Mandeville offers an evolutionary explanation of norms that pivots on the power of praise to affect individuals. Yet this sort of account is not mentioned by Hume or Ferguson, and only indirectly noted by Smith. Nonetheless, there are various similarities in the thought of Mandeville and these philosophers. After delineating some resemblances, the essay takes up the objection Hume poses to Mandeville: praise fails to motivate if individuals take no pride in moral conduct. To this challenge there is a Mandevillean response that emphasizes how, in the evolutionary emergence of norms, the original praise need not be understood in moral terms.

Key Terms: evolution, normativity, praise, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith

INTRODUCTION

Bernard Mandeville achieved notoriety for defending what his contemporaries viewed as a selfish account of human conduct. Not only did they regard Mandeville as painting an egoistic portrait of human nature but they typically understood his conjectural history of society to reduce morality to an artificial creation of politicians. However, Mandeville’s appeal to the politicians may also be understood, as in the second volume of The Fable of the Bees, as an explanation less of the acts of specific legislators than of the slow, piecemeal evolutionary
emergence of social norms and institutions. Without doubt, Mandeville’s purported egoism and his appeal to political artifice would animate and antagonize a host of eighteenth-century thinkers, including Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith. Hume would challenge Mandeville’s appeal to the arts of politicians, but only Smith would recognize the evolutionary element in Mandeville’s thought. Whether the ‘politician’ is understood literally (as a specific legislator), or more metaphorically (for example, as the ‘joint Experience of many Ages,’ in Mandeville 1988: II, 141), the idea that morality might be created, as artifice, motivates a fundamental criticism from Hume: If flattery is to affect an individual in the sense that it will motivate her to act morally, then the person must take pride in acting in cooperative and sociable ways; however, a theory (such as Mandeville’s) that seems to posit a fundamental psychological egoism could scarcely explain such pride. Hume’s challenge raises a larger issue: Are there resources in Mandeville’s work that could provide the basis for a response to Hume’s challenge? In contradistinction to the literalist interpretation of the ‘politician,’ can Mandeville’s conjectural history of society, as an account of the evolutionary progression of norms, techniques and institutions, yield a plausible response to Hume’s query?

In this essay, I address this question and point out that Hume’s challenge seems to neglect the manner in which Mandeville’s history of morals offers an evolutionary account of how normativity—normative practices and standards of judgment—arise. In the first section I set forth a summary of Mandeville’s conjectural account, distinguishing his evolutionary approach from one that relies on intentional acts of specific politicians. In section II, I revisit how Mandeville’s ideas may have influenced and affected the outlooks of Hume, Ferguson, and Smith, pointing out that Mandeville’s evolutionary account is not mentioned by these philosophers except in so far as Smith refers the reader to volume II of the *Fable*. In the third section, I set forth Hume’s challenge to Mandeville, and I follow that, in section IV, with a reconstruction of the basic structure of a Mandevillean response.

I. AN EVOLUTIONARY ACCOUNT OF MORALS

Mandeville offers an account of morality that has several faces. There is first his ‘rigoristic’ definition of virtue. By this definition virtue requires that one act contrary to an appetite or passion in order to benefit others out of a rational intention. However, it is also by this definition that virtue is so rare, if not impossible. Indeed, given this rigoristic standard of virtue, most (if not all) actions are motivated by vice. But despite these vicious motivations our conduct may nonetheless conform, generally or for the most part, to the types of behavior

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consistent with conduct which would be performed if we were genuinely virtuous. So in addition to the definition of virtue there exists the practice of a kind of virtue which, though not fulfilling the rigorist definition, is nonetheless sufficient to ensure the functioning of society – the peaceable (or sociable) cooperation among individuals.

The important commonality between definition and practice is that they are the product of the efforts of ‘Politicians.’ It is the ‘Politicians,’ says Mandeville, who sire virtue by employing praise and flattery to elicit and maintain practices which, if not genuinely moral, are nonetheless sufficiently normative to allow society to function and prosper. Through the efforts of politicians individuals are coaxed into forms of conduct that are cooperative and other-regarding, and these same politicians encapsulate these standards into a language definitive of virtue as self-denying and rational.

This brief summary obscures, however, an important distinction. In his early essay, An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue (1714), Mandeville seems to ascribe a role to ‘politicians’ who, as specific governing individuals, divide the population into two classes, one exemplifying high-minded reason, the other manifesting the low appetites typical of animals. The politicians praise the higher class for their seeming capacity to restrain appetites, just as they urge the lower class to reign in their passions so as not to be brutish. Playing one group against the other, the politicians gradually expand the higher class, thereby enlarging the number of practitioners of virtue so as to ultimately inculcate virtue across the population.

However, in subsequent works, particularly the second volume of the Fable of the Bees, 1728, Mandeville sets forth a theory of society in which the ‘Politicians’ may be understood metaphorically rather than literally. In this second theory, which I refer to as ‘evolutionary,’ norms and normative practices arise out of the piecemeal accumulation of individual acts undertaken, in part, as a response to the praise and flattery of a myriad of individuals acting across time and within a variety of circumstances. Mandeville stipulates explicitly that one may distinguish, ‘the Philosophical Reason of the Alterations, that are made in the Behaviour of Men, by their being civiliz’d: but all this is done without reflection, and Men by degrees, and great Length of Time, fall as it were into these Things spontaneously’ (II, 139). Some commentators contend that Mandeville’s appeal to the politician should, in general, be understood as a metaphor for piecemeal evolution. In this evolutionary and conjectural account, society emerges out of families, then alliances take place across families, and then with the advent of writing, law and government emerge. With the institution of government there is greater interaction among individuals and as this occurs additional normative practices result, including expectations concerning conduct and its evaluative standards. As individuals interact, then so will normative practices emerge that
would seem to conform, at least in part, to the morality encapsulated in the definition of virtue.

How do these practices emerge? Given that basic rudiments of sociability are acquired in family life (II, 201–4), then self-regarding individuals will either redirect their conduct out of self-love, understood primarily as self-preservation or self-interest or they will require an incentive to do so, namely, the praise of others. Because of our self-liking—the natural tendency to overvalue the self and to desire the approval of others—the praise of others proves hard to resist. So spectators will deploy praise or flattery in order to alter a person’s set of options: ‘The Greediness we have after the Esteem of others and the Raptures we enjoy in the Thoughts of being liked and perhaps admired, are Equivalents that overpay the Conquest of the strongest Passions’ (I, 68). Flattery appeals to our desire for esteem: ‘It is this that makes us so fond of the Approbation, Liking and Assent of others’ (II, 130). Flattery comes at little cost to the flatterer (I, 42), so as praise is iterated across interactions and circumstances, predictable expectations arise as to the kinds of conduct that will elicit praise or blame in specific sorts of circumstances.

