

The Dark Side of Recognition

Bernard Mandeville and the Morality of Pride

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Note for participants of the Brown PPE seminar: This is a draft of a paper I am writing for a special issue of the British Journal of the History of Philosophy on ideas of recognition and respect in early-modern philosophy (hence the paper's title). The paper draws on material from a book I am completing on Bernard Mandeville's philosophy, and I will talk more generally about the book project during my talk. I would be happy to share draft chapters with anyone who is interested.

Bernard Mandeville regarded pride as our 'predominant passion', which is capable of governing 'all the rest, without Exception' and thereby central to explaining a remarkable amount of human behaviour (*Fable II*, 75). 'The true Object of Pride ... is the Opinion of others', and we desire few things more than to 'be well thought of, applauded, and admired by the whole World, not only in the present, but all future Ages.' (*Fable II*, 64) This desire of being praised and held in high esteem is at the heart of Mandeville's analysis of our social and moral norms. The 'Moral Virtues', he memorably declared, 'are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride' (*Fable I*, 51), and much of *The Fable of the Bees* seeks to dissect the good manners of polite society to reveal 'that the Basis of all this Machinery is Pride.' (*Fable II*, 146) This strand of his philosophy closely resembles what we would now call a psychological theory of recognition,¹ and Mandeville thought we must focus on pride, above all else, to understand why we are so deeply invested in our reputation and social standing.

Theories of recognition are sometimes divided into respect- and esteem-based varieties (e.g. Neuhausser, *Theodicy*, 61-70). Both involve comparing ourselves to other people, but our desire for respect can be satisfied through being recognised as an equal in society – i.e. by being granted equal rights or standing – whereas our desire for esteem can only be fully satisfied if we are recognised as superior to others in some way. Where respect focuses more on our shared personhood or humanity, esteem is bestowed for qualities that mark us out as distinctive. Mandeville's account of pride is far more concerned with esteem than respect. Unlike esteem,

¹ For more general studies that read Mandeville in the light of recognition theory, see Simonazzi, *Le favole della filosofia*, 159-81; Simonazzi, 'Reconnaissance, *Self-liking* et contrôle social'; Gomes, 'The Desire and Struggle for Recognition', 24-164.

respect, or recognition, however, the term pride typically has negative connotations, having long been associated with Original Sin in Christian and especially Augustinian thought. A healthy desire for social esteem may be deemed innocent, yet pride goes well beyond this and involves thinking too highly of ourselves (*Fable I*, 124). If pride really is ‘the hidden Spring, that gives Life and Motion’ to so much of what we do (*Fable II*, 79), as Mandeville argues, then to expose this is to shed light on the dark side of recognition, which we generally prefer to keep concealed from both ourselves and our peers.

This paper has two main aims: one interpretative, the other evaluative. The first is to show that the moral connotations of pride do matter, for Mandeville. In uncovering the depths of human pride, he aimed to show that ‘a most beautiful Super-structure may be rais’d upon a rotten and despicable Foundation’ (*Fable II*, 64, also 74), which is to say that our civil and sociable norms should be regarded as a morally compromised achievement on account of their pride-based roots. I defend this interpretation against scholars who deny that Mandeville endorsed the moral worldview that considered pride as vicious, or sinful,² and in doing so I intervene into debates about whether, and in what sense, his depiction of human nature rests on Augustinian assumptions about our fallen condition.

My second goal is to offer a qualified defence of Mandeville’s pride-centred theory of recognition, which involves responding to the objection that what he called pride is better understood as a morally neutral desire for esteem. These are criticisms we encounter in, or can be constructed from, other eighteenth-century philosophers who presented our desire for esteem in a more positive light, such as Archibald Campbell, David Hume and Adam Smith. While their criticisms are not without merit, I suggest that there remains something deeply unsettling about the extent to which we can see pride, as Mandeville understood the passion, lying behind our desire for esteem and social standing.

Evaluating pride

Mandeville defines pride as ‘that Natural Faculty by which every Mortal that has any Understanding over-values, and imagines better Things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted

² For the general argument that Mandeville sought to ridicule and/ or overturn austere (Augustinian/ Calvinist) moral standards, see, for example, Viner, ‘Introduction’, 178-82; Harth, ‘Satiric Purpose’, 333-40; Colman, ‘Reality of Virtue’, 128; Castiglione, ‘Considering Things Minutely’, 483; Nieli, ‘Commercial Society and Christian Virtue’; Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, 144; Goldsmith, ‘Mandeville’s Pernicious System’, 79-81; Herdt, *Putting On Virtue*, 268-69, 275, 280.

