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**Conflicting Sentiments: Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Hume on Virtue and Self-Interest**

*Cahiers du Séminaire québécois en philosophie moderne / Working Papers of the Quebec Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy*

2015 | n° 1 | pages 117 to 137

**Permalink**

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**Abstract**

In this paper I evaluate challenges to Mandeville's egoist characterization of man by Hutcheson and Hume. I discuss Mandeville's genealogy of virtue in *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue* and consider Hutcheson's reply in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. Hutcheson's reply fails insofar as it does not escape the explanatory reach of Mandeville's genealogical discussion of self-interested motivations to virtue. Where Hutcheson fails, however, I argue that Hume succeeds. In the *Treatise* Hume acknowledges the tenable arguments of Mandeville's egoism while still demonstrating that approbation of virtue can extend beyond self-interest.

**Résumé**

Dans cet article, j'examine les critiques qui ont été formulées par Hutcheson et Hume contre la caractérisation égoïste de l'homme opérée par Mandeville. Je présente la généalogie de la vertu offerte par Mandeville dans *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue* et la réponse qu'y apporte Hutcheson dans *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. La réponse de Hutcheson échoue, selon moi, car elle n'échappe pas à la portée explicative de la généalogie mandevillienne des motivations égoïstes à la vertu. Toutefois, je soutiens que Hume réussit là où Hutcheson échoue. Dans le *Traité*, Hume reconnaît que les arguments de Mandeville sur l'égoïsme moral sont valides, tout en démontrant que, malgré tout, la vertu peut aller au-delà de l'intérêt personnel.

# Conflicting Sentiments: Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Hume on Virtue and Self-Interest

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In “Remark T” of the *Fable of the Bees*, Bernard Mandeville poses a seemingly innocent question: “What hurt do I do to Man if I make him more known to himself than he was before?” (Mandeville, 1988: 229). Shaftesbury before him had professed to reveal the nature of man via the self-reflective method of “soliloquy”, that “Sovereign Remedy” enabling man to “set afoot the powerfulest Facultys of his Mind, and assemble the best Forces of his Wit and Judgment, in order to make a formal Descent on the Territorys of *the Heart*” (“Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author”, in Shaftesbury, 2001: II, 105 and 219). By means of this self-examination man can master the flux of appetites, interests, and passions within his frame and gain “Knowledg of his own *natural Principles*” as grounded in the “fix’d Standard” of virtue (see “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit”, in Shaftesbury, 2001: I, 174, 198-199, and 218).<sup>1</sup>

But Mandeville rejects this “Flattery made to our Species” (Mandeville, 1988: 337).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, his subsequent depiction of mankind as essentially self-interested and devoid of virtue marks a sharp contrast with the views of his predecessor.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Mandeville’s egoist characterization of

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<sup>1</sup> These passages should be read in conjunction with Shaftesbury’s discussion of man and virtue in “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit” (Shaftesbury, 2001: I, *loc. cit.*). In the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury argues that virtue is natural to man. The “very Principle of Virtue” is “*natural and kind Affection*”, and virtue itself is “no other than the Love of Order and Beauty in Society” (Shaftesbury, 2001a: 41 and 43).

<sup>2</sup> See also Mandeville, 1988: 39 and 126.

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on Shaftesbury’s account of human nature and virtue, Mandeville writes: “[T]wo Systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship’s and mine” (Mandeville,

## Quoting this article

Burroughs, Michael D. (2015) “Conflicting Sentiments: Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Hume on Virtue and Self-Interest”. *Cahiers du Séminaire québécois en philosophie moderne / Working Papers of the Quebec Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy* 1: 115-135.

man served as a critical target for Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith – each being influenced by Shaftesbury’s ethics – to provide their own arguments on the nature of virtue and the character of man.

In this essay I will evaluate challenges posed to Mandeville as voiced by Hutcheson and Hume. To begin, I will provide a brief overview of Mandeville’s genealogy of virtue in “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue”;<sup>4</sup> it is this genealogical account that serves as the foundation of Mandeville’s critique of moral theory and, in turn, those moral theorists that “are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever troubling their Heads with telling them what they really are” (39). In Part II, I will turn to Hutcheson’s reply to Mandeville in “An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue”. In this work Hutcheson develops his account of the moral sense: in direct opposition to Mandeville, Hutcheson argues that this faculty determines an immediate, disinterested approval of virtuous action in all men and, further, that this approval is phenomenologically distinct from that of self-interested desire. Although self-interest can provide additional motives to virtuous action, Hutcheson argues that approbation of virtue depends solely on the recognition of benevolent motives to action. But Hutcheson’s response fails to overturn Mandeville’s egoist challenge for two reasons: first, Hutcheson’s arguments do not escape the explanatory “reach” of Mandeville’s genealogical discussion of self-interested motivations to virtue; and, second, Hutcheson does not adequately address the influence of education and custom on one’s conception of moral goodness, nor the relativistic conclusions derived from the effects of these social forces by Mandeville.

Where Hutcheson fails, however, I will argue that Hume succeeds. Hume acknowledges the tenable arguments of Mandeville’s egoism – including certain elements of his genealogical account of virtue – while still demonstrating that approbation of virtue *can* and *does* extend beyond self-interest. Hume’s account of the *origin* of and subsequent *natural* response to the artificial virtue of justice along with his illustration of extensive sympathy – the psychological mechanism by which sentiments are communicated between moral agents – prove effective rebuttals to Mandeville’s egoism. Furthermore, unlike Hutcheson, Hume does

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1988: 324). For the former, man is fundamentally benevolent and altruistic; for the latter, man is fundamentally egoistic and selfish. For more on the distinction between Shaftesbury and Mandeville on human nature, see Frederick B. Kaye’s “Introduction” to the *Fable*, in Mandeville, 1988: lxxii-lxxv.