Mandeville’s overall explanation is a version of an invisible-hand explanation with functionalist attributes. Across society, particular acts aggregate into patterns and crystallize, thereby, into normative habits of action and expectation that fulfill the desires of individuals for cooperative behavior from others. This process occurs less through the directives of specific individuals (the ‘Politicians’) than through ‘the joynt Labour of several Ages’ (II, 321–2). Of course, the practices that Mandeville describes—politeness, sociability, benevolence, honor—do not conform fully to the rational and ‘rigoristic’ virtue that he purports to embrace. By the rigorous definition one acts virtuously when one acts against a passion, in order to benefit others, and out of a ‘Rational Ambition’ to be good. The evolutionary Mandeville, of volume II of the Fable, focuses, rather, on norms that manifest how our conduct becomes ‘civiliz’d … without reflection, [so that] Men by degrees and great Length of Time, fall as it were into these Things spontaneously’ (II, 139).

It remains an open question as to whether any of the eighteenth-century Scots regarded seriously Mandeville’s evolutionary history. It is well-known, of course, that Scottish thinkers embraced the idea of natural (and conjectural) history with its companion notion of the unintended emergence of norms and institutions. There are similarities among and between their historical perspectives and that of Mandeville. To some of these (Hume, Ferguson, and Smith) we turn now, proceeding subsequently to take up Hume’s challenge: how could the evolution that Mandeville sets forth produce genuine normativity?
II. MANDEVILLE’S EVOLUTIONARY OUTLOOK – RECEIVING NEITHER PRAISE OR FLATTERY

The second volume of The Fable did not appear until 1728 and by then Mandeville had acquired a notoriety that would prevail against any interest in the power of his ideas. Most of his many critics focus on his poem (‘The Grumbling Hive’, 1705, 1714) and his subsequent remarks (1714 and 1723), along with An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue (1714) and An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools (1723). As has been pointed out, Mandeville’s theory of the politicians as literal artificers of morality is one that is persistently challenged. One of the first to attack Mandeville was William Law who focuses entirely on the Enquiry. Law recognizes that Mandeville proposes a ‘System’: man emerges from a natural state and with a division of the population into classes politicians deploy flattery to bring about virtuous behavior. But, Law contends, this account is incompatible with scripture and with the nature of morality, whose propositions are apprehensible to our rational faculties and rendered obligatory by the will of God.

It is not easy to locate any eighteenth-century thinker who engages Mandeville’s more explicit evolutionary theory. It would seem doubtful that later thinkers simply read and rejected Mandeville’s evolutionism, for if they did so reject it then why would they not mention that in their critical attacks? Even if many attacks, such as those of Law, Robert Burrow, Richard Fiddes, John Dennis, or George Bluet appear prior to the publication of volume II of The Fable, this would not hold of Hume, Ferguson, or Smith. Yet as each of these three philosophers incorporates into his social or moral theory a semblance of a conjectural history, only Smith refers to the second volume, thereby indicating explicitly his own acquaintance with Mandeville’s various appeals to the emergence over time of norms, knowledge, and techniques.

In Hume’s case he takes up questions of self-love (Hume 1978: 480; 2000: 3.2.1.10) and seeks to counter Mandeville’s egoism (Hume 1978: 486; 2000: 3.2.2.5), just as he also recognizes the role of the family in socializing individuals (Hume 1978: 486; 2000: 3.2.2.4) along with the power of pride and reputation (Hume 1978: 501; 2000: 3.2.2.27). It is Hume’s conjectural history of the gradual emergence of conventions of justice, as well as his account of the general or impartial point of view, that manifest his interest in how institutions and rules might arise in an unintended fashion. In his account of the origins of the justice, Hume remarks that a rule of property ‘arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it’ (Hume 1978: 490; 2000: 3.2.2.10). He adds that this account must ‘only suppose those reflexions to be form’d at once, which in fact arise insensibly and by degrees’ (Hume 1978: 503; 2000: 3.2.3.4). Indeed, just as Mandeville draws a distinction between a philosophical reason (as noted above, p. 97), so
does Hume distinguish a speculative reason from its actual mode of production: ‘speculative reasonings . . . are often form’d by the world naturally, and without reflection’ (Hume 1978: 572; 2000: 3.2.12.7). The idea that conventions of justice, as other artificial virtues, might accumulate over time, from the aggregation of discrete actions, bears comparison to Mandeville’s appeals to the ‘joynt Labour of many Ages’ (II, 128; or see II, 139, 141, 187, 319, 322 for similar allusions). And when Hume concludes his account of these rules of justice he makes clear, almost as Mandeville would have, that the ‘system . . . is of course advantageous to the public; tho’ it be not intended for that purpose by the inventors’ (Hume 1978: 529; 2000: 3.2.6.6). Moreover, when Hume takes up the question of the correction of moral judgments (rendered partial through the operation of sympathy) his terms, often redolent of the language employed in his account of justice, point to an on-going process of social and economic interaction from which emerges a stable but general (impartial) point of view to amend the partialities and vagaries of sympathetic communication. When Hume explains that, ‘The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners’ (Hume 1978: 603; 2000: 3.3.3.2), one is reminded of Mandeville’s use of these terms, ‘commerce’ and ‘conversation’ in the second volume of The Fable. Indeed, as early as volume I, Mandeville admits that our sentiments may need correction when the objects that typically generate these feelings are distant.

These striking similarities between Mandeville and Hume might suggest influence either in the sense that Mandeville’s considerations affected Hume’s thinking or that they lent support to a mode of thought that Hume was ready to advance. However, it is not only Mandeville who set forth claims of the unintended and slow emergence of rules and institutions. As David Allan has recently pointed out there already reigned a significant heritage of Scottish historical study that had sought to illuminate the underlying causes of historical events and transitions, taking into account the role of unforeseen fortune. Along with this inheritance there is the work of Vico, as well as the arguments of the English Common Lawyers (Sir John Davies, Edward Coke and Matthew Hale) in whose writings one may discern the rudiments of a theory of the gradual emergence of customary practices. So even if Mandeville is an influence, he is not unique. Nonetheless, one could assume, with Mikko Tolenen, that Hume had read volume II of The Fable, but when Hume makes (tacit) reference to Mandeville, he refers to the ‘artifice of politicians’ (Hume 1978: 500; 2000: 3.2.2.25) without any explanation as to who these politicians might be. Hume gives no indication that these ‘politicians’ might be anonymous individuals interacting in a multitude of circumstances, in different ages and epochs. One may agree, therefore, that there are notable similarities between Mandeville and

