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Springer

2015

Tolonen , M 2015 , The Exchange Between Mandeville and Berkeley . in E Balsemão Pires & J Braga (eds) , Bernard de Mandeville's Topology of Paradoxes : Morals, Politics, Economics, and Therapy . Studies in History and Philosophy of Science , vol. 40 , Springer , pp. 167-179 . <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-19381-6>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/160488>

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-19381-6>

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Dialogue between Mandeville and Berkeley

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Abstract: George Berkeley directed an *ad hominem* attack on Bernard Mandeville in his *Alciphron*. Although rarely analysed in secondary literature, this and the following exchange, was an important occasion in history of philosophy that contemporaries probably followed closely. The idea of this paper is to offer an analysis of Mandeville's subsequent answer to Berkeley's accusations offering an interpretation that situates this in the context of Mandeville's intellectual development. The relevance that this paper claims to have is that it shows in practice what Mandeville's intellectual development meant in eighteenth-century debates on political economy and how this relates to an equally important question about nature of moral knowledge. The paper will also take into consideration John Hervey as an outside commentator on the polemic between Mandeville and Berkeley.

Keywords: history of political thought; political economy; book history; atheism; Enlightenment

George Berkeley seems to have been an angry man. As we know, his *Alciphron* (1732) includes an attack on Bernard Mandeville and his *Fable of the bees* (among other lashes that he delivered elsewhere).¹ Mandeville's answer to Berkeley, *Letter to Dion* was published that same year. It has received relatively little analytical attention in scholarship, but it was the last of Mandeville's known published texts and an important document because he actually answers his critics in print, something that he did not do at the height of the controversy that *Fable of the bees* caused in 1723-25. This paper will be divided into two: first part is a historical reconstruction of the path to *Letter to Dion* in order to highlight a change in Mandeville's thought relevant to our reading of the piece.² Second part is an analysis of the text itself in relation to the objections put forward especially in the second dialogue of *Alciphron*, but not limited to it. The relevance that this paper claims to have is that it shows in practice what Mandeville's intellectual development meant in eighteenth-century debates on political economy and how this relates to an equally important question about nature of moral

¹ Nature of Berkeley's attack on Mandeville as directed against "a strawman" is noted in Berman (1993: 2-3). Also John Stuart Mill and Leslie Stephen criticised Berkeley for missing his mark on Mandeville (Berman 1993: 13).

² This part relies on the account that I have put forward in more detail in Tolonen (2013).

knowledge. The paper will also take into consideration John Hervey as an outside commentator on the polemic between Mandeville and Berkeley.

Path to Dion

Mandeville was a consciously provocative author starting from his first publications in Britain. *Pamphleteers* in 1703, for example, is a satirical, topical and direct work. Nevertheless, when the reactions to *The Fable of the Bees* started pouring in twenty years later, they must have been a shock to the author, even when, for example, with the “charity school” essay Mandeville was practically begging for trouble by suggesting that the free education of the poor might turn them into a more crafty kind of pickpockets rather than benefiting the public. After the second edition of *The Fable* was published, it took less than three months for the book to end up in front of the grand jury.

The presentment of the Grand-Jury of 1723 includes accusations of ‘diabolical attempts against religion’. It is possible that the political nature of the book is one reason why *The Fable* received such a hostile welcome (Speck 1978).³ However, it is undeniable that the “charity school” essay (combined to some of the more controversial passages of the book) was unusually provocative regarding current affairs that concerned many. Another serious accusation of the presentment was that *Fable of the bees* had ‘a direct tendency to propagate infidelity, and consequently to the corruption of all morals’, which effectively means the debauching of the nation. These are also the main accusation that Berkeley directs at Mandeville in his *Alciphron*.