<sup>4</sup> I will also reference passages from pertinent *Remarks* within the *Fable*.

not deny a robust role to education and custom in the development of man's conception of virtue. But Hume effectively demonstrates why these social forces neither fully explain our moral obligation to the artificial virtue of justice, nor explain the inherent esteem man has for the natural virtues. Taken together, then, Hume is able to do what Hutcheson could not: he provides an account of virtue that withstands the challenge of Mandeville's egoist characterization of man and morality.

*Part I. Mandeville on Man, Society, and Self-Interest*

Mandeville begins "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" with a description of man's egoism:

All untaught Animals are only solicitous of pleasing themselves, and naturally follow the bent of their Inclinations, without considering the good or harm that from their being pleased will accrue to others. This is the Reason that in the wild State of Nature those Creatures are fittest to live peaceably together in great Numbers, that discover the least of Understanding, and have the fewest Appetites to gratify; and consequently no Species of Animals is, without the Curb of Government, less capable of agreeing long together in Multitudes than that of Man [...] being an extraordinary selfish and headstrong, as well as cunning animal (41).

Man is *by nature* self-interested; he is devoid of original concern for the public good and seeks pleasure and private advantage.<sup>5</sup> Mandeville's characterization of man leaves us with a pressing question: amongst such self-interested creatures, how can society, which *prima facie* requires man's just action and pursuit of the public good, come into existence let alone remain stable once formed? Mandeville's attempt to answer this question comes in the form of a parable detailing the suppression of man's brute egoism by "Lawgivers".<sup>6</sup> Early

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<sup>5</sup> In "A Search into the Nature of Society", Mandeville writes: "[B]e we Savages or Politicians, it is impossible that Man, mere fallen Man, should act with any other View but to please himself [...]. Since then Action is so confin'd, and we are always forc'd to do what we please, and at the same time our Thoughts are free and uncontrolled, it is impossible we could be sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy" (Mandeville, 1988: 348-349).

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note Mandeville's qualification to his parable of the origin of society and moral virtue. Mandeville writes: "This was (or at least might have been) the manner after which Savage Man was broke" (Mandeville, 1988: 46). As Kaye writes in his "Introduction" to the *Fable*: "[H]is [Mandeville's] description of the invention of virtue and society by lawgivers and wise men who deliberately imposed upon man's pride and

legislators recognized that the “Chiefest Ingredients” of man – self-love and pride – made him susceptible of moral training and governance (see “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue”, “Remark C”, and “Remark M”, Mandeville, 1988: 45, 75, and 124). Men could be divided into two artificial classes: those of an inferior second class lacking both self-denial and interest in the public good; and those fully rational men, devoid of selfishness and wholly focused on public welfare (see 43-44). Given man’s inherent pride and self-love, the legislators needed only to flatter man by acknowledging his superiority to all other creatures and, in turn, to associate socially expedient qualities with those of the superior class (see 43). Through the influence of flattery savage man would do “violence” to his own nature; he would undergo hardship and deny his appetites in order to gain the pride of being superior to the brutes (see 45). Thus, we have an answer to our pressing question: society is made possible by essential elements of man, namely, his pride and susceptibility to flattery. By means of flattery, man is conditioned to limit his immediate appetites and impulses and to perform the publicly useful actions necessary for a functioning society. By means of pride, society, once formed, can remain stable. In limiting immediate appetites and performing ostensibly benevolent acts, man takes pride in being part of the superior class and increases his self-love in virtue of the praise received from others. Thus, man has substantial motivation to remain in society, motivation stemming from his self-love, prideful passions, and the great pleasure associated with the satisfaction of these passions.

It is here – set in sharp contrast to the appetitive nature of man – that we begin to see Mandeville’s rigorist conception of virtue: virtue is located only in those motives stemming from a purely rational choice of the public good, a choice that requires the complete self-denial of one’s natural appetites and impulses. The original legislators had introduced the “first Rudiments of Morality” in order to rule men more easily. But the common appetitive man (of the second class) recognized the potential for satisfying his interests through self-restraint and pursuit of the public good. He would save himself unnecessary trouble by checking his reckless search for pleasure and reap numerous benefits from those seeking the public welfare (see 48). “Virtue”, it was agreed by all, would be assigned to “every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the Benefit of others, or the Conquest of

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shame is a parable and not an attempt at history [...]. He did not mean that ‘politicians’ constructed morality out of whole cloth; they merely directed instincts already predisposed to moral guidance” (in Mandeville, 1988: lxiv).

his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good” (48-49).<sup>7</sup> What had been a distinction in the frame of man – between his rational and appetitive qualities – was now associated with the social division between the virtuous and the vicious. Once established, men took the greatest pleasure (felt pride) from being counted among the noble and virtuous species of humanity while taking pain (felt shame) from being considered vicious pleasure seekers.

According to Mandeville, then, *all* thoughts of and motivations toward virtue and public welfare remain firmly rooted in one’s own self-interested pride and desire for pleasure (see 49 and 57). From his earliest youth, man is educated by means of pride and shame, taking his end as the satisfaction of pleasing his parents and teachers. As an adult he sets a different end but continues to act from self-love and prideful motives, always seeking the “Reward of Glory” that is inextricably linked to virtuous action (see 52-57).<sup>8</sup> No matter the publicly useful outcome of a man’s action or his apparent sincerity in acting for the public good, virtue remains absent in the hearts of men as does any original, benevolent desire for public welfare apart from one’s own interests.<sup>9</sup> On Mandeville’s rigorist account of virtue, man is only virtuous when acting in complete self-denial of his passions in conjunction with a rational choice of the good. But this species of action lies beyond the capabilities of mankind. Indeed, even in the actions of those deemed most virtuous and altruistic “we may discover no small Symptoms of Pride” (57) and, thus, Mandeville states baldly:

If you ask me where to look for those beautiful shining Qualities of Prime Ministers, and the great Favourites of Princes that are so finely painted in Dedications, Addresses, Epitaphs, Funeral Sermons and Inscriptions, I answer *There*, and no where else [...]. This has often made me compare the Virtues of great Men to your large *China Jars*: they make a fine Shew, and are Ornamental even to a Chimney; one would by the Bulk they appear in, and the Value that is set upon ’em, think they might be very useful, but look into a thousand of them,

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<sup>7</sup> Conversely, vice was assigned to “every thing, which, without Regard to the Publick, Man should commit to gratify any of his Appetites...if in that Action there could be observed the least prospect, that it might either be injurious to any of the Society, or ever render himself less serviceable to others” (“An Enquiry”, in Mandeville, 1988: 48).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of education as based in pride and shame, see “Remark C” (in Mandeville, 1988: 63-72).