with all his Qualities and Circumstances, could allow him.’ (*Fable I*, 124) Pride is not only concerned with thinking highly of ourselves; it further involves overvaluing ourselves in comparison to any impartial assessment of our worth. Perhaps in some cases we are justified in holding a high opinion of ourselves, but these would not count as pride on this definition. Although the definition relates solely to how we view ourselves, much of Mandeville’s discussion focuses on our reputation and social standing. He equates pride with ‘the Concern for [our] Reputation’ (*Fable I*, 146), for example, and affirms that there ‘is no Man that has any Pride, but he has some Value for his Reputation’ (*Fable II*, 333). The care we have for our reputation, however, ultimately derives from ‘the vast Esteem we have for our selves.’ (*Fable I*, 67)

We can join the dots between Mandeville’s definition of pride and the emphasis he places on reputation by recognising that our sense of self-esteem is rarely, if ever, independent of our awareness of how other people regard us. Receiving praise tends to inflate the view we hold of ourselves. Even if we do not witness the praise directly, we sometimes still take pride in reflecting on the applause that we expect others do, or will, give us (*Fable I*, 55, 78). We are greedy for ‘the Esteem of others, and the Raptures we enjoy in the Thoughts of being liked, and perhaps admired,’ go a long way to determining our conduct (*Fable I*, 68). Conversely, it is very difficult to sustain a high opinion of oneself if nobody else ever reinforces it. We are troubled by the realisation that we overvalue ourselves and thus seek social approval to ease our anxiety and confirm our estimations of our own worth (*Fable II*, 130).

Pride, then, involves overvaluing ourselves and leads us to perform actions out of a desire for social approval. There is also a comparative element built into the passion, since the high opinion we hold of ourselves is relative to our judgements of other people’s qualities. We feel pride in believing that we are better than others, or at least as good as them, and this is compounded by the social dimension of pride, where our own estimation of the approval we receive is relative to the approval we observe others receiving. Indeed, for social approval to reinforce our *overvaluation* of ourselves, it is important that we appear to be better than we really are. The reason why so many people wear fine clothes when going out in public, Mandeville suggests, is less because doing so immediately makes them feel better about themselves, and more due to ‘the Pleasure of being esteem’d by a vast Majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be’ (*Fable I*, 128).

Pride is central to understanding how our moral and social norms function. We conform to social norms because we desire the approbation of others, thereby satisfying our pride, and because we fear their disapprobation, which would arouse our shame. Crucially, however, we only receive praise if other people believe that we have acted from other-regarding or virtuous motives, rather than from pride. We cannot go around publicly flaunting our pride. Outward displays of the

passion are liable to instigate conflict and breed animosity. We dislike people who sing their own praises, especially when they sing too loudly. Good manners instead demand that we flatter the pride of others, rather than indulging our own. Those who have mastered the art of politeness thus know ‘not only to deny the high Value they have for themselves, but likewise to pretend that they have greater Value for others, than they have for themselves.’ (*Fable II*, 145) In such cases, we can even see pride moderating itself. We feel proud when secretly concealing the outward display of our pride from others. This is the passion’s most sophisticated manifestation, and the ‘Man of Sense and Education never exults more in his Pride than when he hides it with the greatest Dexterity’ (*Fable I*, 79).

How should we evaluate our pride-based conduct? One of Mandeville’s observations is that we do, in fact, consider pride a vice, in the sense that we regard actions motivated by the passion as an appropriate object of moral censure. This is supported by reflecting on our own behaviour. Even if we acknowledge that we are not altogether free from pride – denying this would of course be a self-defeating expression of the utmost pride – we remain unwilling to admit that our actions stem from pride on any given occasion (*Fable I*, 124). We often take pains to hide the passion away from others, for there are few things that cause us more shame than having our pride detected (*Fable I*, 79-80; *Fable II*, 122). Our strong aversion to pride is likewise corroborated by reflecting on how we judge other people’s pride. We typically find the unadulterated expression of the high value that others hold for themselves morally repugnant or distasteful. The ‘Pride of others is displeasing to us in every Shape’ (*Fable II*, 126), which is why we have contrived artful ways of concealing the passion so that it goes undetected. Without such dissimulation, everyone would ‘be offended at the barefac’d Pride of their Neighbours’ (*Fable II*, 138). We can even offer pride-based reasons for why we find other people’s pride offensive. Pride leads us to care deeply about our relative standing amongst our peers. When others express an overvalued sense of their own worth then this will often convey, at least by implication, a higher relative standing between them and us than our own pride is willing to countenance. By contrast, one of the reasons why polite manners are so effective is that they can transform a zero-sum game of pursuing social standing into cases where we take pride from flattering the pride of others. In complimenting you, I flatter your pride with my praise and flatter my own pride through my display of civility.