After the presentment in 1723, Mandeville’s own approach rapidly changed from provocation to a careful defence of his reputation. A vindication was published in the *London Journal* (Kaye 1924: xi). It was also included in the later editions of *The Fable*. In *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville says that he himself published the vindication (Mandeville 1732: 7). According to Mandeville, if Berkeley had only read it, he had not written against him at all, or at least shown how this vindication was insufficient. Clearly, the vindication meant much to Mandeville. Mandeville started to worry about his reputation and what that *The Fable* might have been doing to it. Berkeley did not take notice of it and Mandeville repeated several times in *Letter to Dion* that Berkeley had not read the *Fable*, but trusted false reports about it.

³ Speck’s suggestion is that much of the controversy regarded the fact that the makeup of the jury was Tory at heart.

Another contingent matter that we should take into consideration is that it is likely that in 1724-25 Mandeville sold the copyright of the work to a famous publisher called Jacob Tonson jr. and did not have much say on further editions or possible changes. The third edition, which is the first “Tonson edition” is in effect the last edition of the work. The rest are reprints with some typographical changes that do not affect the copytext. Publisher Tonson’s vision about bookselling was rather cynical. For him, good controversy always meant good business. It is interesting, in this context, that Tonson is the publisher of *Alciphron* and he also owned the copyright of that work.⁴ This is an important factor and something that to my knowledge has not been taken into consideration in earlier scholarship. As a publisher of both *Fable* and *Alciphron*, Tonson would naturally benefit from controversy and, to use a cliché, “from any publicity”. These kinds of issues are philosophically relevant because they influence the matter more than is often realised.

About different ways of defending himself, Mandeville mentions that he ‘once thought’ of compiling ‘a list of the adversaries that have appeared in print’. The reason why this plan was given up, according to Mandeville, was that antagonists were too many and the points they were making too few. The reason given by Mandeville for not providing any further answers in print was that simply reading ‘some part or other, either of the Vindication or the book it self’ should prove the raised accusations wrong. During this time, Mandeville had probably also compiled a manuscript defending himself that was finished by 1726. It is surprising how little notice this has received in Mandeville scholarship. ‘I have wrote’, Mandeville says in 1728, ‘and had by me near two years, a Defence of the *The Fable of the Bees*’, in which I have stated and endeavour’d to solve all the objections that might reasonably be made against it, as to the doctrine contain’d in it, and the detriment it might be of to others’ (Mandeville 1729: ii.).⁵ Hence, one simple explanation why making alterations to the first part of *The Fable* was not necessary for Mandeville was that he started writing a separate defence, which however was never published as such.⁶

⁴ Indicated in the Longman sale records.

⁵ Kaye argues that *Remarks upon two late presentments of the Grand-Jury of the county of Middlesex* would be the defence of *The Fable* that Mandeville is discussing in the preface (Kaye, 1921: 457–8). I find this unlikely. Particularly because Mandeville’s main point (in 1728) is that it is a work that has not been published and the *Remarks* was already published in 1724.

⁶ Kaye has proved that Mandeville was not the author of *True meaning of the Fable of the bees* of 1726 and certainly this is not the defence of *The Fable* that Mandeville refers to. This work has been mistakenly attributed to Mandeville. (Kaye 1921: 463–4). The anonymous author of *True meaning of the Fable of the bees* defends a view that all moral distinctions are made by politicians tricking men to act against their passions. He also tries to reduce all the passions to self-love (*True meaning* 1726: 10, 71). These are the kind of claims that Mandeville wanted to take distance from by writing *Part II*.

One reason of talking about Mandeville canon is that even when *The Letter to Dion* was designed as a piece engaging Berkeley, in fact it was not completely written for that occasion. *The Fable* is quoted extensively to prove that Berkeley's criticism was misplaced. But more interestingly, we can infer that Mandeville also used his unpublished Defence of the *Fable* of 1726 in his answer to Berkeley. This was nothing new for Mandeville, for example, he did a similar thing with some collected poems: he had a habit of publishing all sorts of miscellaneous pieces that he had composed earlier. To understand the composition of the *Letter to Dion* is important to realize that the dialogue between Berkeley and Mandeville was more of a hybrid of different discussions and at the same time, in Mandeville's part, it was a culmination of finally printing his answer to his many critics embodied now in George Berkeley.