<sup>9</sup> It remains a question as to whether Mandeville allows for the existence of *any* virtuous men or virtuous motives (both in the past or present). See Mandeville, 1988: 133-134 and 231. See also Kaye’s discussion of this question in his “Introduction” to the *Fable* (in Mandeville, 1988: xlv-lvi).

and you'll find nothing in them but Dust and Cobwebs ("Remark O", in Mandeville, 1988: 168).

On Mandeville's account we find no true self-denial in the greatest of men, nor do we find restraint of appetite in mankind generally. On the contrary, there is always a reward for ostensibly virtuous (i.e., self-denying) action, namely, the satisfaction of pride and self-interest. And no matter the beneficiary of his action—friend, family, or society—man fully repays his own self-love with the pride and pleasure of reflecting on his virtuous act (see "A Search into the Nature of Society", in Mandeville, 1988: 342). We find no self-denial in man and, therefore, we find no virtue. For all their work, moralists at best bring us to understand the *theory* of virtue. But its *practice* is nowhere to be found (see "An Enquiry", in Mandeville, 1988: 152 and 168).

*Part II. Hutcheson and the Moral Sense: A Response to Mandeville*

For our purposes, the most important feature of Hutcheson's response to Mandeville is his discussion of the moral sense (see Hutcheson, 2003: 510). On the basis of this internal sense<sup>10</sup> Hutcheson develops two important arguments: first, he argues that, just as we do not choose what forms of objects (perceived by *external* senses) give us pleasure or pain, we also do not choose those qualities of actions and affections (perceived by our *internal* sense) that give us pleasure or pain (see Hutcheson, 2003: 505-506 and 510). Rather, by implanting a moral sense in each of us, the "author of nature" determined our immediate approval of benevolent actions. For this reason, Mandeville's discussion of self-interested motivations toward the public welfare only proves (at most) that it is possible to *add* self-interested motives to man's *original* desire for the public good (see 508-509). In other words, arguments based in self-interest can only motivate us insofar as they appeal to that which our moral sense *antecedently* determines as virtuous and choiceworthy. Emphasizing the priority of approbation from the moral sense to calculations of self-interest, Hutcheson writes:

Some moralists [...] will rather twist self-love into a thousand shapes than allow any other principle of approbation than interest [...]. Allow their reasoning to be perfectly good, they only prove that after long reflection and reasoning we may find out some ground to judge certain actions advantageous to us which every man admires as soon as he hears of them (508; see also 506 and 521).

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<sup>10</sup> Hutcheson enumerates the distinct senses of human beings in the "Preface" to *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*; see Hutcheson, 2002: 5.

Hutcheson does not deny the private advantages gained from benevolent actions, nor does he contest that – given our imperfect nature – self-love and self-interested calculations often do act as motivating principles for action toward the public good (see 517). Nonetheless, our approval of actions as based in the moral sense is original and disinterested. Indeed, *contra* Mandeville’s claims about self-interested motives to publicly beneficial action, Hutcheson argues that we *must* possess an original approval of benevolent actions prior to self-interested motivations. For it would be “ridiculous” to try to direct man’s sentiments to benevolent ends via the prospect of rewards or threats if he had no natural “moral notions” antecedently disposing him to desire such ends (see 509). Mandeville’s legislators could (at best) appeal to an original determination in man to approve benevolent action and to act for public advantage.

Hutcheson’s second moral sense based challenge to Mandeville focuses on the influence of education and custom on man’s conception of the good. Citing these socio-cultural forces, Mandeville maintained that the good is relative to a given society, culture, or historical era. On Mandeville’s account, there is no more certainty in morals than there is in taste for style of dress and beauty in art – in each of these cases our approval or disapproval “chiefly depends on Mode and Custom” (“A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 330). Hutcheson’s response to Mandeville again relies on the moral sense: not only is this faculty *original* in its determination of man’s approbation of benevolent motives, it is also *universal*; that is, it is possessed by all men, comprehends all men, and is prior in influence to the effects of education and custom (see Hutcheson, 2003: 509-510). Moral goodness is an original “perception” of benevolence universally shared by men independent of private interest and socio-cultural forces (see Hutcheson, 2003: 509). This is not to say that rational justifications for our approbation of benevolent actions cannot be found – we need only cite the tendency of benevolent actions to benefit the public and, in turn, ourselves as part of the public to see that this is not the case. But in making such arguments we are engaging in apologetics for that which our natural sense originally and universally approves (see 521). Our conception of virtue and moral goodness is no more the product of education and custom than are our external sensations of pleasure and pain – the author of nature created us to take joy in benevolent acts in the same way he disposed us to take pleasure in beautiful forms and harmonious compositions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hutcheson writes: “[V]irtue itself, or good dispositions of mind, are not directly taught or produced by instruction; they must be originally implanted in our nature by its

But these arguments fail to rebut Mandeville's egoist challenge. To understand why they fail, we must note an additional, phenomenological element of Hutcheson's response to Mandeville. Hutcheson provides a phenomenological description of moral experience in order to secure the *originality* and *universality* of approbation of benevolence from the moral sense: joy and approbation immediately "spring" from man's recognition of benevolence in others, whereas the recognition of self-interested motivations raises disapprobation and abhorrence, regardless of any personal benefit gained from such an action (see 507-508). Even if we suppose that the prospects of personal advantage are the same in both cases, Hutcheson argues, I only *approve* that action sourced in benevolence.