But did Mandeville *really* consider pride a vice? He famously argues that all the benefits associated with living in a prosperous and wealthy nation are based on the vices, and of pride specifically he writes that we ‘are possess’d of no other Quality so beneficial to Society, and so necessary to render it wealthy and flourishing’ (*Fable I*, 124). Given these benefits, some scholars doubt whether Mandeville genuinely disapproved of the vices he uncovered and instead contend

that he is best read as merely acknowledging – perhaps even subverting, but certainly not endorsing – the place that vice occupied in the moral vocabulary of his contemporaries. After all, he typically seems ‘more ready to laugh at man than lament his tragic fallen nature’ (Colman, ‘Reality of Virtue’, 128). ‘The tone of the book is not that of a denunciation of wrong-doing’, some object, and it is thus ‘hard to believe that Mandeville’s professions are not ironic.’ (Goldsmith, ‘Mandeville’s Pernicious System’, 79). To conclude that Mandeville saw anything morally troubling in the vices he exposed is apparently to miss the ‘obvious funmaking gusto’ of his argument (Viner, ‘Introduction’, 179).

A full response to this line of objection would involve discussing the nature and bearing of Mandeville’s satirical approach.³ For present purposes, however, it is worth stressing that nothing in his discussion of pride indicates that we are wrong to classify it as a vice. When explaining the origin of our ideas of virtue and vice, Mandeville claims that we would have agreed to give the name vice to any action in which ‘cou’d be observed the least prospect, that it might be injurious to any of the Society, or ever render himself less serviceable to others.’ (*Fable I*, 48) On this definition, we could say that acting from pride is vicious because it is likely to be injurious. One of the main reasons why it is likely to be injurious, however, is because we are so strongly averse to other people’s pride, and thus displays of pride will often cause offence, or even generate conflict. While Mandeville notoriously attributed the ‘Distinction between *Virtue* and *Vice*’ to ‘the Contrivance of Politicians’ (*Fable I*, 50), the content of virtue and vice supervenes on our natural appetites and aversions. It is not solely down to the arbitrary whim of politicians (see also *Origin of Honour*, ii). Humans could only have come to live peacefully together in large societies by adopting certain ideas of virtue and vice, and by regulating their behaviour accordingly (see also Monro, *Ambivalence*, 231; Scribano, *Natura umana e società competitiva*, 157-61). If pride is ‘odious to all the World’ (*Fable I*, 124), as Mandeville insists, then outward displays of this passion will always be liable to cause harm and should, therefore, be classified as vicious.

An Augustinian view?

Mandeville’s analysis of our pride-centred nature appears indebted to French neo-Augustinian moralists of the seventeenth century, for whom the dominance of pride and self-love characterised

³ For insightful analysis of how Mandeville’s satire relates to his philosophical and scientific goals, see Hilton, *Bitter Honey*, especially 177-93. The interpretation I offer here is compatible with Hilton’s account of Mandeville’s satire.

our sinful – that is, *fallen* – state.⁴ This gives rise to a more specific version of the objection canvassed in the last section: did Mandeville really endorse the moral worldview that classified pride as a vice, which, for Augustinians, relied on theological assumptions about Original Sin? While some commentators hold that we must attend to Mandeville’s ‘starkly Augustinian view of humanity’ to make sense of his philosophy (Sagar, ‘Sociability, Luxury and Sympathy’, 793-74; see also Crisp, *Sacrifice Regained*, 60-73), others see his ‘mock Augustinian stance’ as no more than a satirical pose, which does not convey his true moral convictions (Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, 144; see also Colman, ‘Reality of Virtue’, 128). We should tread very carefully before labelling someone as Augustinian, mock or otherwise, and be clear about the precise relationship we are seeking to uncover.⁵ The crucial question presently, which discussions of the Augustinian influence sometimes elide, is whether Mandeville’s moral evaluation of pride depends upon certain theological assumptions that are in tension with his otherwise naturalistic explanation of human nature and society.⁶

On the Augustinian account, Original Sin is understood in terms of a perverted or evil will, and this evil will begins with pride, which ‘occurs when a man is too well pleased with himself’ and fails to display the humility demanded by the obedience and love we owe to God (Augustine, *City of God*, xiv.13). The latter point is crucial: an Augustinian analysis of pride presents the vice in stark contradistinction to love of God. Yet at no point in *The Fable of the Bees* does Mandeville explain what is wrong with pride in terms of the love, honour, or obedience that we fail to show God, which counts strongly against reading his analysis as premised on Augustinian assumptions.⁷

Although Mandeville does not deploy the Augustinian opposition between pride and love of God in the *Fable*, he does claim that his account of human nature pertains only to our fallen

⁴ For helpful studies situating Mandeville in this context, see Kaye, ‘Introduction’, lxxix-lxxxiv; Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature*, 153-80; Horne, *Social Thought*, 19-31; Dickey, ‘Pride, Hypocrisy and Civility’, Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, 30–38; McLendon, *Psychology of Inequality*, 84-92.