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Hume without, however, coming to the conclusion that he was the thinker who ‘made Hume possible’.\(^{22}\)

If we turn to Adam Ferguson’s work, in particular, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, we find other affinities to Mandeville’s evolutionism, even though Ferguson (like Hume) does not mention Mandeville’s various appeals to the ‘joynit Labour of many Ages’. Both Mandeville and Ferguson embark on a natural history of society that employs assumptions of the unintended and gradual evolution of social and moral institutions. In the first sentence of his Essay, Ferguson states, ‘Natural productions are generally formed by degrees’,\(^{23}\) a statement that refers as much to the creations of human beings in society as it does to the growth of plants or animals. Mandeville also characterizes the development of society in terms of degrees: ‘Men by degrees, and great Length of Time, fall as it were into these Things spontaneously’ (II, 139). And just as Mandeville concludes, ‘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’ (II, 142), so does Ferguson profess, ‘In accounting for actions we often forget that we ourselves have acted; and instead of the sentiments which stimulate the mind in the presence of its object, we assign as the motives of conduct with men, those considerations which occur in the hours of retirement and cold reflection’ (Ferguson 1995a: 22). Mandeville finds each human to have a ‘perpetual Desire of meliorating his Condition’ (II, 180), a feature remarked, variously, by Ferguson in his appeals to an original propensity for improvement (Ferguson 1995a: 13 and 204), a characteristic he later describes as ‘ambition’,\(^ {24}\) and a quality noted by Adam Smith throughout his two great works.

However, it is in Ferguson’s varying appeals to the unintended and slow emergence of institutions and patterns that we find a similarity to Mandeville. Ferguson maintains, as does Mandeville, that there is a piecemeal accumulation of successive improvements in the arts and sciences.\(^ {25}\) When Ferguson turns to consider the history of language, in the *Principles*, he appeals, as Mandeville does, to natural expressions as the primordial basis of language (II, 286). The development of language is not owed to the ‘special exertion of one or a few ingenious men’ but is the accomplishment of ‘a succession of ages… [and] appears so much above what could be ascribed to any simultaneous effort of the most sublime and comprehensive abilities’.\(^ {26}\) Even beyond the appeal to language, there is in Ferguson the basic framework of an evolution of morals, even if in Ferguson’s case there exists a prior and natural moral disposition or set of passions that can be developed more specifically.\(^ {27}\) Unlike Mandeville, whose appeal to flattery and praise constitutes a kind of coordinating mechanism by which uniform patterns of conduct emerge, Ferguson appeals to contingent elements such as propensities to improvement, as well as those of communication and imitation, conflict and opposition, and habit.\(^ {28}\)
The various affinities between Ferguson and Mandeville do not, in themselves, demonstrate any influence of Mandeville on Ferguson, at least not from the evolutionary passages in volume II of The Fable. Even though Ferguson’s appeals to slow evolution bear comparison to Mandeville’s speculations, Ferguson makes no mention of Mandeville’s thought on these matters. In fact, even in his criticisms Ferguson hardly mentions Mandeville by name (for example, Ferguson 1995a: 36–7). If we are to find any such explicit notice of volume II of the Fable, we must turn to Adam Smith.

Smith was no doubt challenged by Mandeville’s overall thought. It is not for nothing that the Theory of Moral Sentiments begins: ‘How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others’ (Smith 1982: I.i.I.1). When he introduces his distinction between the desire for praise and the desire to be praise-worthy (Smith 1982: III.2.1) Smith quite likely has Mandeville in mind (as indicated in Smith 1982: III.2.27, though earlier editions of the Moral Sentiments would have also included La Rochefoucauld as a target). Similar to Mandeville, Smith also fixes our intentions in the particular and local rather than the grand (Smith 1982: VI.i.2.4).

However, one of the primary ways in which Mandeville’s thought affects and disturbs Smith is that Mandeville recognizes the power of self-love to distort our perception of self and world. In the first volume Mandeville employs this term to various purposes, one of which is to show that self-love involves an ‘immoderate’ affection for the self, includes a desire to have others think well of us, and constitutes the basis of our passions (Mandeville 1988: I, 82, 67, and 75, respectively). Out of this affection for self arises a difficulty in judging accurately both the self and the world: Self-love engages in ‘secret Strategems’ (I, 230) and easily becomes, as in volume II, a pride that ‘blinds the Understanding’ (II, 79) or a ‘Sorcerer’ (II, 96). Self-love becomes not simply an affection for self and a desire to have that affection reciprocated but a disposition that affects our perception (II, 112). By the third dialogue of volume II, Mandeville has distinguished self-love and self-liking, treating the former as self-preservation and the latter as the overreaching esteem for self. It is through self-liking that we seek the praise of others. However, it is that earlier sense of self-love (as a disposition that moves us beyond self-preservation) that Mandeville comes to treat as ‘self-liking’. Mandeville’s summary admission that one tends to ‘look upon every thing as centring in himself’ (II, 271) forehadows and, presumably, reinforces Smith’s understanding of self-love. In the Moral Sentiments and in the Wealth of Nations, one discerns an implicit distinction among three related concepts: self-preservation (the desire to live and maintain one’s health), self-interest (a calculative desire to secure or gain economically valuable goods), and self-love. Smith’s conception of self-love, which owes much to the Augustinian or Jansenist perspectives as adumbrated by La Rochefoucauld, as well as Pierre Nicole, among others, is less a motive than...
a cognitive function by which we tend to overvalue ourselves and to perceive the 
world in relation to self.32

Concerned about the potent power of self-love, Smith also believes that the 
interaction of individuals in society, and the emergence of an impartial spectator, 
may counter the impulses of self-love. Smith delineates a social science of morals 
in which the moral standard of the impartial spectator emerges over time via the 
sympathetic interaction of individuals.33 That Smith elaborates such a science of 
morals may be related to how he is also the only notable thinker to recognize 
explicitly how Mandeville continued to write after his Enquiry into the Origin of 
Morals. In a letter to the Edinburgh Review (1755), in his account of Rousseau’s 
Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Smith points out,

> Whoever reads this work with attention, will observe, that the second volume 
of the Fable of the Bees, has given occasion to the system of Mr. Rousseau 
in whom however the principles of the English author are softened, improved 
and embellished, and stript of all that tendency to corruption and licentiousness 
which has disgraced them in the original author.34

Smith suggests that the tenets of volume II have in some way inspired the work 
of Rousseau, though Smith does not specifically remark the competing histories 
of the development of society. Despite this recognition of the second volume, 
Smith does not take up in any explicit way the evolutionism apparent in that 
work. In part VII of the Moral Sentiments, when Smith turns to ‘licentious 
systems’ his concern is not slow or gradual change, but Mandeville’s denial 
of any real distinction between vice and virtue. Nor do we find any mention 
of Mandeville’s evolutionary considerations in either the Wealth of Nations or 
Lectures on Justice.35 Smith clearly recognizes the power of Mandeville’s ideas 
but he does not confront or engage Mandeville’s evolutionism.