But this phenomenological distinction does not escape the explanatory "reach" of Mandeville's genealogy of virtue in the *Fable*. Mandeville would agree with such an *apparent* source of our approbation while maintaining that the *actual* source of this approval is self-love and the prospect of personal advantage.<sup>12</sup> His argument turns on the following: the force of our socialization – beginning in our youth and remaining with us as adults – is such that we can be deceived as to our own motives, mistaking our prideful acts for those grounded in disinterested benevolence. The well-bred man restrains his appetites for the sake of the public good just as the educated man observes the desires of others before his own. But in each case the public good is not the true end, nor is benevolence the actual motive to action. Rather, each man sacrifices "only the insipid outward Part of [...] Pride" and, in return, "over-pays to Self-love with Interest, the loss it sustain'd in his Complacence to others" ("Remark C", in Mandeville, 1988: 78). Thus, from Mandeville's perspective, Hutcheson arguably plays a significant role in perpetuating the illusion of man's disinterested benevolence, thereby contributing to the force of this socialization; like Shaftesbury before him, he presents man as originally virtuous and capable of disinterested benevolence. In doing so, Mandeville argues, both men do man

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great Author, and afterwards strengthened and confirmed by our own cultivation" (Hutcheson, 2003: 521; see also 510).

<sup>12</sup> Mandeville writes: "[W]e are ever pushing our Reason which way soever we feel Passion to draw it, and Self-love pleads to all human Creatures for their different Views, still furnishing every individual with Arguments to justify their Inclinations" ("A Search", in Mandeville, 1988: 333).

great harm, misleading him as to his true, selfish nature.<sup>13</sup> Though he too prefers “the Road that leads to Virtue” Mandeville refuses to deceive man as to his ability to attain this end (see “Remark T”, in Mandeville, 1988: 230-231).

At this point it seems that we are faced with a decision between which account of man and virtue we will choose to believe. Is there really a distinct, moral sense in all of us that determines our approbation of virtue apart from *all* interest? Or, are what I take as my attempts at virtuous action as well as my approval of the virtuous actions of others *always* in fact based in self-interest? Of course, it is difficult to wholly disprove either of these accounts, but our choice between them need not be arbitrary. First, we can recognize that the greater explanatory burden falls on Hutcheson. Mandeville does not argue that man *ought* to pursue his private advantage at every turn, but rather, he maintains that man is incapable of acting in any other fashion. His argument is an attempt to undercut the continual flattery of man’s nature as one naturally disposed to disinterested benevolent action; it is not an attempt to promote vice.<sup>14</sup> Given that Hutcheson maintains that benevolent action *is* original and universal to man and, further, that we *do* approve of benevolent actions prior to self-interested reflection, it is necessary for him to demonstrate that his arguments amount to more than mere flattery of mankind. If successful, he will illustrate the potential for virtue in man desired by himself and Mandeville alike.<sup>15</sup>

Second, it is problematic that in accepting this challenge Hutcheson continually relies on a phenomenological distinction between the experience of joy in the recognition of benevolent motives to action and that of desire for possession and personal advantage. Hutcheson argues that we immediately

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<sup>13</sup> Mandeville writes: “[T]he generous Notions concerning the natural Goodness of Man are hurtful as they tend to mis-lead, and are merely Chimerical” (“A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 342).

<sup>14</sup> Mandeville writes: “I lay 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 encourag’d, Vice discountenanc’d, the Laws obey’d, and the Transgressors punish’d” (“A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 229).

<sup>15</sup> See previous footnote, as well as Kaye’s “Introduction”, in Mandeville, 1988: lii-lvi. Given his discussion of virtue, man, and society in the *Fable*, Mandeville’s claims to prefer the path of virtue to that of vice is difficult to wholly accept. In response to Mandeville’s statement that he “always without Hesitation preferr’d the Road that leads to Virtue” Kaye argues that “he [Mandeville] is simply not to be believed” (lv). On Kaye’s account, Mandeville’s statement – given his moral rigorism and pessimistic account of man’s capacity for virtuous action – should be interpreted as an attempt at satire.

approve of actions flowing from “love, humanity, gratitude, compassion, a study of the good of others, and an ultimate desire of their happiness” though these might bring no personal advantage to us (see Hutcheson, 2003: 508). We are, quite simply, conscious of an experiential difference between approbation sourced in the recognition of benevolent motives and approval based in the prospect of personal advantage (see 507). But, again, Hutcheson does not recognize that his phenomenological distinction between the esteem for benevolence and the desire for personal advantage does not escape Mandeville’s genealogical account of virtue. Mandeville’s parable possesses the explanatory power to account for the immediate joy and pleasure taken in these “virtuous” actions. This approval is based in our self-interest; we need no moral sense to explain it. As Mandeville writes, “the Force of Custom warps Nature, and at the same time imitates her in such a manner, that it is often difficult to know which of the two we are influenced by” (“A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 330). We *do* take joy in the (seemingly) disinterested and publicly useful actions of others; this much is true. But this *does not* mean that we have an original, moral sense determining such approbation. Rather, this approval is merely the sign of a socialization and influence so successful that it “imitates” a natural response.