⁵ See Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, 368-80, whose discussion of whether La Rochefoucauld should be considered Augustinian is exemplary in this respect. For an account of Mandeville’s Augustinianism close to the one I defend here, see Maurer, *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis*, 59, 72-73, 81, and the accompanying endnotes.

⁶ I use the term ‘naturalistic’ to differentiate claims about human nature that are based on observation or empirical analysis, from those which instead appeal to revealed knowledge (i.e. scripture).

⁷ Mandeville does adopt the Augustinian opposition between pride and love of God in the opening chapter of *Free Thoughts* (1, 18-20), tellingly entitled ‘Of Religion’. At one point in the *Fable* Mandeville claims that it ‘is owing to the Principle of Pride ... that Men imagine the whole Universe to be principally made for their use ... and have pitiful and most unworthy Notions of God and his Works.’ (*Fable* II, 243) Mandeville’s point in this passage, however, is that the natural evils that befall humans are not evidence against the world being governed by providence.

condition. In explaining the origin of moral virtue, for example, he clarifies that when he refers to ‘Men’ he means ‘neither Jews nor Christians; but meer Man, in the State of Nature and Ignorance of the true Deity’ (*Fable I*, 40, 50; see also *Fable I*, 229, 346-48). One reason for emphasising this point, however, was simply to evade certain objections; most notably, in this case, that our knowledge of virtue and vice is derived from revealed religion (*Fable I*, 50-51). When Mandeville claims that ‘we shall find that Human Nature since the Fall of *Adam* has always been the same’ (*Fable I*, 229), the important point concerns the account of human nature we are left with, not belief in a prelapsarian state of innocence that has been lost.

Mandeville could find the Augustinian analysis of our pride-centred nature persuasive, then, without endorsing its underlying theological assumptions (see also Force, *Self-Interest before Smith*, 63). The same is largely true of Augustinian criticisms of Stoic pride, echoes of which are also present in the *Fable*. For Augustine (*City of God*, xix.4), anyone who neither recognises the dominion of God nor understands that His rewards are not of this world is guilty of pride, and, on this count, he reserved especial scorn for the Stoics, who ‘in their stupid pride, believe that the Final Good is to be found in this life, and that they can achieve happiness by their own efforts.’ The Stoics denied human dependence upon God and mistakenly thought that (in our present condition) we can master our passions and live without sin.⁸ Even though the failure to acknowledge our dependence upon God makes sense only within a theological worldview, the more general complaint that the Stoics overestimated our capacity to control our passions and achieve true happiness can be supported by a naturalistic analysis of human nature. The *Fable*’s ‘Remark O’ is a case in point.

Mandeville claims that the Stoics associated happiness with ‘the calm Serenity of a contented Mind’ that has ‘subdued every sensual Appetite’, and that many of them ‘own’d themselves arriv’d to the height of Self-denial and ... rais’d above common Mortals’. These precepts, however, have been ‘exploded’ as beyond ‘all human Force and Possibility’, thereby revealing that ‘the Virtues they boasted of could be nothing but haughty Pretence, full of Arrogance and Hypocrisy’ (*Fable I*, 150-51). On the rare occasions when people really do renounce all luxury and voluntarily embrace poverty, their secret motive is to win the adoration of the vulgar; such was the case of Diogenes the Cynic, who sacrificed ‘all his Passions to his Pride in acting this Part’ (*Fable I*, 157). This fault is not unique to the Stoics (or Cynics), and much of Mandeville’s critical ire is directed at the clergy of his own day, who, like the Stoics, presented themselves as

⁸ For a helpful overview of Augustine’s criticisms, see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, 7-10; and 76-100 on seventeenth-century French Augustinians. More comprehensively on the latter, see Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, with 61-78 focusing on the original criticisms in Augustine.

paragons of a virtue they never actually practised. Mandeville even suggests that the reason why many people believe in certain forms of human distinction – including the immortality of the soul – is to flatter their pride (*Fable* I, 230; *Treatise*, 59-60).

The fault common to the Stoics, most clergy, and many others, then, on Mandeville's account, is that they think far too highly of their own abilities and qualities. For Augustinians, to imagine we could attain the levels of wisdom and virtue to which the Stoics laid claim is to overestimate our capacities and to fail to acknowledge our dependence upon God. For Mandeville, it is equally to overestimate our capacities – whence the vice of pride – irrespective of our dependence upon God. We need not invoke God or divine grace to hold an overly idealised account of human excellence or goodness, which we then falsely present ourselves as approximating. We are guilty of pride whenever we fail to appreciate the sway of the passions in determining our behaviour or pretend that we are moved by more public-spirited motives than is truly the case. This may well be an Augustinian insight, but it is quite compatible with a naturalistic worldview: one does not need to posit the fall to hold that we are governed by self-regarding passions, yet simultaneously deceived about the true extent to which we are unknown to ourselves. There is much to find plausible in Augustinian moral psychology – including its *moral* connotations – even for those sceptical of Augustinian theology.

