Bernard Mandeville on the Use and Abuse of Hypocrisy

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Abstract

In *The Fable of the Bees*, Bernard Mandeville declared that ‘it is impossible we could be sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy’. Mandeville set out his ideas of sociability against Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose notions of virtue he dismissed as ‘a vast Inlet to Hypocrisy’. The main goal of this article is to reconstruct Mandeville’s account of hypocrisy, first by explaining why he accords it such a prominent role in understanding our moral and social norms, and, second, by piecing together his criticisms of Shaftesbury’s rival ethical theory. In doing so, the article outlines a more general Mandevillean framework for assessing when hypocrisy is likely to prove either socially beneficial or pernicious, while also examining what is at stake in choosing to expose rather than tolerate other people’s hypocrisy.

Keywords

Bernard Mandeville, hypocrisy, sociability, virtue, Shaftesbury

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Hypocrisy is widely classified as a moral vice. But should it be regarded as a vice with wholly pernicious social consequences or one that has a positive and even indispensable role to play in allowing us to live together peacefully? Invocations of hypocrisy in day-to-day politics are invariably negative. ‘Hypocrisy remains the only unforgivable sin’, Judith Shklar (1984: 45) observes at the outset of her landmark discussion. We too often explain away cruelty and other evils, but ‘not hypocrisy, which alone is now inexcusable’. Shklar saw both sides of hypocrisy. She was aware that it often works alongside cruelty, ‘unified in zeal’ behind some of the worst human atrocities (Shklar, 1984: 11–12). Yet she also recognised hypocrisy as an inevitable feature of politics, especially in liberal democracies that are committed both to resolving disagreements through compromise and to the ‘democracy of everyday life’, where we are called upon publicly to accept a diversity of ways of life that we might not privately endorse (Shklar, 1984: 77–78). Hypocrisy, Shklar (1984: 248) concludes, ‘is one of the few vices that bolsters liberal democracy’.

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Much subsequent scholarship on hypocrisy has followed Shklar in assessing the implications of the vice for contemporary democratic politics, typically (but not exclusively) focusing on questions of how we should judge the hypocrisy of politicians (e.g. Dovi, 2001; Furia, 2009; Grant, 1997; Runciman, 2008; Thompson, 1996; Tillyris, 2016). My approach in this article involves stepping back to reflect more generally on the hypocrisy underlying our sociable and moral norms, for hypocrisy is not only a ubiquitous feature of political life but of social interaction more broadly. Or so I shall suggest, at least, taking for my guide one of the great champions of the social benefits of hypocrisy, Bernard Mandeville, who declared that ‘it is impossible we could be sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy’ (FB I: 349).1

Mandeville is mostly remembered today for his infamous ‘private vices, public benefits’ thesis, according to which most of, if not all, the benefits associated with living in a large and prosperous society are ultimately rooted in human vices. This is typically cashed out in terms of economic considerations, with the pursuit of certain vices, such as vanity, stimulating demand for luxury goods and fuelling economic prosperity. Although this constitutes an important strand of Mandeville’s thought, he regarded his most famous work, The Fable of the Bees, as largely comprising ‘a Philosophical Disquisition into the Force of the Passions, and the Nature of Society’ (LD: 54–55; see also FB I: 406). In what follows, I take Mandeville’s philosophical credentials seriously and focus on questions of moral psychology and sociability,2 rather than economics and markets. Indeed, we could even view his claims about hypocrisy as one of the ways in which his more general ‘private vices, public benefits’ thesis plays out: large-scale human society depends upon vices like hypocrisy being turned to good use, which is not, of course, to say that hypocrisy or any other vice is always beneficial.