Hutcheson himself admits that self-love can (and often does) act as a motive to action. He goes so far as to acknowledge that we cannot know the extent to which man’s actions are influenced by self-interest (see Hutcheson, 2003: 512 and 517). Despite this potential source of motivation, he argues, we can “compute” the benevolence in each act and “where self-interest excites to the same action, the approbation is given only to the disinterested principle” (511).<sup>16</sup> Self-interested motives may add extra appeal or “strength” to benevolent actions, but it is our benevolence alone that constitutes the virtue of an act (see 512). But Mandeville need not accept the viability of this neat and

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<sup>16</sup> Hutcheson writes: “[A]s all men have self-love, as well as benevolence, these two principles may jointly excite a man to the same action; and they are to be considered as two forces impelling the same body to motion...[but] if a man have such strong benevolence as would have produced an action without any views of self-interest, that such a man has also in view private advantage along with public good as the effect of his action does no way diminish the benevolence of the action...the effect of self-love is to be deducted and his benevolence is proportioned to the remainder of good which pure benevolence would have produced” (see Hutcheson, 2003: 511-512). Later, he goes on to discuss six axioms for computing the morality of actions, including the measurement of the “moral importance of the agent” and the proportion of “moments of public good” in actions to “the goodness of the temper or benevolence” (516).

tidy computation of benevolence, nor that self-love, in fact, is the driving force behind these actions. Nor does Mandeville share Hutcheson's confidence in the possibility of "deducting" self-interested motives to action, and for good reason. On Mandeville's account, determining man's motivations is a messy business. Man is a compound of passions centering in self-love; our self-interest provides justifications for each of our inclinations, presenting them as just, necessary, or even benevolent (see "Preface", in Mandeville, 1988: 39; see also 75 and 333). Along with the additional socialization of moralists, educators and custom, man is not always conscious of the self-interested passions that ground his publicly useful actions. Given this confusion in the frame of man it remains a question as to how reliable Hutcheson's objective computation of benevolent motives actually is.

But Hutcheson's account faces yet another challenge from Mandeville. As discussed above, Hutcheson maintains that the moral sense is not only original in determining our approval of benevolent acts, but also universal – it is implanted in all of humanity and, thus, all mankind view benevolence as the good.<sup>17</sup> But if all people *do* have a uniform moral sense how is it that societies and individuals *do* vary in their conceptions of the good and beautiful in actions? As Mandeville points out, we need only look to common experience to recognize that there is no greater certainty in morals than there is in culturally relative judgments of beauty in art and propriety in custom. The florist prefers this flower to that one; the beard and top hat are fashionable in this era but no longer in ten years past; polygamy is evil to one religion and a necessary rite in another (see "A Search", in Mandeville: 327-329). From their earliest youth children are trained to take pride in certain actions and shame in others and, as adults, they judge certain actions virtuous and others vicious. It is due to the "excessive Force of Education" that these socialized distinctions are ascribed to the "Dictates of Nature" ("Remark C", in Mandeville, 1988: 71 and 78). Thus, attempts to identify a universal moral good prior to the influence of education and social influence amounts to a "Wild-Goose-Chace" ("A Search", in Mandeville, 1988: 221). Given the influence of education, custom, and society we find vastly different accounts of the good and divergent standards for virtuous action. Hutcheson's claim that education and custom do not influence our determinations of the good and, further, that they "give us no new ideas" seems, at best, naïve; at worst, an act of flattery and deception.

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<sup>17</sup> "Moral goodness", Hutcheson writes, "denotes our idea of some quality apprehended in actions which procures approbation attended with desire of the agent's happiness" (506). The apprehended "quality" is disinterested benevolence.

I have argued that Hutcheson's response to Mandeville is insufficient in at least two important ways: first, his phenomenological distinction between the joy of viewing benevolent actions and the pleasure of self-interested advantage escapes neither Mandeville's genealogical account of virtue nor his description of contemporary man's self-deception as to his motives for approbation of virtue; second, given that Hutcheson's moral sense is – prior to the influence of education and custom – presented as a universal source of man's approbation, it is not clear why a vast diversity of conceptions of moral goodness and virtuous action do exist. To the extent that Hutcheson falters in adequately addressing these challenges he cannot fully respond to Mandeville's egoism.

*Part III. Hume on Justice and Sympathy: A Response to Mandeville*

As we have seen, Hutcheson's response to Mandeville is to reject the characterization of man as fundamentally selfish; he does not accept Mandeville's genealogy of virtue in the *Fable* nor his description of self-interested motivations informing the benevolent acts of contemporary man. On Hutcheson's account, man is naturally disposed to take joy in disinterested benevolence and is capable of authentically virtuous action. That Hume – in response to Mandeville – does not wholly reject the genealogical account of virtue nor the egoist characterization of man distinguishes his response from that of his predecessor. In direct opposition to Hutcheson, Hume dismisses any original or universal benevolence in man, maintaining that “there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself” (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 1, 12).

But the greatest similarities between Hume and Mandeville are found in their accounts of man's original motivation to virtuous action, particularly in Hume's discussion of the origin of the artificial virtue<sup>18</sup> of justice and Mandeville's genealogy of virtue in the *Fable*. Like Mandeville, Hume provides

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<sup>18</sup> Hume defines an *artificial virtue* as one that produces “pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind” (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 1, 1). Examples include justice, promise keeping, and chastity. In contrast, a *natural virtue* has “no dependence on the artifice and contrivance of men” (III, 3, 1, 1). Examples include benevolence and care for children. For additional examples see footnote 28 below.

an account of man's original condition in the state of nature, arguing that the sense of justice emerges not on account of any distinct moral faculty (such as Hutcheson's moral sense), but rather, from the artifice of education and human convention (see III, 2, 1, 17 and 2, 2, 26).<sup>19</sup> Like Mandeville's "savage man", Hume's original man is in peril in the state of nature – he has many needs but few natural abilities to satisfy them (see III, 2, 2, 2).<sup>20</sup> Society is a product of necessity; it is due to the "easy change" and "scarcity" of external goods in conjunction with man's "selfishness" and "limited generosity" that this convention must be founded, thereby providing mankind with additional force, ability, and security (see III, 2, 2, 16).<sup>21</sup>

Man, then, is originally self-interested, possessing a drive to secure the scarce natural goods at his disposal with only a limited generosity toward his friends and closest relations. Though providing for the necessity of society, man's self-interest and partiality to his friends and family threaten to tear this human convention apart at its inception.<sup>22</sup> As on Mandeville's account, the remedy to this problem is derived from pragmatic *artifice*. Hume maintains that a convention providing for man's secure possession of goods supplies the motive to justice and allows the sense of this artificial virtue to take hold in society (see III, 2, 2, 11).<sup>23</sup> In agreement with Mandeville – and in disagreement with Hutcheson – Hume argues that justice is not founded on original or universal benevolence. For if benevolence were universal there would be no need for a convention to restrain man's partiality and desire for the goods of others and,

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<sup>19</sup> Just as Mandeville did in the *Fable*, Hume qualifies his account of the development of virtue and society in the *Treatise*. The state of nature is "a mere philosophical fiction, which never had, and never cou'd have any reality" (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 14).