One objection to this interpretation is that even if it accurately captures Mandeville's position in the first volume of the *Fable*, his position changes in his later work: the second volume of the *Fable* (*Fable* II) and *Origin of Honour*.⁹ In *Fable* II, Mandeville introduces the concept of self-liking as the underlying cause of pride (*Fable* II, 131; see also *Origin of Honour*, 3-4). Some commentators read this as marking a considerable break in the evaluative character of Mandeville's analysis, with his later works distinguished by a morally neutral or purely descriptive mode of explanation.¹⁰ According to Edward Hundert, for example, self-liking allows Mandeville to 'employ the moralized vocabulary he had inherited [from seventeenth-century French moralists] in a non-

⁹ The *Fable* was first published in 1714, with a considerably expanded edition following in 1723. The second volume, or *Part II*, appeared at the end of 1728 (the title page states 1729), and *Origin of Honour* in 1732.

¹⁰ Another objection, along similar lines, is that in the first volume of the *Fable*, unlike the second, pride is not, in fact, 'one of the original appetites' of human nature (Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume*, 46-47). Tolonen's evidence is drawn from 'Remark R', where Mandeville contrasts 'Man in his Savage State' with man 'as a Member of a Society and a taught Animal', claiming that 'his Pride has room to play' only in the latter (*Fable* I, 205-206, also 366). If Tolonen's point is simply that pride becomes more prominent as society and civilisation develop, then this is true of both volumes, yet even in the first Mandeville describes pride as 'inseparable from [man's] very Essence' (*Fable* I: 44). The most charitable interpretation is that Mandeville consistently holds that pride is both innate *and* becomes more prominent with increased socialisation.

normative, descriptive fashion.’ In his later writings, Mandeville explains ‘sociability in a language shorn of moralized concepts.’ (Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, 54-55, also 60-61; see also Luban, ‘Moralist and Materialist’, 841; Simonazzi, ‘Reconnaissance, *Self-liking* et contrôle social’, 143-44) This position has been defended at greater length by Mikko Tolonen, who argues that *Fable II* ‘changes the premises of the discussion from normative moral theory to social theory, leaving both Hobbism and French Augustinianism behind.’ On this view, the distinction between self-love and self-liking enables Mandeville to conduct a ‘morally neutral analysis of the relationship between human nature and civil society.’ (Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume*, 24-29; see also Jack, ‘Men Become Sociable’, 5)

One response to this objection is to question whether Mandeville did, in fact, regard self-liking as a morally neutral passion. I think the textual evidence is less clear-cut than is sometimes suggested (Douglass, ‘Origins of Virtue’, 290). For present purposes, however, I avail myself of a more straightforward response. Even if we grant that self-liking is morally neutral – that is, neither vicious nor virtuous in itself – Mandeville continues to present human nature and society in morally laden terms. Hundert and Tolonen appeal to self-liking when arguing that Mandeville explains society in morally neutral terms in *Fable II* and *Origin of Honour*. If they were right then we would expect Mandeville’s analysis in these works to be conducted principally in terms of self-liking, eschewing all references to pride, which he now describes as the vicious offshoot of self-liking (*Origin of Honour*, 3). But this is not what we find. Mandeville’s index to *Fable II* confirms that he uses pride far more frequently than self-liking (*Fable II*, 371-72, 374), while pride likewise remains central to the argument of *Origin of Honour*. He maintains, for example, that establishing power or authority requires ‘Flattering the Pride of All’, that honour is a ‘Human Contrivance, rais’d on the Basis of Human Pride’, and that the ‘higher you can raise a Man’s Pride, the more refin’d you may render his Notions of Honour.’ (*Origin of Honour*, 46, 64, 86) He sometimes makes similar claims in terms of self-liking, but the fact that he still chooses to use the term pride indicates that the vice is key to understanding his analysis of society. The prevalence of pride throughout Mandeville’s later works, therefore, signals that he had no intention of backtracking from the morally compromised vision of human nature and society laid out in the first volume of the *Fable*.

Pride vs. a well-regulated desire for esteem

I have thus far argued that Mandeville regards pride as central to explaining what we would now call our desire for recognition, and that he takes the prevalence of pride as evidence of our morally compromised nature. Mandeville’s analysis of pride looks very Augustinian, but his assessment of

its moral character does not rely on endorsing any theological assumptions; it is, instead, based on a naturalistic examination of the sentiments that are aroused when we detect the pride behind our own and other people's actions. In this section I consider objections from philosophers who sought to dissociate their views from the Augustinian and Mandevillian picture of our (fallen) nature. The overarching question these criticisms raise is whether, if we are committed to a naturalistic analysis of human nature, we should endorse Mandeville's pride-centred theory of recognition and its moral connotations.