Theoretical discussions of hypocrisy often commence with the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition (e.g. Shklar, 1984: 47; Wallace, 2010: 308): ‘The assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, esp. in respect of religious life or beliefs; hence in general sense, dissimulation, pretence, sham’. This proves a helpful starting point for present purposes too, since Mandeville associated hypocrisy with dissimulation: hiding away the sentiments and motives from which we act, while putting on an outward appearance we do not feel within (see FB I: 281; FT: 31; OH: 202). In Mandeville’s day, hypocrisy was exemplified by feigning religious sincerity or hiding our vices behind a mask of virtue, and while philosophers continue to debate how best to conceptualise hypocrisy, the idea of ‘the hypocrite as someone who dissembles or shams regarding her motives or intentions in regions where we take such things seriously’ (McKinnon, 1991: 322) remains one of the main contenders.3

That Mandeville enjoyed exposing the hypocrisy of his adversaries is well-known. Daniel Luban (2015: 848), for example, claims that hypocrisy was the ‘fundamental theme’ of Mandeville’s social criticism, and that ‘it is difficult to come up with a thinker who was more exhaustive in investigating and exposing hypocrisy’. Nonetheless, the place of hypocrisy in Mandeville’s theory of sociability has received little sustained attention.4 The main aim of this article, then, is to reconstruct his ideas on hypocrisy and its relation to our social and moral norms. My point of departure is ‘A Search into the Nature of Society’, which Mandeville added to the enlarged 1723 edition of (the first volume of) The Fable of the Bees. This essay announces his opposition to Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury – an opposition that structures much of Mandeville’s subsequent philosophy.5 Where Shaftesbury had argued that our social love and generous affections lead us to seek the welfare of others, Mandeville denies that ‘the good and aimable Qualities of Man . . .
make him beyond other Animals a sociable Creature’, and instead seeks to show the impos-
sibility of raising and maintaining ‘any Multitudes into a Populous, Rich and Flourishing
Nation . . . without the assistance of what we call Evil both Natural and Moral’ (FB I: 325).
The moral evil of hypocrisy is key to his explanation.

Mandeville’s criticisms of Shaftesbury go beyond their rival accounts of sociability, however, in ways which prove important for evaluating hypocrisy. Mandeville launches a scathing attack on Shaftesbury’s own hypocrisy, while arguing that Shaftesbury’s view that we can be virtuous without self-denial is ‘a vast Inlet to Hypocrisy’ (FB I: 33; also FB II: 109; OH: x). To fully understand Mandeville’s position on hypocrisy, then, we need to consider how his arguments about sociability intersect with his views on virtue, and, in particular, the important distinction he draws between ‘counterfeited’ and ‘real’
virtue (FB I: 230, 405). This article thus proceeds by reconstructing the complex relation-
ship between hypocrisy, sociability and virtue in Mandeville’s thought, first by setting out his own account of how these ideas relate and, second, by explaining why he regarded
Shaftesbury’s rival notions of virtue as a vast inlet to hypocrisy. I then turn to Mandeville’s
distinction between ‘malicious’ and ‘fashionable’ hypocrites (OH: 201–202) to sketch out a more general framework for assessing when hypocrisy is likely to prove either benefi-
cial or pernicious. This distinction has implications not only for evaluating other people’s hypocrisy, but equally for thinking through what is at stake in choosing to expose rather than tolerate someone else’s hypocrisy – implications that further complicate the place of hypocrisy in Mandeville’s own thought, since he both theorised and participated in the politics of crying hypocrisy.

In reconstructing Mandeville’s account of hypocrisy, I hope to present his ideas in a sufficiently sympathetic light to indicate that we would do well to take them seriously, without pretending to offer an unequivocal defence of his position. To this end, I conclude by drawing some Mandevillian reflections on the problem of hypocrisy. Although Mandeville does not make an appearance in Ordinary Vices, these reflections are offered very much in the spirit of Shklar’s (1984: 228–229) approach of turning to past thinkers to better understand debates that occupy us today and to which their ideas might still contribute. Questions about the place of hypocrisy in political and social life do not admit of easy answers, and my aim is less to offer an overarching thesis about how we should evaluate hypocrisy and more to highlight some of the complexities involved in any such evaluation; complexities which, I hope to show, are thrown into sharper relief through a study of Mandeville.

