</sup>

Although this statement is omitted from both the second and third editions it seems reasonable to read the distinction as applying to the later editions as well as the first. In the context of the strong materialist argument provided by Misomedon in the first dialogue of the later editions, it also seems plausible to read Mandeville's disavowal of Misomedon's ideas as indicative of dissimulation. That said, it is not certain that Mandeville was dissimulating and, indeed, Misomedon qualifies his argument in the second dialogue, stating: "yesterday I was in a gay and sprightly Humour; and when I have those Intervals of Ease, I am ... more pleas'd with Sallies of the Imagination and airy Flourishes, than grave Reasoning, and Solid Doctrine".<sup>55</sup> With the publication of the *Treatise*, Mandeville was under extra pressure to repudiate heterodox ideas; unlike the *Fable*, which appeared anonymously, the *Treatise* was published under Mandeville's name (see Figures 1 and 2 below, pp. 117-8). Although Mandeville's identity as the author of the *Fable* had been revealed in 1725 by George Bluet, while Mandeville was alive the *Fable* was published anonymously.<sup>56</sup> Mandeville's final defence of his system in the *Letter to Dion* was published anonymously as well, crediting "the Author of the Fable of the Bees". This suggests that Mandeville was reluctant to acknowledge his authorship of the *Fable* even if it was common knowledge.

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<sup>54</sup> MT, xi.

<sup>55</sup> MT 3rd, 155.

<sup>56</sup> J. Martin Stafford, "Introduction to *Letters to the Dublin Journal*," in *Private Vices, Publick Benefits? The Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville*, ed. J. Martin Stafford (Solihull, UK: Ismeron, 1997), 386.

Mandeville's discussion of the nature of the soul involved dissimulation in order to protect himself from the accusation of irreligion. It is reasonable to conclude that despite Mandeville's ambiguity regarding materialism in the *Treatise*, he included the disavowed materialist passage in the later editions of the *Treatise* to reconcile that text with the *Fable*. It follows that Mandeville was aligning himself consciously with a doctrine that was understood to be religiously suspect. Both Hobbes and Coward supplied scriptural passages in defence of their arguments against the immortality of the soul. Mandeville, by contrast, offers no such religious grounds and defends his materialist doctrine with the assertion that it is only our pride that allows us to maintain the belief that the soul persists after death. In examining Mandeville's understanding of the soul we again encounter an articulation of a thoroughly naturalistic and secular vision of the human condition.

Figure 1: Front matter from the first edition of the *Treatise* (1711).

A  
**TREATISE**  
 OF THE  
**HYPOCHONDRIACK**  
 AND  
**H Y S T E R I C K**  
**PASSIONS,**

Vulgarly call'd the **HYPŌ** in **MEN** and  
**VAPOURS** in **WOMEN**;

In which the **SYMPTOMS, CAUSES, and CURE**  
 of those **DISEASES** are set forth after a Method  
 intirely new.

The whole interspers'd, with Instructive Discourses  
 ON THE  
**Real ART of PHYSICK** it self;  
 And Entertaining Remarks on the Modern Practice  
 OF  
**PHYSICIANS**  
 AND  
**APOTHECARIES:**

Very useful to all, that have the Misfortune to stand in  
 need of either. In Three Dialogues.

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By **B. DE MANDEVILLE, M. D.**