1732 and *Part II* of 1729

What Berkeley did in 1732 was to re-intensify the tradition of denouncing *the Fable*. We must see Mandeville's answer to *Alciphron* in the context of this long line of accusations. But what makes it interesting is that instead of defending his *Fable* properly in public before Berkeley's *Alciphron*, Mandeville had already published a new work, *Part II* of the *Fable* that changed things considerably.

The reason why *Part II* is important for the story of Mandeville's answer to Berkeley is this: Here we have a new work where Mandeville who had been looking at the criticism poured onto him reflects on this criticism and puts forward what he clearly considered to be a new theory of the formation of civil society. In this work the question of passions, sociability and morals is more complicated than previously. And in this sense, what Mandeville took as representation of himself in the third dialogue of *Alciphron*, denouncing all moral beauty in the form of a follower of *The Fable* named Lysicles, this must have been irritating to him. What is also significant about the title of the *Fable* is that while the memorable part (and what everyone including Berkeley criticized) was the subtitle, "private vices, public benefits", it does not play a central role in *Part II*.

But to turn back to *Alciphron*, the point is that Berkeley was not reading some of these Mandeville's later works when writing it. It might be that in Rhode Island where he composed the work, he did not have access to *Part II* and most definitely not to Mandeville's *Origin of honour* that was published in 1732. This asymmetry between the development of Mandeville's thinking and what Berkeley was focusing on is important. It enables us to

understand how Mandeville approaches Berkeley's accusations. First of all, Mandeville had given a new version of the theory of civil society that effectively disregarded the earlier infamous slogan of private vices and public benefits. Also, Mandeville had changed his opinion about the possibility of natural virtues in the case of natural affection. Hence, it is important that after modifying his view, Mandeville takes up again the task of defending the paradox of "private vices, public benefits", this time against Berkeley. Of course, since Mandeville's perspective was now somewhat different, at some points he is not in fact defending what he set forward in the original *Fable*, but instead what he advanced in *Part II*. Also, his attitude seems to be much more relaxed now in the *Letter to Dion*, because he does not have to struggle with the problem of reducing everything to self-love because he has already accepted some other-regarding affections as natural. So, what I want to say is that in one sense the Mandeville who answers Berkeley is not virtually the author of the *Fable of the bees*, but in this sense the author of *Part II*.

Dialogue between Berkeley and Mandeville

In *Alciphron* Berkeley famously defines 'modern Free-thinkers' to be 'the very same with those *Cicero* called Minute Philosophers' who 'diminish all the most valuable things', 'act the reverse of all other wise and thinking men'; 'aim to erase the principles of all that is great and good from the mind of man, to unhinge all order of civil life' and 'to undermine the foundations of morality' (Berkeley 1732: 47-48). Mandeville refuses to recognize himself as such minute philosopher. In *Alciphron* these free-thinkers are supposed to be, or they profess to be, free thinking lovers of truth. Examination, however, proves that they are everything but that. They are a sect, much comparable to superstitious religious outfit. Berkeley paints them as atheists, particularly Lysicles who was at the time seen (also by other people than Mandeville) to represent the author the *Fable of the bees*.

In *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville makes serious accusations about Berkeley's way of writing. His view about the characters of Alciphron and Lysicles is that 'they are fellows without feeling or manners' and no gentleman would ever act in the way they do. In Mandeville's words, Berkeley portrays them to 'always begin with swaggering and boasting of what they'll prove; and in every argument they pretend to maintain, they are laid upon their backs, and constantly beaten to pieces, till they have not a word more to say; and when this has been repeated above half a score times, they still retain the same arrogance' and 'immediately after every defeat, they are making fresh challenges, seemingly with as much

unconcern and confidence of success, as if nothing has pass'd before, or they remember'd nothing of what had happen'd' (Mandeville 1732: 52-53). For a sceptic like Mandeville, to whom the question of identity and self were not immovable objects, uniform and unviolated character mattered instead a great deal.