Sociability, Hypocrisy and Counterfeited Virtue

The question at the heart of ‘A Search into the Nature of Society’ is in what sense humans are ‘made for Society’ (FB I: 323). Mandeville’s main thesis is that ‘the Sociableness of Man’ arises from nothing but the ‘multiplicity of his Desires, and the continual Opposition he meets with in his Endeavours to gratify them’ (FB I: 344). Those who instead base sociability on ‘the generous Notions concerning the natural Goodness of Man’ offer a misleading picture of the human condition in its current state (FB I: 343). If there ever was a time when the necessitates of life were abundant and our desires could be satisfied without hardship then it has long passed, and there is no reason why anyone would have ever contrived to design large societies in such a ‘State of Innocence’ or ‘Golden Age’. The political societies we now inhabit are instead drawn from our fallen condition, in which all our actions ‘have no other Centre’ than our own interest and pleasure. Where
Shaftesbury (2001, vol. I: 175–179, vol. II: 78–79) had suggested that the natural affections which bind families together could be scaled up to the level of political society, Mandeville claims that ‘in the Wild State of Nature’, parental authority would have soon dissolved into war, as descendants quarrelled for pre-eminence. The earliest forms of government that subsequently emerged would have been based on averting conflict, rather than on any naturally sociable qualities driving us to live together on a large scale (FB I: 346–348).

Once we see the origin of society in this light, Mandeville argues, it is evident that we could never have become ‘sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy’. If our natural affections are not the basis of human sociability then sincerity and openness will rarely result in successful social interaction. More often than not, we are required to conceal our natural inclinations and innermost motives rather than expressing them outwardly. Mandeville maintains that we are naturally driven to please ourselves and pursue our own advantage, but ‘all Civil Commerce would be lost, if by Art and prudent Dissimulation, we had not learn’d to stifle’ our self-centred ideas, for ‘if all we think was to be laid open to others in the same manner as it is to our selves, it is impossible that endued with Speech we could be sufferable to one another’ (FB I: 349).

The reason why hypocrisy is so important, then, is that, first, we care principally for ourselves, and, second, we are naturally averse to others displaying their own self-centredness when we interact with them. Both points are crucial: if we were indifferent to other people’s displays of self-love then there would be no need for dissimulation, even if we are all self-interested. Yet this is not the case and successful social interaction requires hiding our self-love away and giving the appearance of acting from other-regarding considerations. This is why in ‘all Civil Societies Men are taught insensibly to be Hypocrites from their Cradle’, a point Mandeville illustrates with a characteristically grim example. The sexton who tends the church graveyard ‘would be stoned should he wish openly for the Death of the Parishioners, tho’ every body knew that he had nothing else to live upon’ (FB I: 349). While some people’s livelihoods depend on the misfortunes or even fatalities of others, the point extends to more mundane cases. As Adam Smith (1981: 27) memorably remarked, in market exchanges we typically address ourselves to the self-love of those with whom we trade ‘and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages’. From Mandeville’s perspective, however, there is something deeply hypocritical about such dealings, for what we really care about is our own necessities and not their advantages. The shop assistant offering help cares more for your custom than your well-being, but knows that the key to their profit involves pretending otherwise. Good customer service invariably involves humouring others and exaggerating our interest in their affairs.

Mandeville’s argument applies not only to market relations but to social interaction more broadly, the success of which is based on channelling our pride and shame to beneficial ends while giving the impression of acting from more public-spirited motives. We take pride in living up to standards of civility and sociality, secretly concealing the outward display of our self-centred passions from others. At the same time, we want to appear virtuous, not proud, and we thus endeavour to hide any semblance of pride from our actions (FB I: 79, 132; FB II: 17, 78–79, 122, 125, 141). Where pride leads us to desire the approval of others, shame leads us to fear their disapproval. Indeed, the thought of being exposed as proud is itself a source of shame – Mandeville lists lust, pride and selfishness as the ‘Passions we chiefly ought to hide for the Happiness and Embellishment of the Society’ (FB I: 68–69). We all take ‘extraordinary Pleasure in hearing [ourselves]
prais’d’, yet we know that our delight must be hidden away to ensure we do not rouse the envy and hatred of our company, which is why ‘all good Manners consist in flattering the Pride of others, and concealing our Own’ (FB II: 108).