### III. Hume’s Challenge

The contemporaries who criticize Mandeville focus often on the role of lawgivers 
and politicians, interpreting these in a literal way, consonant with Mandeville’s 
presentation in volume I of The Fable.36 In so doing, several critics discern a 
peculiar problem for Mandeville’s theory of the genesis of morals: If individuals 
are basically egoistic and take no pride in acting cooperatively, then how could 
praise or flattery ever affect them so that they act in non-egoistic and cooperative 
ways? In other words, if praise is to affect self-liking, then it must direct attention 
to something about the self; however, unless an agent already takes pride in acting 
cooperatively, then any praise of the agent’s cooperative action would fail to affect 
him! Hume raise this sort of objection, but he was not the first. Before turning to

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Hume’s challenge, it is worth recording the objection set forth by William Law. In 1724 Law points out, pithily, that genuine moral virtue is analogous to seeing and hearing: ‘Had there ever been a Time, when there was nothing of it [virtue] in the World, it could no more have been introduc’d than the Faculties of Seeing and Hearing could have been contriv’d by Men, who were blind and deaf’.37

In his Treatise, having drawn his distinction between self-interest as the ‘original motive’ to the conventions of justice and sympathy as the ‘source of the moral approbation’ of justice, Hume notes that the ‘progress of the sentiments’ is ‘natural,’ even as it may be encouraged by politicians. Hume then expresses his worry:

nothing can be more evident, than that the matter has been carry’d too far by certain writers on morals, who seem to have employ’d their utmost efforts to extirpate all sense of virtue from among mankind. Any artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which she suggests to us, and may even on some occasions, produce alone an approbation or esteem for any particular action; but ‘tis impossible it should be the sole cause of the distinction we make betwixt vice and virtue. For if nature did not aid us in this particular, ‘twou’d be in vain for politicians to talk of honourable or dishonourable, praiseworthy or blameable. These words wou’d be perfectly unintelligible, and wou’d no more have any idea annex’d to them, than if they were of a tongue perfectly unknown to us. The utmost politicians can perform, is, to extend the natural sentiments beyond their original bounds; but still nature must furnish the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions (Hume 1978: 500; 2000: 3.2.2.25).

Hume’s general point is that unless there is some natural disposition to morality – a particular sentiment which when filtered through the general point of view becomes a moral sentiment – then the praise of politicians will find no anchor. For Mandeville, of course, there is no such anchor, no natural or original disposition to be moral – all virtue is artificial.38

How should we understand the notion of ‘intelligibility’ in which Hume sets forth his challenge? It would be a mistake to construe ‘intelligibility’ merely in terms of informational content, as if Hume were merely making a point about whether some phrase were gibberish. The kind of intelligibility relevant to (Humean) moral content is not merely informational. As Hume makes abundantly clear, ‘Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions’ (Hume 1978: 457; 2000: 3.1.1.6), so at least one element of the intelligibility of morals must be motivational capacity. In other words, the intelligibility of moral praise must at least include (perhaps among other elements that together constitute intelligibility) that the praise has some motivational force, some influence on the agent.39 For example, the praise or blame of spectators (or politicians) will
include moral terms of right and wrong, good and bad, but these terms will have no influence unless the agent has the capacity to respond in a manner consonant or consistent with the directive of the moral terms. In other words, an agent who is told that he ought to do X will find this injunction compelling, influential, or motivating only if the agent is also disposed to think that the doing of X is to some degree something that should be done. Hume then contends that there must be a sentiment—an impression of reflection—that inclines the human being in the direction of these moral concepts.

Hume takes for granted that if there is no natural or original moral sentiment, then there is no moral virtue. However, even if it is true that moral terms require some kind of moral disposition (sentiment), that fact does not preclude such a disposition developing over time, even out of a non-moral set of acts. This claim might seem fantastic, but we should not forget Mandeville’s assurance that ‘a most beautiful Superstructure may be rais’d upon a rotten and despicable Foundation’ (II, 64). Nor should we omit mention that the very sociability of an individual is, for Mandeville, not a single quality but a compound emergent only after interaction with others. It is in this sense that ‘Nature had design’d Man for Society, as she has made Grapes for Wine’ (II, 185). Under the right conditions grapes may be rendered so as to taste and to affect in ways distinct from the fruit as found on the vine. Similarly, Mandeville might be suggesting that individuals may come to achieve normative standards and dispositions even if these differ from the qualities out of which these morals arise.

An analogy may illustrate further the problem Hume has raised and the possibility of a Mandevillean response. For Hume, the idea of necessary connection must derive from an impression; however, there is no sensory impression of such connection, only the regular contiguity and precedence of cause to effect. Without any such impression, how can we have the idea of necessary connection? Hume suggests that even though the idea of necessary connection is an idea about sensory objects, the relevant impression need not be sensory. The impression that gives rise to the idea of necessary connection is born of repeated instances in which one object is correlated with another. These habituated cases generate in the mind ‘a determination . . . to pass from one object to its usual attendant and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation’ (Hume 1978: 165; 2000: 1.3.14.20). Might not this account bear analogy to the problem facing Mandeville? Hume says that if there is no original moral sentiment, then there is no moral disposition in which to anchor moral praise. But just as our judgments of the necessary connection of one sensory object to another relies on no sensory impression of these objects, only an impression of reflection that arises out of custom and habit, so might a moral disposition arise out of some sequence of acts which if taken singly or in isolation would reveal no moral quality whatsoever. Just as Hume’s customary conjunction might generate an impression of reflexion in the mind (that we imaginatively extend to objects),
so might the repeated performance or expectation of some action generate, as wine from grapes, a normative disposition that finds in moral praise a more, shall we say, intoxicating influence that moves agents and spectators as one would expect of normative concepts and ideas. The morality that arises is the ‘Superstructure’ that is grounded in a ‘rotten and despicable Foundation’. Such a structure would be an emergent and supervenient quality whose normativity remains distinct from its genesis in self-liking.

A construal such as this would be consistent with Mandeville’s (ostensible) attachment to a rigoristic doctrine of virtue and to his thesis of the evolutionary development of everyday norms of sociability. But could any sort of normative disposition arise out of acts of flattery and praise, especially if these acts originate out of self-liking? To consider a response we turn, in part, to the second volume of The Fable and consider, albeit briefly, the nature of praise, as well as Mandeville’s view of language. There is a Mandevillean basis for responding to Hume’s challenge and its structure may be outlined, even if the details remain as a speculative exercise not to be undertaken here.