Berkeley's *Alciphron* received, what might seem to us, a surprisingly hostile welcome in the eighteenth century. This regarded especially the way he had treated both Shaftesbury and Mandeville. Hervey, in his *Some remarks concerning the minute philosopher*, for example, writes that Berkeley was 'monstrously and manifestly partial' (Hervey 1732: 6). He particularly singles out that the handling of the *Fable of the bees* and its author has been 'injudicious and unfair' saying that Berkeley's book has done more harm to Christianity than the *Fable* (Hervey 1732: 44, 8).

Also for the contemporaries it was not only the question of how philosophy was presented that mattered. Equally important was how the characters that represented the authors were drawn. In the case of Shaftesbury, the treatment of Cratylus (singled out to be the character of Shaftesbury) was brought up not only by Hervey, but also by Mandeville in *Letter to Dion*. In fact, Mandeville defends Shaftesbury against Berkeley and says that he has been mocked without reason (Berkeley 1732: 190). Mandeville writes, 'I am fully persuaded that Shaftesbury 'was in the wrong' in many things, 'but this does not blind my understanding so far, as not to see, that he is a very fine author, and a much better writer than my self, or you either', he tells Berkeley. Mandeville says he cannot understand the 'indignity and contempt, which you treat *Cratylus* with' (Mandeville 1732: 47-48).

Rhetorically Mandeville's strategy in the *Letter to Dion* is to assume that Berkeley, like so many others, had not read the *Fable of the bees*, but was leaning on false reports about it. Mandeville writes his answer to Berkeley in a very cordial manner. Mandeville is sure that if Berkeley had actually read his work, 'he would not have suffer'd such lawless Libertines as *Alciphron* and *Lysicles*, to have shelter'd themselves under my wings; but he would have demonstrated to them, that my Principles differ'd from theirs, as Sunshine does from Darkness' (Mandeville 1732: 3). Mandeville also draws a parallel to the grand jury that had also trusted the judgment of others (Mandeville 1732: 8). The reason why he is writing his answer is explicitly that he hopes that Berkeley revises his views in a future edition of *Alciphron*.

What Berkeley puts *Alciphron* and *Lysicles* to defend in the name of Freethinking, *Euphranor* (or others) by open-dialect will either ridicule or put to questionable light. Berkeley's reading of the *Fable* is that it aims to show that 'vice circulates money and

promotes industry, which causeth a people to flourish'. Hence, any vice like drunkenness is supposed to produce this effect, because it causes 'an extravagant consumption which is most beneficial to the Manufacturers, their encouragement consisting in a quick demand and high price' (Berkeley 1732: 79). Thus, the counter-argument concentrates on the idea that drunkard is not necessarily as beneficial to the brewer as one might think and most definitely this is not as beneficial for the public as some claim. What Berkeley wants to say is that 'money spent innocently' circulates just 'as well as that spent upon vice' (Berkeley 1732: 81).⁷ Vice here is to be understood in a wide sense of fashionable, luxurious living. Hence, what in Berkeley's opinion follows is that agriculture employs men just as well as money spent on fashion and luxury. What Berkeley is after is something called real happiness of the state. Riches are just means to produce it (Berkeley 1732: 94). Berkeley argues that men's primary pleasure is not sensual, but rational higher kind of pleasure. For this reason as well, Mandeville is wrong. What Berkeley wants to say is that man's 'true interest is combined with his Duty' (Berkeley 1732: 184).

We need to understand that the moral, social and economical questions under discussion are not hypothetical, but concrete ones. We are really talking about how to prove different hypothesis about flourishing in a particular country. This, of course, is true to Berkeley in the question of Ireland. What is also relevant is that the dialogue between Berkeley and Mandeville conforms to the same form that was structured around the grand jury presentment: questions of religion and debauching the nation. At the same time the question of what Mandeville actually means by vice becomes crucial.