Mandeville insists that what passes for good manners in polite society has ‘nothing to do with Virtue or Religion’ (FB I: 79; also FB II: 138, 146). At most, we only ever practise ‘counterfeited’ virtue and not ‘real’ virtue. He draws this distinction in ‘Remark T’, added to the 1723 edition of the Fable, now claiming that one of the main goals of the book is to reveal ‘the difference between such Actions as proceed from a Victory over the Passions, and those that are only the result of a Conquest which one Passion obtains over another; that is, between Real, and Counterfeited Virtue’ (FB I: 230, also 405). Elsewhere he writes more generally of conquering the passions, in the plural (FB I: 48–49, 51, 72, 74, 151, 162; FB II: 109; OH: x–xi), which seems to be what he has in mind when contrasting ‘real’ virtue’s victory over the passions with cases of ‘counterfeited’ virtue where one passion conquers another. If we are governed by our passions, however, as Mandeville often claims (FB I: 39, 140; FB II: 139; OH: 31), then it is far from evident that the victory over the passions required for ‘real’ virtue is within our reach.

Mandeville’s theory rests on a sharp distinction between the idea that we have of real virtue and the widespread practice of counterfeited virtue (see also Douglass, 2020: 285). The distance between the two is crucial for making sense of his position: counterfeited virtue can only be judged counterfeit if it falls short of some widely endorsed idea of real virtue. Although Mandeville had not yet drawn the distinction between counterfeited and real virtue when he first published the Fable in 1714, it is plausible to read ‘An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue’ as offering a naturalistic explanation of how we could come to practise counterfeited virtue while acquiring the idea of real virtue. Even without the counterfeited/real distinction at hand, we can still identify a clear gap in the ‘Enquiry’ between the idea and practice of virtue. Mandeville famously claims that we would all have come to agree ‘to give the name of VIRTUE to every Performance, by which Man, contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the Benefits of others, or the Conquest of his own Passions out of a Rational Ambition of being good’ (FB I: 48–49). This definition is not without its ambiguities (see Colman, 1972: 131–134; Douglass, 2020: 279–281), but Mandeville later indicates that conquering a passion ‘from a rational Ambition of being Good’ is its most important clause (FB I: 260). The overriding argument of the ‘Enquiry’, however, is that it is our desire for praise and aversion to shame – and not a rational ambition of being good – that lead us to imitate this ideal of virtuous conduct. Notice, however, that Mandeville does not claim that we give the name of virtue to every performance, by which, contrary to the impulse of nature, we endeavour the benefits of others out of a desire for praise and an aversion to shame (or irrespective of motive altogether). This would be a definition of what he later terms counterfeited virtue, and, while this more accurately describes our actual conduct, he maintains that we do not call this (real) virtue. To put the point another way, Mandeville thinks that to live peacefully together in large societies, we need to have an idea of virtue which goes beyond performing socially beneficial acts from self-centred motives, even though, in practice, such performances are widely mistaken for virtue.