IV. A MANDEVILLEAN RESPONSE

In setting forth a putatively Mandevillean response I adopt the view that the conspiratorial and the evolutionary histories are compatible. In other words, the literal and metaphorical interpretations of ‘politicians’ may be combined (moreover, it is not a foregone conclusion that Mandeville’s appeal to evolutionary progress is meant to correct his earlier appeal to the work of literal politicians). More particularly yet, much of what Mandeville asserts about the role of the politician (understood literally) may be employed more generally to indicate how praise and flattery might affect individuals, even when the praise originates from anonymous others, as a product of ‘the joynct Labour of several Ages’. In fact, the praise that politicians and others deploy suggests less that they are issuing moral accolades than that they are including persons into a preferred group, or accepting or supporting them either for what they do or because they have constrained some manifestation of self-liking. This feature of ‘praise’, as non-moral, establishes the grounds for a Mandevillean response to Hume’s challenge.

In his earlier work (volume I of The Fable) Mandeville’s description of the role of the politicians suggests that the sort of praise that they provide is of an indirect sort. Instead of praising (or condemning) one’s act as moral or virtuous (vicious), the politicians attribute the act to a certain group to which one would wish to belong (or not). For example, in An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue Mandeville relates how certain acts are ascribed to human beings rather than animals and that the politicians categorize a certain class of actions as human rather than animalian. Acts are praised not for their moral content but for how they
represent specifically human qualities such as reason: the Politicians ‘extoll’d the Excellency of our Nature above other Animals’, and they praised ‘our Sagacity and Vastness of Understanding’, as well as the ‘Rationality of our Souls’ (I, 43). Only after they ‘insinuated themselves into the Hearts of Men’ did the Politicians instruct us in ‘Notions of Honour and Shame’, but these concepts were linked with pride in being human rather than animal (I, 43). To further their aims, the Politicians divided the population into classes, with some – deemed ‘abject, low-minded’ – who live only by appetite and differ from ‘Brutes’ by external aspect alone. Therefore, in its earliest stages we may assume that the praise and flattery invoked by the politicians has no moral meaning that would require a moral sentiment or disposition. Rather, in this context ‘praise’ refers to acts linked with or emblematic of a preferred group or class.

In other examples Mandeville refers to how a person may be praised for the town he is from, or as a means of commending the person’s learning, profession or nation. These examples too can be understood as non-moral: the terms recommend conduct because it is associated with a preferred group. Mandeville extends an illustration with the example of a young girl learning to curtsy: even if the curtsy itself is praised as ‘delicate’ the girl is lauded for being ‘pretty’ or for doing something better than her sister. Or consider the case of a young boy who is told not to be like ‘Beggar Boys’ but to be a ‘a Captain, a Lord Mayor’ until at last, as Mandeville puts it, ‘the little Urchin’ tries to be what he ‘imagines he is believ’d to be’ (I, 54). Nor need the praise be directed to a particular person: ‘Children and Fools will swallow Personal Praise, but those that are more cunning, must be manag’d with greater Circumspection; and the more general the Flattery is, the less it is suspected by those it is levell’d at’ (I, 52).

As Mandeville develops his theory, however, he comes to admit explicitly, as in his Enquiry into the Origin of Honor, that references to ‘Moralists’ and ‘Politicians’ are figures of speech (‘Names’) that he gives ‘promiscuously to All that, having studied Human Nature, have endeavor’d to civilize Men, and render them more and more tractable’. He adds ‘I think of all Inventions of this Sort, the same which told you of Politeness, that they are the joint Labour of Many. Human Wisdom is the Child of Time. It was not the Contrivance of one Man’ (Mandeville 1970: 40–41).

As he elaborates a more evolutionary conception Mandeville adds an additional feature. The affecting praise is linked not to pride but to self-liking, a more fundamental form of pride or shame. In so doing, he also alters the emphasis: No longer does Mandeville stress pride in one’s action or affiliation; rather, he notes a desire – self-liking – to receive the endorsements of others. ‘The true object of Pride or Vain-glory is the Opinion of others; and the most superlative Wish, which a Man possess’d… is, that he may be well thought of, applauded, and admired by the whole World’ (II, 64). A similar point is set forth in the Enquiry into the Origin of Honor: ‘it is not the good or bad Opinion of others that affects us
with Joy or Sorrow, Pleasure or Pain; but it is the Notion we form of that Opinion of theirs, and must proceed from the Regard and Value we have for it’ (Mandeville 1970: 41). The shift here is small but significant: instead of offering a history of virtue that links its origin only to associations with preferred groups, Mandeville now suggests that good acts may emerge as we seek the good opinion, acceptance or endorsement of those around us. To relate some act or trait to a particular group is distinct from whether or not that trait receives the approval of others within that group. The commonality between these two modes of praise rests in the fact that each presumes that agents desire to have affirmation from others, whether by the assumption of group membership or by some form of approval. As Mandeville explains, in volume II, ‘It is this [self-liking] that makes us so fond of the Approbation, Liking and Assent of others; because they strengthen and confirm us in the good Opinion we have of ourselves’ (II, 130).

One avenue for securing the good opinion of others is by performing the acts they prefer, but another (and often complementary) route lies in reining in our own manifestation of self-liking. In this way we are less offensive to others. Indeed, it is this sort of self-denial that ‘must have been the Fore-runner of Flattery’ (II, 150). Mandeville speculates that some forms of politeness (‘Your servant’, II, 150) arose from ‘Adulation that was paid to Conquerors and Tyrants’ and that actions and words served as ‘Signs and convincing Proofs to a Superior, that we have a mean Opinion of ourselves in respect to him, that we are at his Mercy’ (II, 151).

These two modes of ‘praise’ (and their companion modes of conduct) suggest Mandeville’s own halting attempts to formulate a means by which conduct might be altered without the agent being affected by terms that presuppose normativity (moral content). One wishes to be part of some preferred group or one seeks the welcome acceptance or endorsement of others, either by conduct or by constraining the outward manifestation of self-liking (or both). Perhaps these modes would work in tandem or as complementing tendencies. However, if these modes of praise and conduct are reiterated by individuals and across society, then so do they grow into regular and accepted patterns of appraisal and conduct. Such reiteration generates expectations about how to behave and how to appraise, and these expectations may offer a route to normativity.