Religion

Regarding Mandeville's answer, I will first treat the question how Mandeville defends himself in the *Letter to Dion* against the accusations that the *Fable of the bees* is contrary to religion or promotes atheism. Mandeville says on numerous occasions that the *Fable* was not written against religion, but it just exposes the hypocrisy of many Christians, taking notice of the scarcity of true self-denial among them (Mandeville 1732: 19, 24-25, 63). We need to remember that also Hervey backed up Mandeville on this particular question.

Now, we need not assume that Mandeville was an atheist. Or the point is actually that his personal religious views, one way or the other, do not have an effect on his moral and

⁷ Also, it is important that the number of inhabitants is underlined as an indicator of the flourishing of people.

political thought. On several occasions he discusses what he terms true Christianity. This, some believe, is due to a shade of Armenianism that Mandeville derived from his Dutch background. In any case, Mandeville systematically defends a view that 'true Christianity' is a 'private concern of every individual'. Multitudes may join in outward, public performance of religion, but the actual religion is always an individual and private matter. (Mandeville 1732: 40-41) Mandeville is continuously underlining that the "private vices, public benefits" argument concerns this world. Christian thinking must always consider the afterlife and this is a different matter than the question of the flourishing of the state. Mandeville utters that a man may go directly to hell because of his avarice and his wealth builds hospitals as soon as he is dead (Mandeville 1732: 39). The position Mandeville defends regarding religion comes also quite close to Jansenists and Pierre Nicole in particular. The common point is that worldly flourishing and afterlife have little to do with each other. We may see how Mandeville's and Berkeley's views clash regarding the question of virtuousness of an atheistic colony, which is quite contrary to Berkeley's own Bermuda project that again underlines that we are discussing concrete questions.

In *Alciphron*, Berkeley dismisses the Baylean question whether an atheistic society could be virtuous that also Mandeville had discussed (Berkeley 1732: 135, 148).⁸ When Berkeley touches upon the question of setting up a colony of atheists, his suggestion is to go ahead and try. Without religious duty, you will not survive. What is important is that once again we are talking about practical measures. Mandeville answers: 'you think the multitudes among Christians to have better morals, than they were possess'd of among the antient heathens. The vices of men have always been so inseparable from great nations, that it is difficult to determine any thing with certainty about the matter. But I am of opinion, that the morals of a people in general, I mean the virtues and vices of a whole nation, are not so much influenced by the religion that is profess'd among them, as they are by the laws of the country, the administration of justice, the politicks of the rulers, and the circumstances of the people' (Mandeville 1732: 55). And since it is the circumstances of the people that the private vices, public benefits argument mainly concerns, we may perhaps understand in what way this part of Mandeville's answer is justified.

The reason why Mandeville thinks that the difference between the virtuousness of heathens and Christians is more accidental is that it varies considerably why people actually follow certain rules. Some act according to laws and customs because of religious tenets, no

⁸ "Question whether to have religion or not examined".

doubt. Also, some because they value what others think about them. Some from whatever fleeting motives they might have. This is the point how customs function. What Mandeville is doing is deteriorating the argument that we may strictly define virtue (unless we use the concept of self-denial) and claim that proper motivation for certain actions are what matters the most. Mandeville does not find religion as an overriding motive making men sociable (Mandeville 1732: 60). It is one motive among many for people to act in a certain way, but it has little consequence to the flourishing of the people. ‘In Great-Britain there are thousands that abstain from unlawful pleasures, who would not be so cautious, if they were not deterr’d from them by the expence, the fear of diseases, and that of losing their reputation’ (Mandeville 1732: 56). Regarding the question of atheistic colony, Mandeville challenges Berkeley to show: ‘If the laws and government, the administration of justice, and the care of the magistrates were the same, and the circumstances of the people were likewise the same, I should be glad to hear a reason, why there should be more or less incontinence in *England*, if we were heathens, than there is, now we are Christians’ (Mandeville 1732: 55).