<sup>20</sup> Man is subject to an "unnatural conjunction of infirmity, and of necessity." Society is chiefly in man's interests as it satisfies his wants more than is possible in his "savage and solitary condition" (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 3). See Mandeville's similar discussion in the *Fable* ("A Search", in Mandeville, 1988: 344-345).

<sup>21</sup> Though the "original principle of human society" is attraction between the sexes (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 4).

<sup>22</sup> Hume writes: "[T]his avidity alone, of acquiring goods and possessions for ourselves and our nearest friends, is insatiable, perpetual, universal, and directly destructive of society... So that upon the whole, we are to esteem the difficulties in the establishment of society, to be greater or less, according to those we encounter in regulating and restraining this passion" (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 12).

<sup>23</sup> This convention also gives rise to the ideas of property, right, and obligation.

thus, no need for the artificial virtue of justice.<sup>24</sup> Nor does justice arise from even a *restrained* self-interest, but ultimately, only by altering its direction to that of the public good (see III, 2, 2, 13).<sup>25</sup>

At this point it seems that far from challenging Mandeville's account of man, society, and virtue, Hume instead reinforces it at every turn. We must now identify Hume's challenge to Mandeville and, in turn, the potential success of his response where Hutcheson's failed. First, though he does not take the hard line of Hutcheson – that man is originally benevolent and universally determined to approve of all virtue –, Hume does share a basic response with his predecessor. Regardless of Mandeville's accurate assessment of man's selfishness and the ability of early legislators to manipulate this self-interest, Hume argues, he fails to recognize that we *do* nonetheless have original moral dispositions (see III, 2, 2, 25 and III, 3, 1, 11). Hume writes:

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 [...] 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 *praiseworthy*, *blameable* and *odious*, be any more intelligible, than if they were a language perfectly unknown to us (III, 3, 1, 11).

Despite man's original selfishness, he does possess a natural sense of vice and virtue. Man is greatly influenced in his moral distinctions by custom and education but, as Hutcheson contended before Hume, without an original moral disposition toward public welfare the cajoling of Mandeville's legislators and educators to benevolent actions would have been performed in vain (see Hutcheson, 2003: 509); they could only influence natural sentiments that we

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<sup>24</sup> Hume writes: “[A] regard to public interest, or a strong extensive benevolence, is not our first and original motive for the observation of the rules of justice; since 'tis allowed, that if men were endow'd with such a benevolence, these rules would never have been dreamt of” (Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 19). For Mandeville's similar claim in the *Fable*, see “A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 346-347.

<sup>25</sup> We alter the direction of self-interest by reflecting on the fact that this passion is better satisfied in society than it is in the brutish state of nature. It is important to note that Hume is not interested in determining whether self-interest is virtuous or vicious *as such*. Rather, he is concerned with showing that this passion alone is capable of restraining itself by finding an application in the good of society. For a similar claim by Mandeville see “A Search”, in Mandeville, 1988: 333-334.

*already* possess and pervert moral distinctions we *already* make (see 509; see also Hume, 2000: III, 2, 2, 25; 2, 5, 9; and 3, 1, 11).

Hume's argument on the priority of moral distinctions (sentiments of praise and blame) to the influence of socialization differentiates his account of virtue from that of Mandeville. Hume does not wholly accept Mandeville's genealogical account of virtue, but rather, argues that – in addition to man's self-interested motivations to the artificial virtue of justice – human nature also includes a natural sense of virtue and vice.<sup>26</sup> But this argument does little work in overturning Mandeville's egoism and if this response constituted the heart of Hume's challenge he would ultimately fair no better than Hutcheson. More to the point, Hume's reliance on original and universal moral sentiments to undercut Mandeville's emphasis on socio-cultural determination is liable to the same responses directed at Hutcheson in his attempts to make this kind of argument.<sup>27</sup> To find a novel and convincing challenge to Mandeville's genealogical account we must turn to a different component of Hume's *Treatise*, an element within this work that provides for an account of disinterested approbation of virtue.

Though he agrees with Mandeville in regard to the source of *natural* obligation to justice (self-interest), Hume argues that there is also a distinct *moral* obligation to justice (see III, 2, 2, 23-24 and 3, 6, 5): our approbation and disapprobation of just or unjust acts can be transformed via the psychological

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<sup>26</sup> Speaking of the moral sentiments, Hume writes: “[T]here never was any nation of the world, nor any single person in any nation, who was utterly depriv’d of them [...]. These sentiments are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, ’tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them” (Hume, 2000: III, 1, 2, 8; see also 3, 3, 6 for Hume's claim that “a sense of morals is principle inherent in the soul”). In the third part of Book III Hume argues that many virtues and vices are “entirely natural, and have no dependence on the artifice and contrivance of men”. These, of course, are the “natural virtues and vices” (III, 3, 1, 1). Hume describes certain qualities of the mind as naturally virtuous or vicious: qualities that are useful or agreeable to oneself or to others (virtuous) and qualities that are disadvantageous or disagreeable to oneself or to others (vicious) (III, 3, 1, 30). However, he provides no exhaustive list of the natural virtues and vices. See III, 3, 3, 3, for a potential listing of natural virtues. For more on the natural virtues, see David Fate Norton's “Introduction” to Hume, 2000: 192-195.