In so far as individuals seek affiliation with a certain class or group, or as individuals desire approval for certain kinds of conduct, then so do patterns of conduct and appraisal acquire a settled nature both as to what people do and what people expect others to do (including themselves). In the minds of both agent and spectator, these sorts of expectations are not simply predictions but attempts to persuade and influence. That these expectations might influence our conduct in significant ways is plausible if one accepts Mandeville’s assumption of the power of self-liking and its constant demands for approval from others. It is not simply that we are prone to believe anything that might situate us in a desired class or portray us as better than others (I, 208) but that this influence is powerful enough.
to move us to risk life and limb (I, 210). Mandeville has provided, therefore, an account as to why praise and flattery, understood as indirect and non-moral, would influence us, even before that ‘praise’ acquires normativity. In the very repetitious nature of such ‘praise’ normativity would emerge precisely insofar as the expectations of others align with the individual desire for approval and inclusion.

What sort of praise might elicit these acts and serve to coordinate and coalesce them into patterns of normative expectation? This question requires a brief excursion into Mandeville’s account of language.43 Language arises, ‘By slow degrees, as all other Arts and sciences have done, and length of time’ (II, 287). Indeed, by 1732, Mandeville thinks it fit to begin his Enquiry into Honor with a review of the etymology of ‘Moral Virtue’, pointing out that even if the ‘Truth of its Excellency is Eternal, the Words Moral Virtue themselves are not so, any more than Speech or Man himself’44 (Preface, Mandeville 1970: ii). Similarly, in the second volume of The Fable Mandeville suggests that words of praise and flattery may have had one origin, but ‘in Tract of Time’ took on new meanings and colorations45 (II, 152). The crucial element of his theory is that the attempt to persuade is an essential first step in the development of language. Language was not invented to report our thoughts: the ‘first Design of Speech was to persuade others’ (II, 289). Indeed, speech does not emerge in isolation from action: ‘Speech and Action assist and corroborate one another, and Experience teaches us that they move us much more, and are more persuasive jointly than separately’ (II, 290). Some of what Mandeville is alluding to is the significance of gesture and tone, but his larger point would be that the language of praise is, in fact, a language of words and action that conveys to the agent a confirmation from the other or inclusion within a group. The spectator wishes to urge a certain mode of action; the agent seeks endorsement that confirms a sense of positive like-mindedness. The content of that endorsement need not be moral, at least in its earliest form but may suggest inclusion over exclusion, acceptance not rejection.

Language allows for justification, a fact that returns us to normativity. A second condition of normativity is that of justificatory adequacy: Why do norms have importance? There is a relatively easy response for Mandeville: the norms of good conduct, as encapsulated (for example) in the definition of virtue, not only demand that our highest capacity (reason) control our animal appetites but that we do so for the public good. Nonetheless, and despite this justification, the conduct undertaken for purposes of affiliation or affirmation will only appear to conform to the rhetorical demands of virtue, even as agents are not genuinely virtuous. So how can this sort of justification carry weight if normative conduct arises out of self-liking? As Christine Korsgaard puts it:

The trouble with a view like Mandeville’s is not that it is not a reasonable explanation of how moral practices came about, but rather that our
commitment to these practices would not survive our belief that it was true. Why give up your heart’s desire, just because some politician wants to keep you in line? When we seek a philosophical foundation for morality we are not looking merely for an explanation of moral practices. We are asking what justifies the claims that morality makes on us.46

Korsgaard’s point assumes, with Hume, that morals reflect the ‘wants’ of particular politicians. This consideration not only ignores the evolutionary element in Mandeville’s thought, it also ignores how Mandeville believes that we may so accustom ourselves to conduct in accord with virtue that a person ‘may in time forget the Principle he set out with, and become ignorant, or at least insensible of the hidden Spring, that gives Life and Motion to all his Actions’ (II, 79). Part of Mandeville’s overall thesis is that we are not aware of the ‘hidden Spring[s]’ of our actions. And there is a reason for this lack: ‘as the World grows more polish’d, Flattery becomes less bare-faced, and the Design of it upon Man’s Pride is better disguis’d than it was formerly’ (II, 152). As habits grow to expectations and as these acquire influence and normativity, then so would the rhetoric of praise acquire a content that appealed to rationality, constraints on passion and the significance of the public good.47 Such praise would affect one’s pride if one had come to identify one’s self with the groups or affirmations that emphasized reason, self-constraint and the common good. Of course, the person who has this identification remains a creature who acts out of self-liking – that is also Mandeville’s point! Nonetheless, the implicit thesis endures: the evolution of normative standards may allow for the identification of self with the rhetoric of (genuine) virtue even as the fact persists that we are self-liking creatures. What occurs is that the disposition to self redirects its focus from a self-concerned with some objects to a self-concerned with what others count as rationally constrained conduct undertaken for the public good. So long as one identifies oneself with the rhetoric of the public good, then so will that rhetoric have importance, even though the roots of its importance lie less in the content of the rhetoric than in how it conveys affirmation or inclusion. In this sense, Mandeville’s account allows for both an explanation of the influence of norms and for some account of their justificatory power.

This sketch, however brief, illuminates how within Mandeville’s thought there exist the elements of a response to Hume. The structuring of these elements also points to how the regular expectations that self-liking generates may acquire, for agent and spectator, a common normative component. As this norm is realized and internalized, so may the language that encourages such action become the language of demand and obligation. If this is a plausible sketch, then the desire to have others affirm one’s opinion of self could involve a desire to have others recognize one’s conformity or adherence to the moral life, even as the deep
basis of that desire is self-liking. Such a conclusion may lift no spirits even if it conforms quite well to Mandeville’s recurring revelations of human hypocrisy.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hume, Ferguson and Smith were each perturbed by Mandeville’s themes of egoism and the artificiality of morals. Although each philosopher also embraced the power of conjectural histories of morals and society, it is difficult to find any full or explicit embrace of Mandeville’s various appeals to ‘the joynt Labour of several Ages’. Indeed, it is Hume’s fundamental question that would seem to challenge Mandeville’s appeal to the work of politicians and to the very possibility of the kind of history of society that Mandeville seeks to develop. Yet within Mandeville’s corpus rest the elements for a response. Perhaps Adam Smith recognized this fact, for it is Smith who mentions explicitly the power of Mandeville’s later works. In fact, and apart from Smith’s worries about self-love, it becomes clear that Mandeville’s appeals to inclusion and confirmation also foreshadow Smith’s use of sympathetic communication. If we understand Mandeville’s flattery as a kind of non-moral sense of inclusion by which a spectator seeks to appeal to one’s self-liking in order to secure some constraint of appetite, then we glimpse how Mandeville’s chief legacy may rest in Adam Smith’s science of morals.