On Mandeville’s analysis of human nature, we could go so far as to say that it is a necessary feature of our moral practices that we have an idea of virtue which exceeds what is humanly possible. Indeed, his account of the origin of virtue hinges on us being presented with a deceptive picture of human nature. In order to make humans fit for society, ‘Lawgivers and other wise Men’ extolled ‘the Excellency of our Nature above other
Animals’ and ‘bestow’d a thousand Encomiums on the Rationality of our Souls’ (FB I: 42–43, also 208–209). It is only with these false beliefs in place that we would have come to adopt the demanding notion of virtue set out in the ‘Enquiry’, and this adoption helped to render us ‘tractable’ by giving us an ideal of human excellence to emulate, albeit out of pride-based considerations. Mandeville thus offers a naturalistic explanation of how we could arrive at a conception of virtue that cannot be attained. This might sound like a surprising claim, not least because there is a tendency to see a stark tension between Mandeville’s empirical analysis of human nature and his rigoristic definition of virtue, following F. B. Kaye’s (1988: lii–lvi) influential discussion. But Kaye sets up a false dichotomy. Mandeville doubts whether we ever act from genuinely other-regarding motives and, even if we do so very occasionally, these motives are not the basis of human sociability. Nonetheless, he thinks we continue to hold moral standards according to which acts are not classified as (really) virtuous if they are based solely on self-regarding motives. Whether or not this is true of all moral judgements, there is a certain class of actions where Mandeville’s position is eminently plausible: if we think that someone else is motivated exclusively by a desire for praise or aversion to shame then this detracts from the merit we accord to their conduct, despite it being socially beneficial (more generally on this point, see Brennan and Pettit, 2004: 36–39). We are unlikely to judge someone virtuous who admits to performing good deeds solely because they desire the praise of their peers – which is why nobody admits this! We are naturally averse to the self-love and especially pride of others (FB I: 124, 79–80; FB II: 122, 126, 138–139), and do not regard someone’s conduct as virtuous if we suspect these to be their principal motives. In practice, however, we do not usually detect the self-love or pride secretly motivating displays of counterfeited virtue. Crucially, the point here is not that we recognise someone’s self-centred or pride-based motives and consider their conduct virtuous regardless, but, rather, that we do not attribute their conduct to these motives in the first place; indeed, ‘common Civility’ does not allow us to suspect other people’s ‘Actions to be the Result of Pride’ (FB I: 133). Most of the time, then, counterfeited virtue passes for real virtue. It is only when we see it up close, carefully dissected by someone like Mandeville, that we realise it is counterfeited, and, once seen it this light, we are no longer willing to let it pass for the real thing.

If the foregoing summary is broadly accurate then we can see Mandeville offering two closely related considerations to explain why hypocrisy is ineliminable from our moral and sociable practices. First, and most simply, we have self-centred or pride-based reasons for conforming to social norms, but in so conforming we hide these motives away and present ourselves as acting from more public-spirited or other-regarding principles. Second, in maintaining these moral standards, we hold others to higher expectations than is realistic and disapprove of failings in them that we too share. Hypocrisy pervades our self-presentation and our judgements of others. On Mandeville’s account, then, there is a striking disparity between the demands of our ethical standards and a realistic analysis of our moral psychology. As this disparity takes place at the level of motives, our moral practices can survive so long as counterfeited virtue generally passes for real virtue. If we know that others will expose our actions for counterfeited virtue then our pride will no longer motivate us to perform those actions, so it helps that we are so often deceived about the true motives behind both our own and other people’s conduct (see also Monro, 1975: 189–190). Indeed, were everyone to identify one another’s hidden motives in day-to-day interactions then we would cease to reward counterfeited virtue with social esteem and start to find the company of others a lot more insufferable. Hypocrisy is therefore a feature, not a bug, of our social life.
Mandeville tends to see self-love and hypocrisy everywhere, but two qualifications are worth emphasising regarding his theory of sociability. First, his argument that we cannot be sociable without hypocrisy does not depend upon endorsing psychological egoism. Although he often explains all semblance of public-spiritedness away in terms of self-centred motives, he also argues that, even if we grant that humans do have naturally other-regarding affections, these cannot supply the foundations for large-scale society (e.g. FB I: 369; FB II: 183). Second, Mandeville’s position is most plausible if we take him to be arguing, as he claims, that we cannot be sociable creatures without hypocrisy, rather than for the stronger position, which he perhaps sometimes implies, that all social interaction is hypocritical. The key takeaway is that we must all be hypocrites much of the time, even if not everything we do is hypocritical.