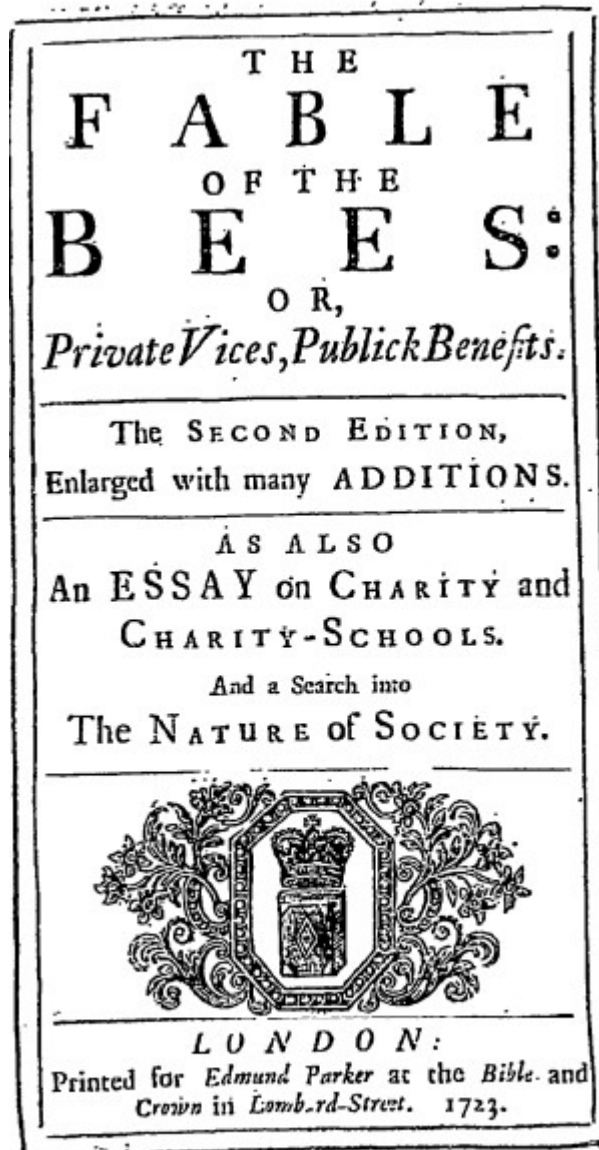
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*Scire potestates herbarum, usurque medendi  
 Malsuit, & Mutas agitare inglorius artes.  
 Æneid. Lib. XII.*

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**LONDON:** Printed and Sold by *Dryden Leach*, in *Elliot's*  
*Court*, in the *Little-Old-Baily*, and *W. Taylor*, at the *Ship*  
 in *Pater-Noster-Row*. 1711.

Figure 2: Front-matter from the second edition of the *Fable* (1723). Note that unlike the *Treatise*, the *Fable* is published anonymously. This is true of both the first edition of the first volume and the second volume of the *Fable*.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Despite Mandeville's protests to the contrary, his critics were justified in doubting that the author of the *Fable* was a genuine Christian. Mandeville's constant appeal to natural processes and his naturalistic explanation of the origins of human sociability indicate that he was a thinker who did not fully accept the religious doctrines of Christianity. He believed that our world is governed by natural forces, and his exploration of these forces is rife with implications of unbelief. His religious arguments are either weak, clearly satirical or patently insincere. Though Mandeville is consistently and explicitly careful to present himself as affirming the truth and value of religion, his affirmations are quickly undermined by his own arguments. Within sentences or pages of his forays into orthodoxy, he can be found seeming to wink at his religious defences, creating the distinct impression that his prayers must have been mumbled with a tongue firmly in his cheek.

When we look into the lives and beliefs of early modern Europeans to ask if they were unbelievers or atheists there are two general approaches to the question. First, we can ask what these terms mean to us in the present. Second, we can ask what atheism and unbelief meant to the subjects we are studying. The first approach, despite the inherent danger of teleological reasoning and anachronism, offers a number of important insights.

Presently atheism is generally understood to indicate the reasoned disbelief in the existence of God. A slew of other philosophical and ideological doctrines may flow from atheism – such as the value of church/state separation or a woman's right to bodily autonomy – but atheism is not a necessary precondition for these ideological commitments. Secularism and civil rights are, however, fundamental to the rise of

modern secular society. Secularization is a recent and dramatic phenomenon, its character highly contested by historians, philosophers and sociologists. The role of active unbelievers in this process is similarly open to debate.<sup>1</sup> Atheism and secularization may, historically, be considered as separate topics for investigation. But the use of the modern definition of atheism might allow for the exploration of atheism's historical role in the process of secularization.

We might, however, prefer to explore atheism's development as a subject in its own right. Alan Kors pursued this latter avenue of investigation in his *Atheism in France*. Taking the modern definition of atheism as his guide, he tracked the emergence of modern atheism from the religious and philosophical controversies among the orthodox in seventeenth-century France.<sup>2</sup> My discussion of Mandeville has focused primarily on his secularism rather than on the nature of his atheism. It has proven more useful to demonstrate how Mandeville's unbelief manifested itself as an exploration of a secular vision of nature and society than to define Mandeville's unbelief as a term within a broader category. Clearly, Mandeville's thought does not fit within our modern understanding of the term "atheism". He evinces no explicit rejection of the idea of God. Furthermore, Mandeville held that institutional religion is a useful mechanism for the maintenance of social control – a concept that was common among early-modern unbelievers but that has been abandoned by modern atheists.