For Smith, mutual sympathy—fellow-feeling, harmony of sentiments—between spectator and agent is a kind of equilibrating mechanism which, if successful, is pleasurable. But why should sympathy be pleasing? Smith notes that we have an anxiety about public opinion (Smith 1982: III.2.18). The more certain we are of our own judgments, the less relevant is the sympathy of another: ‘The agreement or disagreement both of the sentiments and judgments of other people with our own, is in all cases, it must be observed, of more or less importance to us, exactly in proportion as we ourselves are more or less uncertain about the propriety of our own sentiments, about the accuracy of our own judgments’ (Smith 1982: III.2.16). This is not to say that uncertainty is the only condition for sympathy, for the pleasure of sympathy also depends on the esteem which one holds for the person with whom one sympathizes. However, we can also discern how Mandeville’s notion of self-liking and flattery, which together bring agent and spectator into a harmony, pivots on a similar desire to have others think well of us. That we do what we can to bring this about is, perhaps, the Mandevillean basis of Adam Smith’s sympathy.

SPECIAL THANKS

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REFERENCES


‘And to give the Name of VIRTUE to 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.’ An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue (hereafter referred to as Enquiry), I, 48–9.

I say ‘rare’ rather than non-existent, even though Kaye himself states, ‘when Mandeville came to examine the world in the light of this formula [of virtue], he could find no virtue’. (Mandeville 1988: xlviii) However, there are numerous instances in which Mandeville affirms that virtue is possible or at least that some actions may be virtuous: see ‘A Vindication of the Book’ in The Fable of the Bees (I, 404–5). In fact, via the voice of Cleomenes, Mandeville also asserts that he has made no ‘supposition’ that an individual cannot be good (II, 64); Cleomenes also avers ‘I have never thought that there were no virtuous or religious Men; what I differ in with the Flatterers of our Species, is about the Numbers . . .’ (II, 336). Of course, if virtue requires action contrary to any passion and if all action is motivated by passion, then it would follow that there is no virtue, nor can there be.

In a strict sense there are at least two kinds of evolutionary theory at work. There exists, within the political and legal realm a trial and error process, which takes place over time, in which politicians invent, abridge, and alter the basic laws of society. The laws that result, both individually and collectively, may be said to be unintended outcomes and, presumably, convey public benefits. However, alongside, if not in conjunction with, this legal evolution there occurs a moral evolution in which the words and actions of anonymous individuals seek to alter and affect one another’s conduct, thereby bringing about predictable patterns of conduct which themselves acquire normativity. I draw this distinction in (1998) ‘Mandeville’s Bewitching Engine of Praise’, History of Philosophy Quarterly, 15(2): 207.


For a full account of the emergence of norms, see my reconstruction in ‘Mandeville’s Bewitching Engine of Praise’. A more recent summary of Mandeville’s evolution may be found in Mikko Tolonen (2013) Mandeville and Hume: Anatomists of Civil Society, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 86–93.


As Stafford notes, ‘there is no thesis in the first part of the Fable which were more persistently, more vigorously, or more cogently criticized than the conspiratorial account of the origin of virtue and the foundation of society’ (Stafford 1997: xviii).


For example, in the fourth dialogue, in the context of a discussion of the sociability of human beings—how the human being is made for society as grapes are for wine—Cleomenes exclaims, ‘Such an Equivalent [an analogue in society for fermentation in grapes] is demonstrable in mutual Commerce: for if we examine every Faculty and Qualification, from and for which we judge and pronounce Man to be a sociable Creature beyond other Animals, we shall find, that a very considerable, if not the greatest part of the Attribute is acquired, and comes upon Multitudes, from their conversing with one another’ (II, 189).

‘When we hear that three or four thousand Men, all Strangers to us, are kill’d with the Sword, or forc’d into some River where they are drown’d, we say and perhaps believe that we pity them. It is Humanity bids us have Compassion with the Sufferings of others, and Reason tells us, that whether a thing be far off or done in our Sight, our Sentiments concerning it ought to be the same, and we should be asham’d to own that we felt no Commiseration in us when anything requires it’ (I, 256–7).

‘It was this fascination, very much inherited from earlier generations of Scottish historians, that led in part to the particular priority that the Enlightenment’s theorists [such as David Hume, William Robertson, George Turnbull, Adam Ferguson, Alexander Gerard, Adam Smith, Alexander Tytler] now gave to explaining the nature and causes of large-scale historical change. The principal product of this focus, much discussed by recent commentators, was, of course, the so-called ‘Theory of Unintended Consequences’ adumbrated by his [Ferguson’s] colleagues in a number of different versions . . . ’. David Allen (2008) ‘Ferguson and Scottish History: Past and Present in An Essay on the History of Civil Society’, in Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle (eds), Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature, London: Pickering & Chatto, 30 (see pp. 26–31 for the full discussion).


See Mandeville and Hume, where Tolonen remarks (p. 9) that the evidence for Hume having read volume II would include (a) that Hume’s first essay, on modern honor, seemed to be ‘modeled after Mandeville’s’ own work on the subject; (b) following the suggestion of John P. Wright (Wright 2009: 8–19), that one of Hume’s self-descriptions—having a ‘disease of the learned’—bears similarities to passages in Mandeville’s work on the passions; and (c) that Hume included Mandeville in the list of ‘late philosophers’ who have ‘put the science of man on a new footing’ (Hume 1978: xvii; 2000: Introduction). It is not clear to me how these points would establish firmly that Hume had read volume II, even though the assumption that Hume had read this second volume has plausibility.

Nor is it any different in Hume’s Enquiry, whose language would seem to suggest, more strongly, a more literal understanding of the ‘politicians’. See David Hume, An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, 214 or the more recent edition, David Hume (1998) An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5.1.3. In The Case for Enlightenment, Robertson contends, ‘Hume could not accept the further supposition, derived from Lucretius and endorsed by Mandeville, that justice must therefore have been imposed upon mankind by far-sighted
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legislators, for this did not explain how men came to be in a position to understand and accept its rules’ (Robertson 2005: 319; see also, 301). But this interpretation not only construes Mandeville as embracing, without qualification, a notion that the politician is a ‘far-sighted’ thinker but that Hume would have understood the politician in just these ways. However, it remains unclear how Hume could have read the later works of Mandeville and come to the conclusion that the politician must be ‘far-sighted’.

22 As F. A. Hayek asserts in ‘Dr Bernard Mandeville’ (Hayek 1978: 264). Hayek also appeals to the early twentieth-century work of Simon N. Patten who contends, ‘the starting-point of Hume’s development lay in the writings of Mandeville’ (as quoted by Hayek 1978: 264, fn 54).


24 ‘The life and activity of intelligent being consists in the consciousness or perception of an improvable state, and in the effort to operate upon it for the better. This constitutes an unremitting principle of ambition in human nature’ (Ferguson 1995b: vol. 1, 200).