The more general disparity between the demands of real virtue and our practices of counterfeited virtue is one that fits well with the theological picture of our fallen condition, which Mandeville sometimes invokes. Yet nothing in my analysis turns on whether, say, he genuinely believed in a prelapsarian state of innocence or the possibility of attaining real virtue through the assistance of divine grace. As his discussion of the Stoics demonstrates, Mandeville did not regard the idea that virtue requires a conquest of the passions as unique to Abrahamic religions, even if the Stoics were so blinded by pride that they mistakenly considered this within their reach (FB I: 150–151). There is nothing incoherent about an ethical theory that demands more than can plausibly be expected on a realistic analysis of our moral psychology. This is arguably true of some secular philosophies today, such as certain varieties of utilitarianism, or, more generally, any ethical theory which holds, for example, that individuals have far-reaching duties to alleviate widespread human (and animal) suffering, or to combat climate change. If we take these demands seriously then we will inevitably fall short. One of the insights well-captured by the idea of our fallen condition is that we are simply incapable of living up to the demands of morality, and this is not necessarily a failing of how we think about morality. From this Mandevilllean perspective, claims of moral righteousness are always laced with hypocrisy and those who extol their own moral qualities – virtue signalling, as we might call it today – tell us more about their pride than they do their integrity. On this note, I turn to Mandeville’s criticisms of Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury’s ‘vast inlet to hypocrisy’

The ‘greatest Fault’ with Shaftesbury’s philosophy, Mandeville announces in ‘A Search into the Nature of Society’, is that the ‘imaginary Notions that Men may be Virtuous without Self-denial are a vast Inlet to Hypocrisy, which being once made habitual, we must not only deceive others, but become altogether unknown to ourselves’. Mandeville insists that virtue requires self-denial, a position he takes Shaftesbury to have denied. But why does he consider Shaftesbury’s notions a vast inlet to hypocrisy? At first glance, he seems less concerned with Shaftesbury’s ideas and more with exploding Shaftesbury’s pretensions to speak with any authority on virtue. The ‘Author of the Characteristicks’ – Shaftesbury’s major work – was ‘brought up in Ease and Affluence’, and while he might write well of the social virtues in print, or discuss them eloquently in polite company, ‘you shall never catch him fighting for his Country’ or engaging in public service. Virtue requires action, but Shaftesbury’s ‘Quiet Indolent Nature’ led him to withdraw from civic life, mistakenly believing ‘himself Virtuous, because his Passions lie dormant’. Shaftesbury might have a nice turn of phrase, but his analysis of virtue is really a self-serving justification for his
own conduct and inaction. The ‘calm Virtues recommended in the Charactersticks, are
good for nothing but to breed Drones’, and will never make someone fit ‘for Labour or
Assiduity, or stir him up to great Atchievements and perilous Undertakings’ (FB I: 331–
333). Mandeville’s index to the Fable captures his point succinctly: ‘Shaftesbury (Lord)
. . . Refuted by his own Character’ (FB I: 378).

Mandeville presents his attack on Shaftesbury as showing how, by internalising mis-
taken notions of virtue, we can become altogether unknown to ourselves. More needs to
be said, however, to explain precisely how this argument relates to hypocrisy. Mandeville
revisits the argument that the ‘System that Virtue requires no Self-denial is . . . a vast Inlet
to Hypocrisy’ at greater length in the second volume of the Fable. The problem with
Shaftesbury’s position, he now clarifies, is that:

> It will on all Accounts furnish Men with a more obvious Handle, and a greater Opportunity of
counterfeiting the Love of Society and Regard to the Publick, than ever they could have receiv’d
from the contrary Doctrine, viz. That there is no Merit but in the Conquest of the Passions, nor
any Virtue without apparent Self-denial (FB II: 109).