For a dissenting voice, it makes sense to turn to David Hume, who pushed back strongly against the notion that pride is always vicious and instead presented it as an 'agreeable impression, which arises in the mind, when the view either of our virtue, beauty, riches or power makes us satisfy'd with ourselves' (Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.7.8).¹¹ Mandeville and Hume did not define pride in the same way and the differences between their views are not as stark as they might first appear.¹² Hume acknowledges that an 'excessive pride or over-weening conceit of ourselves is always esteem'd vicious, and is universally hated' (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.2). As pride is always excessive on Mandeville's definition, the differences between the two on this point may seem slight. What is more, Hume observes that, as we are all proud to some degree, we find other people's displays of pride displeasing. It is for this reason that 'pride is universally blam'd and condemn'd by all mankind; as having a natural tendency to cause uneasiness in others by means of comparison.' (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.7) To ensure that pride does not cause offence, the rules of 'good-breeding and decency' require that we should avoid any outward expression of the passion. Even 'if we harbour pride in our breasts, we must carry a fair outside and have the appearance of modesty and mutual deference in all our conduct and behaviour.' (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.10) These points all resemble Mandeville's position.

Mandeville and Hume clearly agree up to a point: we do have some innate aversion to witnessing displays of pride, and we must therefore learn to conceal the passion when conversing with others. Hume, however, accentuates the positive side of pride to a far greater degree than

¹¹ On Hume's rehabilitation of the pagan ethic of pride against the dominant Christian and especially Augustinian view, see Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 306-21. Similarly, with a closer focus on Cicero's influence on Hume, see Stuart-Buttle, *Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy*, 192-95.

¹² The present discussion is concerned only with their moral evaluations of pride, and nothing I say here should be taken to deny other important differences between the two (e.g. on sympathy or humanity). For the view that Hume's view of pride is indebted to Mandeville, see Schneider, *Paradox and Society*, 55, 113; and, more generally, Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume*, especially 212-27. For discussion of Hume's account of pride as a critical response to Hobbes and Mandeville, see Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 130-53. For a balanced discussion of the ways in which Hume both follows and departs from Mandeville on pride, see Maurer, *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis*, 181-86.

Mandeville, claiming that there is nothing ‘more laudable, than to have a value for ourselves, where we really have qualities that are valuable.’ Although we should not display our pride around others, it is important that we take a sense of pride in our own lives, since this ‘makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes.’ (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.18) Humility is only for outward display, whereas pride should motivate us within. The merit of pride, for Hume then, is derived both from ‘its utility and its agreeableness to ourselves’ (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.14). Yet even Hume’s positive assessment is qualified. Consider his claim that the ‘world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride, which secretly animates our conduct, without breaking out into such indecent expressions of vanity, as may offend the vanity of others.’ (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.2) There is something quite Mandevillian about this, as the universal esteem paid to a well-regulated pride depends on it *secretly* animating our conduct. In other words, we esteem pride only when it does not appear in its true colours. But this implies that pride’s true colours are disagreeable, which is precisely Mandeville’s point.

Hume’s distinction between well-regulated and excessive varieties of pride is one instance of a more general line of criticism, which charges Mandeville with having conflated (excessive) pride with a well-regulated desire for esteem. For Archibald Campbell (*Enquiry*, 89), for example, our desire for social esteem is central to explaining human sociability, but Mandeville entangled himself in ‘a strange Jumble of Ideas’ by calling this pride, which is ‘only to affix a very bad Name to a very good Principle, and from thence to deduce very false Consequences.’ According to Adam Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.4.8), perhaps most famously, ‘the desire of acquiring esteem by what is really estimable’ is certainly meritorious, and closely approximates loving virtue for its own sake.¹³ This line of criticism does not deny the explanatory power Mandeville gives to our desire for social esteem in general, but it questions whether he attributes too much of our conduct to an excessive form of this desire – that is, pride – as opposed to a moderate and well-regulated form. There is nothing wrong with being motivated by our desire for esteem, Campbell and Smith object, as long as we genuinely merit it. The dispute thus turns on the question of how to judge whether and when our desire for esteem should be classified as excessive or well-regulated.

The idea that we only act from pride, and not from a well-regulated desire for esteem, might seem like a hangover from the Augustinian background discussed earlier. For the most

¹³ This point is distinct from the distinction Smith also draws, with Mandeville in his sights, between the love of praise and love of praiseworthiness. Smith argues that the truly virtuous amongst us desire only to be praiseworthy, irrespective of the praise (or social esteem) we receive. In such cases, any love of praise would be derivative, serving only to confirm that our judgement of our own praiseworthiness is well-founded. See *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, especially III.2.3, III.2.24.