25 ‘Those establishments arose from successive improvements that were made, without any sense of their general effect; and they bring human affairs to a state of complication, which the greatest reach of capacity with which human nature was ever adorned, could not have projected; nor even when the whole is carried into execution, can it be comprehended in its full extent’ (Ferguson 1995a: 174).

26 Ferguson, Principles of Moral and Political Science, vol. 1, 41 and 43, respectively.

27 ‘Man, like the other animals, has certain instinctive propensities, which, prior to the perception of pleasure or pain, and prior to the experience of what is pernicious or useful, lead him to perform many functions of nature relative to himself and to his fellow creatures. He has one set of dispositions which refer to his animal preservation … another which lead to society …’ (Ferguson 1995a: 16).


29 Tolonen takes the distinction between self-liking and self-love to be fundamental to the grounding of an institution such as justice (to counter self-love) and politeness (to constrain self-liking). Tolonen rightly notes the Augustinian roots of Mandeville’s conception of self-liking but contends that Mandeville employs these ideas descriptively rather than prescriptively. See his presentation in Mandeville and Hume, in particular pages 22–30 and 82–86. My point is to draw attention to the ways in which Mandeville’s conception of self-love (in volume 1) and his later account of self-liking (volume 2) have similar sorts of cognitive functions: they affect and alter our perception in ways that favor self.

30 The ‘dear self’ to which Kant refers – and which constitutes the title of one of Harry G. Frankfurt’s recent essays – may also be found in Mandeville: ‘Nothing is so near to a Man, nor so really and entirely his own, as what he has from Nature; and when that dear Self, for the sake of which he values or despises, loves or hates every thing else, comes to be stript and abstracted from all Foreign Acquisitions, humane Nature makes a poor Figure …’ (II, 301). See Harry G. Frankfurt (2004) ‘The Dear Self’, in The Reasons of Love, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 69–100.

31 A discussion of the differences may be found in my 2013 essay, ‘Adam Smith and Self-Interest’, in Christopher J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli and Craig Smith (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially pages 245–253.

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35 There are, for example, several explicit references to Mandeville in the Lectures but these focus on the division of labor and issues relating to the opulence of society. Adam Smith (1978) Lectures on Jurisprudence, ed. R. L. Meek, D.D. Raphael and P.G. Stein, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, especially pages 339, 348, 355, 393, 513 and 576.


37 Law, Remarks on the Fable of the Bees, in Stafford, Private Vices, Public Benefits?, 58. Francis Hutcheson comes close to explaining the problem, but his account is not so well formulated as that of Law or so acutely stated as that of Hume. Hutcheson writes: ‘Nay, what should excite a Cato or a Decius to desire praise, if it is only the cold opinion of others that they were useful to the State, without any perception of excellence in such conduct? – Now how unlike is this to what the least observation would teach a man concerning such characters? . . . So easy a matter it seems to him . . . for one who has no ideas of good but in his own advantage, to be led by the persuasions of others, into a conception of goodness in what is avowedly detrimental to himself, and profitable to others . . .’ Francis Hutcheson [1725] (1990) An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good, in D. D. Raphael (ed.), British Moralists: 1650–1800, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 268. Hutcheson’s objection might appear to be the same as Hume’s but it is, in fact, distinct. At first Hutcheson would seem to suggest that a Cato would not desire praise if such praise serves the politician rather than relating to excellence in conduct. However, As Hutcheson proceeds he seems to suggest that if a Cato seeks only his own advantage, then the words of others will not draw him to act in a manner that will benefit others rather than self. It is not clear if Hutcheson is asserting anything other than that a self-interested agent will not act in other-regarding ways.

38 Mandeville makes it explicit in the voice of Cleomenes: ‘. . . I infer, that the Notions of Right and Wrong are acquired; for if they were as natural, or if they affected us, as early as the Opinion, or rather the Instinct we are born with, of taking every thing to be our own, no Child would every cry for his eldest Brother’s Playthings’ (II, 223–4).

39 At a later point in the Treatise, Hume makes clear how the question of intelligibility turns on motivation: ‘Some philosophers have represented all moral distinctions as the effect of artifice and education, when skilful politicians endeavour’d to restrain the turbulent passions of men, and make them operate to the public good, by the notions of honour and shame. This system, however, is not consistent with experience. For, first, there are
other virtues and vices beside those which have this tendency to the public advantage and loss. Secondly, had not men a natural sentiment of approbation and blame, it cou’d never be excited by politicians; nor wou’d the words laudable and praise-worthy, blameable and odious, be any more intelligible, than if they were a language perfectly unknown to us, as we have already observ’d’ (Hume 1978: 578–9; 2000: 3.3.1.11).

I delineate the issue in terms of conditions of normativity. Any explanation as to how our concepts, ideas or principles acquire a normative status must show (i) how these concepts (etc) have an influence on our conduct, and (ii) how these concepts have some justification for their importance. These two conditions are set forth in Christine M. Korsgaard (1996) *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 12–13. In exploring Hume’s argument I rely on Korsgaard’s first condition, ‘explanatory adequacy’; the second condition, ‘justificatory adequacy’, sets forth a case for why the normative has the sort of importance that it does. So far I have referred only to the first condition, which is sufficient for Hume’s point. In section IV, I engage both conditions to show how normativity emerges in Mandeville’s account.

Martin Stafford rejects this view, though it is embraced by Hundert, *The Enlightenment’s Fable*, 75–77, and Heath, ‘Mandeville’s Bewitching Engine of Praise’, 207. Stafford contends that Mandeville put forward the evolutionary view as an alternative to his earlier appeals to politicians (Stafford 1997: xviii).

See the fascinating chapter ‘Order as Regularity and as Rule’, in Dennis Wrong (1994) *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, New York: Free Press, 37–69. Wrong describes how habitual acts lead to expectations and how these expectations come to be viewed as imposing ‘limits on choice and action’ (Wrong 1994: 47): ‘This sequence of habits becoming expectations that acquire normative force as a result of the actors feeling constrained to live up to them describes how norms originate within the process of social interaction’ (Wrong: 49).

On Mandeville’s account of language, see Hundert, *The Enlightenment’s Fable*, 86–96.

After reviewing the etymology of ‘Moral’ he speculates that ‘at First Nothing was meant by Virtus, but Daring and Intrepidity, right or wrong’ (Mandeville 1970: Preface, iv). Mandeville makes explicit that ‘Whatever Alterations may be made in the Sense of Words by Time; yet, as the World grows more polish’d, Flattery becomes less bare-faced, and the Design of it upon Man’s Pride is better disguis’d than it was formerly’ (II, 152).


Indeed, it is the ‘beau monde’ who, as ‘the undoubted Refiners of Language’ (II, 292) will set the linguistic standards.