What Berkeley wants to argue (that interest and Christian duty should always go together and actually cause the best consequences) is in line with the reformation of manners movement that Mandeville had been opposing for some time. These same arguments simply would not do for Mandeville. Mandeville’s objection regarding religion and the view that he thinks Berkeley defends is that if we are talking about duty as a Christian, these two things and how they relate to the prosperity of the state have nothing to do with each other. Vanity makes man profit his tailor, not his interest in helping him or the state. ‘Religion is one thing, and trade another’, Mandeville writes. ‘He that gives most trouble to thousands of his neighbours, and invents the most oporose manufactures is, right or wrong, the greatest friend to the society’ (Mandeville 1732: 68).

What the difference between Mandeville and Berkeley boils down to is important. In one sense Berkeley represents the lot of thinkers that find a conception of virtue (and self) uniform belonging to the same continuum as the Cartesian moralists as well as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and many others. Whereas the way towards a new formulation of personal identity, and analysis of what is agreeable or useful to self and others, is opened up by Mandeville (this can well be called Humean analysis of self and moral psychology). Important part of this new paradigm that challenges the public benevolence and real happiness of the state hypothesis is the uncertainty of moral knowledge. Berkeley is in the end couched to Christian conception of man and virtue, whereas Mandeville’s contribution is to liberate Hume and others of this strain. Equally relevant in this scheme is not to argue that

religion should be explicitly denounced because it is not what it claims to be. But what is important is to treat religion as one custom (and set of motives) among others.

In the *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville is quite explicit that the *Fable* has not been written ‘for the encouragement of vice, and to debauch the nation’, like Berkeley claims (Mandeville 1732: 1). Mandeville’s suggestion is that even his discussion of whoring is in fact an innocent work because he has been careful not to say anything that might be hurtful to weak minds. Mandeville says that his texts are philosophical and they do not popularly address the people. (Mandeville 1732: 14-15) This also makes it understandable how he sees himself justified to claim that he is not promoting the vices of the day, but ridiculing them (Mandeville 1732: 32-34). Therefore, Berkeley misrepresented him when he puts his idea as ‘the more mischief men did, the more they acted for the publick welfare’ because ‘without vices, no great nation can be rich and flourishing’ (Mandeville 1732: 54). In Mandeville’s own perspective, he has always laid ‘down as a first principle, that in all societies, great or small, it is the duty of every member of it to be good, that virtue ought to be encouraged, vice discountenanc’d, the laws obey’d, and the transgressors punish’d’ (Mandeville 1732: 4). I believe this to be a sincere comment. What the *Letter to Dion* is supposed to do is to change things so that it is impossible for Berkeley ‘to remain ignorant any longer of the innocence of my intentions, and the injustice that has been done me’ (Mandeville 1732: 11). Mandeville’s goal in writing the *Letter to Dion* was to establish a dialogue between him and Berkeley, not merely to strike back.

Private vices paradox

It is important to realize that in his attack on Mandeville in *Alciphron*, regarding consumption and the question of circulation of money, Berkeley is actually leaning on arguments about “innocent consumption” excluding luxury out of this realm. Mandeville, of course, is strongly opposed to this idea trying to explain to Berkeley why he is wrong and why the question is categorical about formulating public life according to natural human passions and not of degrees of innocent and not-so-innocent consumption.