<sup>27</sup> Albeit Hutcheson emphasizes the priority of a “moral sense” rather than “moral sentiments” (see Hutcheson, 2003: Part II).

mechanism of sympathy (see III, 2, 2, 24).<sup>28</sup> Despite their artificial origin, the rules of justice – by a “progress of sentiments” – are *naturally* approved due to their benefit to society and our ability to sympathize with the greater concerns of mankind (see III, 2, 1, 19; 3, 1, 12; and 3, 6, 5). Mandeville, then, has provided us only with the *first* stage of our adherence to justice. His account of virtue is incomplete as he does not recognize the possibility – inherent in human nature – of progression from this self-interested stage of motivation to a disinterested moral approval of justice that is itself *natural*, though not *original* (see III, 2, 2, 25). As Hume argues, though justice is originally based in human convention:

[M]ankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as anything that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection. Tho’ the rules of justice be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*. Nor is the expression improper to call them *laws of nature*, if by *natural* we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species (III, 2, 1, 19).<sup>29</sup>

Just as “the sentiments of morality” are natural and “inseparable” from man, so, ultimately, is esteem for the virtue of justice (see III, 1, 2, 8 and 2, 1, 19). The esteem for both classes of virtue – natural and artificial – is latent in human nature: the former being immediately manifest upon the view of useful and agreeable qualities in ourselves and others; the latter becoming manifest only once an artificial virtue has the established “tendency” of benefiting society and, further, in man’s progression from original, self-interested motivations to disinterested concern for the common good via sympathy with public interests (see III, 3, 1, 9-12). Thus, on Hume’s account, the artificial origin of justice – often emphasized in Mandeville genealogy of virtue – need not hinder our esteem for its rules. The progression of our moral sentiments and the capacity for sympathizing with societal concerns makes the mandates of this artificial virtue as “stedfast and immutable” as any law of nature (see III, 3, 6, 5 and 2, 1, 19).

If Hume has addressed Mandeville’s critique of the artificial origins of justice, he still must face his characterization of man as fundamentally selfish. We will recall that Mandeville presented mankind as having no interest in public

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<sup>28</sup> For Hume’s detailed account of the process of sympathy, see III, 2, 1, 11. For further discussion of the process of sympathy, see Debes, 2007; especially, 316-319.

<sup>29</sup> For Hume’s discussion of the multiple senses of the term “natural” see Hume, 2000: III, 1, 2, 7-10.

welfare outside of its indirect effects on his own interests. In response, Hume maintains that, if true, such thoroughgoing egoism in man cannot account for our moral approval of many benevolent acts. We need only consult experience to find that publicly useful acts often provide us with no private benefit, and yet, we still approve of such actions as if they directly affected our own welfare (see III, 3, 1, 11). Benevolent actions can only affect us with such force via the mechanism of sympathy.<sup>30</sup> It is this principle in human nature “which takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in characters which are useful or pernicious to society, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss” (III, 3, 1, 11). Indeed, we are also familiar with cases of injustice that bring no harm to ourselves, but still inspire anger and prejudice toward the perpetrator – this reaction is explained given our interest in the welfare of others, which, in turn, is only possible due to our capacity for sympathy with interests other than our own (see III, 2, 2, 24).

But Hume’s account of sympathy provides a response to yet another element of Mandeville’s discussion, one that presented a major difficulty for Hutcheson’s account of the universal moral sense: namely, the socializing influences of education and custom and their affects on man’s moral distinctions. Hume does not rely on Hutcheson’s maintenance of universal benevolence in man, nor on a phenomenological distinction between the feeling of joy taken in benevolence as opposed to that felt in self-interest.<sup>31</sup> Hume also does not reply to Mandeville’s relativistic account of moral approval with a flat denial of the influence of education and custom. On the contrary, Hume recognizes these influences on our moral distinctions along with numerous others (e.g., our moral sentiments vary not only due to socio-cultural influence,

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<sup>30</sup> Hume writes: “[T]he good of society, where our own interest is not concern’d, or that of our friends, pleases only by sympathy” (Hume, 2000: III, 3, 1, 19).

<sup>31</sup> Hume does make a phenomenological distinction between the experience of taking pleasure in inanimate objects and that of taking pleasures in virtuous characters. Hume writes: “an inanimate object, and the character or sentiments of any person may, both of them, give satisfaction; but as the satisfaction is different, this keeps our sentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us ascribe virtue to the one, and not to the other” (Hume, 2000: III, 1, 2, 4). To possess the sense of virtue “is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of character” (III, 1, 2, 3).

but also in regard to our proximity to the person being judged (both in time and place) as well as by our emotional state when judging; see III, 3, 1, 16).<sup>32</sup>

But Hume once again returns to make an appeal to experience. Past judgments teach us that we must correct for this variability and regard as *moral* sentiments only those derived from our sympathy with those in commerce with the person we are judging, thereby disregarding (or, at the very least, diluting) our own self-interested motives (see 1, 15-18, 20, 23, and 29-30; 3, 1, 29; and 2, 4). Only sentiments derived from this mediated experience serve as “the standard of virtue and morality [...] on which moral distinctions depend” (3, 1, 30). In effect, then, Hume counters Mandeville’s argument from socialization not by disputing Mandeville’s account of these influences, nor by dismissing socio-cultural forces that can create severe biases in our judgments. Rather, Hume disagrees that we are utterly incapable of correcting for these influences. Given past experience, we recognize that we must form *general standards* as to virtuous and vicious conduct (17 and 19). For if we did not our judgments would be full of “contradictions” and “uncertainty”, weakening the force of our moral assessments and making social discourse unacceptably arduous (see 18). In short, Mandeville takes the influence of education and custom too far. We are not so deceived as to fail to recognize that “our situation, with regard both to persons and things, is in continual fluctuation”; we act to prevent these “*contradictions*” by focusing on “some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation” (15). We are able to move beyond our own self-interest and, in doing so, we can make truly *moral* judgments (see 17-18).<sup>33</sup>

Hume’s description of disinterested moral judgment and approbation of virtue relies heavily on his account of sympathy. The force of his challenge to Mandeville is contingent upon the acknowledgment of this psychological mechanism as a universal quality of human nature. Hutcheson does not discuss

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<sup>32</sup> For Hume’s discussion of the influence of education and custom on moral assessment, see III, 2, 2, 26 and 3, 2, 11.