austere Augustinian moralists, a well-regulated desire for esteem is all but impossible given our fallen state (see also Maurer, *Self-love, Egoism and the Selfish Hypothesis*, 10). There is little to be proud about once we recognise the extent of our sinfulness. Nevertheless, and as I argued in the last section, the claim that we regularly overvalue ourselves remains plausible without invoking comparisons with God or assumptions about our fallen nature. Mandeville's analysis is especially incisive when it comes to the stories we like to tell ourselves about the place or reason or rationality in determining our behaviour. Such stories are central to his explanation of the origin of moral virtue, where wise politicians and lawgivers 'extoll'd the Excellency of our Nature above other Animals' by bestowing 'a thousand Encomiums on the Rationality of our Souls' (*Fable I*, 43). Whenever we embrace these encomiums and believe that reason governs our conduct, Mandeville argues, we are really only deceiving ourselves and flattering our pride. Our reason is deployed in service of our passions 'and Self-love pleads to all human Creatures for their different Views, still furnishing every individual with Arguments to justify their Inclinations.' (*Fable I*, 333)

Mandeville's position on the motivational weakness of reason finds some support from psychological research indicating that a great deal of moral reasoning is about offering post hoc rationalisations for our behaviour and judgements, rather than about determining them in the first place (most famously, see Haidt, 'Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail'). More generally, there is now a wealth of evidence from social psychology on self-serving biases, which characteristically involve taking responsibility for our positive qualities and successes, while blaming others or external factors for our negative traits and failures (for an overview, see Myers and Twenge, *Exploring Social Psychology*, 31-39). Everyone has their own anecdotes. Academics will be familiar with the never-ending ingenuity of their peers to explain why their latest paper was rejected for reasons that had nothing to do with its quality, whereas very few acknowledge the converse degree of good fortune involved when their work is accepted for publication. Students will have similar stories to tell about the marks they receive. When we succeed, we deserve it. When we fail, it is bad luck, or, worse still, someone else's fault.

Mandeville is thus on strong psychological ground in arguing that we regularly overvalue our own capacities and achievements. Does it follow that in such cases our desire for esteem is excessive, as opposed to being well-regulated? To recall, Mandeville detects pride whenever we overvalue and imagine better things of ourselves 'than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all [our] Qualities and Circumstances, could allow' (*Fable I*, 124). But how much would an impartial judge allow? Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.iii.53), for example, claims that an impartial spectator would tolerate some degree of pride, for it is usually better to be a little too proud than a little too humble. If we are all disposed to overvalue ourselves, albeit to varying

degrees, then should our desire for esteem be deemed excessive only when it exceeds social norms? Maybe someone is guilty of excessive pride only when they overvalue themselves or seek unmerited approval *to a greater degree* than would be expected given the circumstances. By contrast, a well-regulated desire for esteem, understood this way, does not involve an all-things-considered appraisal of our conduct as much as it does a relative judgement based on comparison with the prevailing social norms.¹⁴ This is more or less Hume's (*Essays*, 82-84) position. Social norms will vary in different times and places, and even between groups within society, as Hume (*Treatise*, 3.3.2.11) acknowledges, but in all cases our desire for esteem should be judged excessive or well-regulated in relation to the social norms in question.

Does this way of thinking through what makes a desire for social esteem excessive remove the moral sting from Mandeville's analysis? To some degree, perhaps, especially when we reflect on the everyday judgements we make of others and they make of us. No sensible person doubts that humans are deeply flawed creatures, but we tend not to dwell on this too much when interacting with others. Society would be insufferable if we constantly reminded one another of our self-serving biases and overvaluations of our conduct. Mandeville, of course, saw this very clearly. Nonetheless, if his psychological analysis is broadly accurate then I think there remains something morally unsettling about the extent to which we are motivated by a desire for esteem, even if this is only divulged upon closer inspection of our conduct. The most troubling insight is simply that we do feel impelled to conceal our desire for social esteem, at least to some degree, for we are conscious of how other people would judge us were it to appear in its true colours.

Consider an example. Suppose that I regularly do voluntary work in the local community, even though this involves giving up other things that I enjoy. Having reflected on the consequences of undertaking this work, I genuinely believe – and am right to believe – that it benefits the community. So far, so good. My sole motivation for undertaking the work, however, is that I desire that other members of my community think highly of me. How should you judge my voluntary work upon discovering my true motivation? Intuitively, even if you are disinclined to describe my motivation as vicious, it does seem to devalue or detract from the moral character of my conduct to some extent. Indeed, this is the reason why I would never disclose my true motivation. If I desire that members of my community think highly of me then I will want them to believe that I

¹⁴ Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.iii.23) similarly distinguishes between two standards of evaluation: first, 'the idea of exact propriety and perfection', and, second, 'the degree of approximation to this idea which is commonly attained in the world, and which the greater part of our friends and companions, of our rivals and competitors, may have actually arrived at.' Smith thinks that we judge ourselves based on both standards, although to varying degrees in different cases.

act from public-spirited or other-regarding motives. In this example, I am confident that an impartial judge, thoroughly acquainted with my motives, would disapprove of my desire for esteem, which is precisely why I try to conceal these self-regarding motives from other members of my community. On the one hand, then, we might be tempted to describe my desire for social esteem as well-regulated, for I do not flaunt my pride in an offensive manner and have instead channelled it to socially beneficial ends. Desiring some praise for doing so hardly seems unreasonable. On the other hand, I have concealed my true motivation precisely because I am aware that, were my peers to realise the extent to which it explains my conduct, they would judge me unfavourably. My desire for esteem is excessive compared to their expectations, even if they never discover this.