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<sup>1</sup> For a valuable discussion of the problem of secularization in Britain see Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). Brown argues that the secularization thesis concerning the nineteenth century is utterly incorrect. He locates secularization within changes in conceptions of womanhood and women's social roles from the 1960s onward. Brown is currently working on material, as yet unpublished, concerning the character of today's secular society and the decline of religion through passive lack of interest rather than at the hands of radical secularists. He calls our society 'the people of no religion'.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729: The Orthodox Sources of Unbelief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 135-296.

Mandeville's doctrines, satirical jabs and obfuscatory digressions are certainly indicative of a sceptical and critical stance concerning faith. However, we cannot say with certainty that his religious scepticism took the form of a reasoned and avowed disbelief in the existence of God. To make such a claim would be to leap far beyond the evidence that Mandeville left us. Consequently, from the modern perspective of atheism and secularism he appears to be a sceptical satirist of religion, deeply implicated in discourses of unbelief but not fully able or willing to articulate a total disbelief in the existence of God. Mandeville's inclusion among the deists remains the most appropriate categorization. This is one of the primary reasons why my discussion of Mandeville has occurred largely within the context of unbelief rather than atheism.

As we saw in Chapter 1, authors such as Carlo Ginzburg and David Wootton have approached the phenomenon of unbelief via their interest in the multifaceted historical definitions and usages of the term "atheism". Such an approach conceives of unbelief and heterodoxy from a perspective that values the various manifestations of unbelief independent of those traditions that contributed more directly to the modern form of atheism. The miller Menocchio's cosmogony appears to be a world apart from the atomism articulated by later formally-educated materialists. However, in the concluding chapters of the *Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg tries to show how Menocchio's heterodoxy may have been familiar, and even shared by his fellow villagers, as well as how his heterodoxy may have been influenced by contact with members of the formally educated cultural elite.<sup>3</sup> How ideas were transmitted from or between Europe's pre-industrial classes is uncertain, and in Menocchio's case some ideas may indeed have been

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<sup>3</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tadeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 117-26,

transmitted to him by cultural superiors, but his articulation of those ideas was uniquely steeped in the world-view of the peasantry. Regardless of how Menocchio accessed or developed his ideas, the profoundly anti-Christian implications of his world view is evidenced by his declaration that the orthodox conception of God was “a betrayal on the part of Scripture to deceive us”.<sup>4</sup> However far Menocchio’s vision of the world may have been from atheism, he is certainly a figure of deep value to our understanding of the nature of unbelief in the past.

Recognizing that atheism did not mean for our predecessors what it means for us involves acknowledging that the presence of the word in a given discourse poses problems of interpretation. It is difficult to understand the significance of accusations of atheism because such accusations could carry purely abusive connotations. Febvre addresses this problem in his discussion of sixteenth-century atheism. Mandeville appears to have identified the same dynamic, evident in his definition of atheism in the *Free Thoughts*.<sup>5</sup> Approaching unbelief as an historically contingent set of parameters necessitates an engagement with how the term was used by both accusers and accused. Without a doubt, Mandeville was an atheist by the standards of his early eighteenth-century contemporaries. His vision of social morality was too divorced from Christianity for him to be otherwise in the minds of the majority of his critics. It is in relation to this fact that we should recall the distinction between practical and speculative atheism. It seems most appropriate within the context of the history of unbelief to understand Mandeville as a practical atheist. The utilitarian social arrangement he advocated was, in practical terms, unconcerned with the Christian economy of divine rewards and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 56-68.

<sup>5</sup> Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 131-46, and FT, 1-17.

punishments. This rejection of Providence is the most suggestive evidence for attributing speculative atheism to Mandeville. However, the rejection of Providence is not enough to establish concretely that Mandeville fully disavowed God's existence. As such, non-Providential deist or practical atheist are the appellations most befitting the religious identity Mandeville presents to us in his work. God is everywhere in the *Fable*, the *Free Thoughts* and the *Treatise*, but remains an empty category in Mandeville's philosophy.

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