Regarding the question of promoting vice, Berkeley keeps bringing up his accusation that the key demonstration of Mandeville’s debauching principle is that he promotes drunkenness in the name of public benefits (Berkeley 1732: 69, 79). He insults Mandeville directly trying to show how he has cornered himself with these ideas (Berkeley 1732: 84-85). As I have repeatedly said, what we need to understand is that in the *Letter to Dion* there is a

change in the presentation of the paradigm “private vices, public benefits”. It is removed quite far from the most extreme cases of the *Fable* (robbers being useful to locksmiths etc.). In *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville says that ‘What I call vices are the fashionable ways of living’ (Mandeville 1732: 31). Given the changing context, this should not be overlooked. From the provocations of the *Fable*, we have come almost to the level of promoting a national lottery. Mandeville also explains that the reason why he used the notorious paradox in the first place was to raise attention. If one reads the book, Mandeville says, he will find that it does not mean encouragement of vice (Mandeville 1732: 38). Hervey calls this a lame reading of the hypothesis, something that even he would be willing to submit to (Hervey 1732: 43-44). In this sense, what Mandeville says about the private vices, public benefits is somewhat dissimilar from the original *Fable*. He is now giving a new reading of the paradox. Mandeville says that he has never advanced anything comparable to an idea: drink and be rich. Yet, in his direct criticism of Berkeley, he does not give up the idea that some vices are necessary for a state to be flourishing.

Not only has the more radical edge disappeared from Mandeville’s use of the paradox, he also advances different arguments defending its use. Most general use of the private vices and public benefits is the explanation that men are driven for example by pride or fickleness (which would be considered a vice by moralists) when they for example wear golden brocades. Their motivation to wear certain fashionable items is not to encourage trade or concern for the public in general, this follows as unintended consequence. (Mandeville 1732: 20) An idea, as we know, made famous later by others.

This leads Mandeville to talk about ‘positive evil’ in more general terms, a theme first pursued in depth in ‘A Search into the nature of society’ in 1723. Mandeville writes that ‘natural as well as moral Evil’ can sometimes contribute to ‘worldly Greatness’ and furthermore ‘a certain Proportion of them is so necessary to all Nations, that it is not to be conceiv’d, how any Society could subsist upon Earth, exempt from all Evil, both natural and moral’ (Mandeville 1732: 21). In economic realm, Mandeville’s example is that plenty of crops is not necessary a good thing for the state revenue. Plenty in one’s country and want in others of course is. (Mandeville 1732: 50) About positive evil, Mandeville’s favourite example is that eighteenth-century London is dirty. The idea is that different professions necessarily make the streets as they are. The only way to make them less dirty would be to give up some of the opulence (or so it seemed). Mandeville’s argument is that ‘Dirty streets are a necessary evil inseparable from the felicity of London’ (Mandeville 1732: 16-17).

Now, the point that I want to make is that while this economic extension of positive evil and “private vices and public benefits” is quite familiar and we understand what Mandeville means when he argues against Berkeley that ‘To wish for the encrease of trade and navigation, and the decrease of luxury at the same time, is a contradiction’, yet there is something more to the argument (Mandeville 1732: 49). The point is that we need to adopt a way of looking at the world where we are able to question ideas about certainty and embrace the opaque nature of moral knowledge. This will then open up a path leading to an idea of a system that incorporates all citizens equitably within its boundaries, instead of treating poverty as a personal shortcoming, for example. Compared to this new way of perceiving the moral and political realm, Bayle’s earlier ideas about toleration, for example, seem almost conservative.

Although great emphasis is put on worldly greatness, Mandeville’s argument concerns politics in a much more extensive way and he discusses this in his *Letter to Dion*. As I already pointed out, Mandeville’s problem with Berkeley was the same that he had with reformation of manners movement, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and all the other moralists that had preceded him. Although different in many ways, what they were doing was precisely what Berkeley was doing, combining man’s interest with his alleged duty. This includes an idea of uniformity of self and I don’t think we are very far off, if we claim that this resembles Cartesian and Christian conception of personal identity.⁹ Moralists always started by defining the conception of a virtuous man and proper motivation and thought that this introspection was also the way to a flourishing society. For Mandeville this was not the way to approach large societies and as a moral principle it would restrict humanity to a certain, arbitrary mode without giving actual way to human flourishing that does not confine itself to one custom, but gives humans the opportunity to develop their own ways of living. *Alciphron* was particularly abusive of Mandeville because it accused him of renouncing all moral beauty when in fact what Mandeville was after was to formulate a new way of perceiving it.