One objection (loosely following Hume, *Essays*, 86) to this example is that its plausibility rests on stipulating the desire for social esteem as the *sole* motivation. What about cases that involve mixed or multiple motives? Suppose that I am motivated by the desire for social esteem *and* by intrinsically other-regarding considerations. I care for the community for its own sake, that is, as well as mine. Where multiple motives are at play, the presence of the desire for esteem might not devalue our evaluation of someone else's conduct. If this is the case, it could simply be because, in practice, it is very difficult to tease complementary motives apart and determine which has greater sway (*Fable I*, 84). We tend to give others the benefit of the doubt, much as civility requires (*Fable I*, 133). More importantly, however, it could also suggest that our judgement in the original example is explained more by the *absence* of other (e.g. public-spirited) motives than by the *presence* of the desire for social esteem.

Even if Mandeville does not address this last point directly,¹⁵ integrating it with his account helps to highlight precisely what is at stake. If we find Mandeville's analysis of our pride-based nature unsettling then it is probably not because he shows us that even our most virtuous deeds are accompanied by a well-regulated desire for social esteem. As his critics rightly point out, there is nothing especially disconcerting about that insight. This may still involve overvaluing ourselves to some degree, but an impartial judge is unlikely to deem this excessive and condemn it as pride. The truly disquieting implications of Mandeville's analysis of pride stem from the far stronger claim, which assigns psychological primacy or dominance to our desire for esteem, and in doing so goes well beyond what any social norms or impartial judges could allow.

¹⁵ At one point, Mandeville considers the objection that someone might 'have had several Motives' determining their action. He responds by denying that the person in question did, in fact, act from any public-spirited motives, but he grants, at least by implication, that we should change our evaluation of the person's conduct had public-spirited and pride-based motives both been at play. See *Fable II*, 120-21.

Conclusion

Mandeville maintains that pride is a vice. I have argued that we can make sense of this position from a naturalistic perspective, which is to say that a close study of human nature can reveal that the aversion we feel towards the display of this passion is well-grounded. In claiming that it is well-grounded, I mean simply that it is based on plausible observations about our moral sentiments and judgements. To be sure, Mandeville did not define vice in terms of pre-existing moral sentiments, but, in some cases at least, our natural appetites and aversions do factor into working out what actions are likely to prove 'injurious' to other people, which is how he defined vice (*Fable I*, 48). The injury of pride is largely based on its propensity to antagonise others and it is precisely when our desire for high esteem 'is excessive, and so openly shewn as to give Offence to others' that it 'is counted a Vice and call'd Pride' (*Origin of Honour*, 3). If displays of pride are typically met with disapprobation and are liable to provoke discord then it makes sense to describe this passion as a vice, or at least to recognise that the moral character of our conduct is in some way compromised due to its roots in pride.

Although Mandeville spends little time dwelling on the precise question "why regard pride as a vice?", he never even comes close to suggesting that we are wrong to do so. For this reason, amongst others, I see no grounds for concluding that Mandeville was trying to overturn the prevailing understanding of pride by exposing it to ridicule, for he simply does not show it to be ridiculous. Nor do I think that his assessment of pride depends on accepting any theological assumptions about the vices that characterise our fallen nature. Mandeville does claim that his analysis applies only to our fallen state, yet this is compatible with a naturalistic approach in the sense that the story of the fall presents a compelling picture of the human condition. A pride-centred theory of recognition, therefore, is one that rests on a morally compromised vision of human nature

We might object that there need not be anything troubling about our desire of recognition, so long as it is moderate and well-regulated. Mandeville could agree with this and maintain that, in practice, the conditional seldom obtains. Indeed, we are unlikely to detect the depths of our own pride even if we try to examine ourselves closely, since we have a strong interest in concealing such disconcerting revelations from ourselves. Our desire of recognition is never satisfied by viewing ourselves as proud; to the contrary, the more we recognise our own pride the worse we feel about ourselves. We thus have pride-based reasons for deceiving ourselves about the prominence of pride, for 'boldly searching into ones own Bosom, must be the most shocking Employment, that

a Man can give his Mind to, whose greatest pleasure consists in secretly admiring himself.' (*Fable* II, 79-80) It is lucky for all concerned, then, that we have learned to conceal the pride behind our desire of recognition from ourselves as much as from others.

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