<sup>33</sup> At III, 1, 2, 4, Hume discusses man’s ability to differentiate sentiments from interest and sentiments from morals: “Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another. It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness. But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgment may preserve himself from these illusions”.

sympathy and, thus, it served as no resource for his response to Mandeville.<sup>34</sup> The *Fable* also lacks a discussion of sympathy and, for this reason, it might be argued that Mandeville need not recognize Hume's sympathy-based challenges. Simply put, Mandeville's account is not successfully challenged by counter arguments relying on a psychological mechanism that he neither discusses, nor recognizes as existing in man. We leave ourselves open to a charge of anachronism by holding Mandeville responsible for arguments based in sympathy as it is not he, but later sentimentalists – Hume and Smith – that focus on this capacity and its role in social function, assessment of virtue and vice, and moral judgment.

But we should not dismiss Hume's sympathy-based critiques of Mandeville's account of man and virtue so quickly. For the establishment of the primary argument and paradox of the *Fable* – that private vices lead to public benefits – presupposes the ability to sympathize with others and, thus, a capacity for sympathy in man. Before we can see this, however, we need to recognize two elements of Mandeville's discussion in the *Fable*. First, Mandeville's own account of the passions – in particular, pity and shame – relies on the acknowledgment of a sympathetic capacity in man. Indeed, Mandeville's discussion of these passions reads like a precursor to Hume's account of sympathy in the *Treatise*. It is true that Mandeville does not invoke the term "sympathy," but he *does* discuss the passion of pity (or "compassion") as consisting in "a Fellow-feeling and Condolence for the Misfortunes and Calamities of others" ("An Essay on Charity, and Charity Schools", in Mandeville, 1988: 260 and 245; see also "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue", *ibid.*: 56). This passion arises in us "when the Sufferings and Misery of other Creatures make *so forcible an impression upon us*, as to make us uneasy [...] often to such a Degree as to occasion great Pain and Anxiety" ("An Essay", in Mandeville, 1988: 254-255). In turn, the passion of shame is described as "a sorrowful reflexion on our own Unworthiness, proceeding from an Apprehension that others either do, or might, if they knew all, deservedly despise us" ("Remark C", in Mandeville, 1988: 64). By Mandeville's own definition, then, shame arises upon receiving (or considering the reception of) the sentiment of another (disgust) and applying it to one's self-image. As grounded in receiving the sentiments of others, shame accounts for the force of education and socialization so necessary to Mandeville's account of society in

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<sup>34</sup> Hutcheson does mention sympathy but he does not develop any robust discussion of this capacity. See "Preface" to Hutcheson, 2002: 5.

the *Fable*.<sup>35</sup> It is thus essential to recognize that within Mandeville's own discussion of these passions, many of the psychological elements later developed in Hume's account of sympathy are present, including fellow-feeling, the application of the idea of another's passion to oneself, and non-verbal communication of sentiments. Thus, we do not commit an act of anachronism by challenging Mandeville with arguments invoking man's capacity for sympathy.

Second, Mandeville argues that "it is impossible to judge of a Man's Performance unless we are thoroughly acquainted with the Principle and Motive from which he acts" ("An Enquiry", in Mandeville, 1988: 56). It is true that the external acts of men might benefit the public, but their internal motivations are based in self-love and, thus, no virtue is found in these "benevolent" actions (see "Remark O", in Mandeville, 1988: 152-158). But Mandeville also maintains that society functions on the basis of vicious motives to action (such as self-interest, lust, and pride,) remaining concealed; we do not know the motivations of others and if we did we would despise them at every turn. Nor, given Mandeville's critique of "soliloquy", do we know many of our own motivations to public action. And, yet, for Mandeville's own conclusions about the private vice of others and, further, for his account of shame and pity to be persuasive, a sympathetic capacity in man *must* be in play. For if motivating passions are the only basis for our evaluation of others, and, yet, these motivations remain hidden from us, how can we judge others as vicious individuals who paradoxically provide a public benefit? It is in virtue of a sympathetic capacity in man that we can know – or at least reliably infer – the motivating passions of others and judge them vicious, thereby grounding Mandeville's paradox.

### *Conclusion*

In the course of this paper I have shown that Hutcheson's moral sense based challenges to Mandeville's egoism must fail. The supposed originality and universality of the determinations of the moral sense do not rebut the explanatory power of Mandeville's genealogy, nor does his phenomenological distinction between benevolent and self-interested motives adequately recognize the complexity of human motivation as presented by Mandeville. But if we accept Hume's account of sympathy as providing for disinterested moral

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<sup>35</sup> The passion of pride is also important in the process of education. See "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" and "Remark C", in Mandeville, 1988: 53 and 66-68.

distinctions and approbation of virtue and, further, that Mandeville's *Fable* presupposes sympathy with others, then there is – even within Mandeville's own account of mankind and society – a means to deny his depiction of the universal selfishness and egoism of man. It remains a question as to whether Hume is able to fully overturn Mandeville's account. But, at the very least, he provides us with a viable alternative to the depiction of man as fundamentally selfish and incapable of virtue; he offers an interpretation of man, society, and virtue that cannot be easily dismissed by Mandeville given his own reliance on a sympathetic capacity in man.

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