There is a clear political dimension to the problem of uncertainty of moral knowledge. In his *Letter to Dion*, Mandeville was particularly worried about the role of education. He did not wish to deny that man could be taught to become virtuous, pious and good in some sense, what he wanted to say was that we should not care so much about particular motives, but concentrate on the different ways that people act in a beneficial manner. This emphasis on the external is what protects the way people cultivate their own moral judgment and identity. In

⁹ Note the general contrast that Jonathan Lamb makes between Cartesian and Humean understanding of passions and identity (Lamb 2009).

political realm man simply should not be given an opportunity to knavery. (Mandeville 1732: 33) 'It is the business of all law-givers to watch over the publick welfare, and, in order to procure that, to submit to any inconveniency, any evil, to prevent a much greater, if it is impossible to avoid that greater evil at a cheaper rate'. Thus, Mandeville gives a concrete example how the idea of "private vices, public benefits" functions also in a strictly political realm. He discusses a law that says, 'if a felon, before he is convicted himself, will impeach two or more of his accomplices, or any other malefactors, so that they are convicted of a capital crime, he shall be pardon'd and dsmiss'd with a reward in money.' (Mandeville 1732: 42-43) According to Mandeville, 'this shews the usefulness of such a law, and at the same time the wisdom of the politician, by whose skilful management the private vices of the worst of men are made to turn to a publick benefit' (Mandeville 1732: 45). The point is that ever-changing legal system is always based on a pragmatic foundation. This is one example of the practical concern of the legislators and how political attempts to define what is a good man, and how he should act, will not do when we discuss the welfare of a state.

One of Mandeville's positive contributions is to question the agent-oriented way of defining what is right and wrong and to extend the idea of private vices and public benefits to the political realm: to show how the separation of moral (and personal) and public (and political) realms is relevant for the existence of both. What we are in this manner preserving is an opportunity for everyone to become something based upon the principles of their own judgment and not on some predetermined attributes. Mandeville writes, 'we stand in need of the plagues and monsters I named, to have all the variety of labour perform'd, which the skill of men is capable of inventing, in order to procure an honest livelihood to the vast multitudes of working poor, that are required to make a large society' (Mandeville 1732: 67). What is said here (from the moral perspective) is nothing that we would consider controversial, the claim is that it is our passions that define who we are and we should be able to cherish this. One inevitable consequence is that cultivation of passions will also advance the economy, create new forms of labour and provide the ones in need with a livelihood. External attributes that enable this process are the pragmatic content and execution of laws.

Conclusion

I believe that the dialogue between Mandeville and Berkeley made a difference in Berkeley's thinking as well. One consequence is that the focus starts to switch to the idea of the labour of the poor and their condition. Mandeville took further the mercantilist idea that everyone

needs to be employed and industrious. Could we not then conclude that the next questions to be asked are: ‘Whether there ever was, or will be, an industrious nation poor, or an idle rich?’ and ‘Whether a people can be called poor, where the common sort are well fed, clothed, and lodged?’ These are Mandevillean questions that Berkeley is asking in his *Querist*. The reason why I think this dialogue between Berkeley and Mandeville is important is that this is also the way we may see that the conception of justice eventually started to expand. The concentration on the poor and the question whether we can or should define strictly what moral motives people should have eventually leads to a question of different rights that also poor people have. Only when we give up the ideals of perfectibility and uniform self we start appreciating the ones in the margins. But moral judgment does not accomplish much before it is protected by concrete laws. Developing this line of thinking is where Mandeville did a better job than Berkeley. The flaws in his approach that prevented him from being more successful in this undertaking lay elsewhere.

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