To defend this claim, Mandeville compares the fortunes of two men from ‘the middling
People’, who are both ‘tolerably well educated’ and ‘set out with the same Stock of
Virtues and Vices’. The only difference is that one is indolent – like Shaftesbury, albeit
from a lower social class – and the other active. The indolent man will likely remain poor
and despairs at the difficulty of raising his condition, but if he has any sense then he will
explain his lack of industry away as evidence of his modesty and frugality, endeavouring
‘to colour over his Frailty with the Appearance of Virtue’. This allows him to indulge his
inclinations ‘with little Offence or Disturbance to his Neighbour’, thereby acquiring
‘many amiable Qualities, that shall have all the Appearances of Social Virtues, whilst
nothing extraordinary befalls him’. The indolent man will never cause others offence, but
nor will he ever ‘serve his Friend, or his Country, at the Expence of his Quiet’. The case
is very different for the active man, however, who seeks to improve his condition by
ingratiating himself with patrons and benefactors. He flatters them in return for favours
yet cares only for his own interest. While ‘his Complaisance may be engaging . . . the
Heart is untouch’d’. The dissimulation this demands leaves him restless and, in following
‘the Dictates of his Nature’, the active man encounters many obstacles and temptations to
‘deviate from the Rules of strict Virtue’, which hardly ever trouble the indolent man. If
virtue requires a victory over the passions, as Mandeville insists, then neither are truly
virtuous, for they both follow the dictates of their own nature: one prefers an easy life, the
other pursues wealth. If we believe that people can be virtuous without self-denial, how-
ever, then we are more likely to mistake the unobtrusive life of the indolent man for vir-
tue. Of the view that virtue requires self-denial, Mandeville concludes, ‘Hypocrites have
less Latitude than in the contrary System’ (FB II: 111–119).

The indolent man and active man are both hypocrites, for they both offer moralising
glosses on their actions (or lack thereof) to present themselves as being more virtuous
than is really the case. They are both aware that this is what they are doing, and their
hypocrisy is thus a straightforward case of hiding away their true motives to put on a
virtuous façade. By denying that virtue requires self-denial, Shaftesbury’s system deval-
ues virtue and even the indolent man can pass for virtuous. In this respect, Shaftesbury’s
notions of virtue make it too easy to counterfeit love of society and the public regard,
which is why Mandeville could maintain that the ‘Opinion, that there can be no Virtue
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without Self-denial, is more advantageous to Society than the contrary Doctrine [i.e. Shaftesbury’s], which is a vast Inlet to Hypocrisy (OH: x, emphasis added). Mandeville’s conception of counterfeited virtue, to recall, does require some self-denial, although not the conquest of the passions required for real virtue. The social benefits associated with counterfeited virtue require that the ideal being counterfeited is itself a demanding one.

If we piece together Mandeville’s various discussions of the ‘vast Inlet to Hypocrisy’ charge, then his position seems to be that lowering the bar for virtue helps to foster self-deception. Those who adopt Shaftesbury’s erroneous notions are more likely to mistake their imperfections and weaknesses for positive qualities or virtues. The indolent man, in Mandeville’s example, can pass for frugal and modest while following his natural inclinations. If the indolent man believes that virtue requires self-denial, as Mandeville maintains, then he is more likely to realise his own shortcomings, even if he manages to deceive others. If, by contrast, the indolent man internalises the view that we can be virtuous without self-denial then he might come to deceive himself too, failing to recognise his lack of industry and ambition as serious shortcomings.

In exposing Shaftesbury’s notions of virtue as ‘a vast Inlet to Hypocrisy’, Mandeville thus suggests that what starts out as hypocrisy – deceiving others about our moral character – may eventually lead to self-deception. If Shaftesbury’s views are made habitual and we become completely unknown to ourselves, however, then we might question whether this still counts as hypocrisy at all. That is, at least, if hypocrisy requires some awareness of the deception inherent in our own conduct, the presence of which we have pride-based reasons to conceal even from ourselves (FB II: 79–80). Mandeville equivocates on this point. In 1720, he claims that ‘it is unjust to call People Hypocrites, when they set out with no ill design, and by their fair Appearance deceive themselves more ten to one, than they can do others of any tolerable Experience’ (FT: 31). In the 1723 additions to the Fable, however, he writes of that ‘strong Habit of Hypocrisy, by the Help of which, we have learned from our Cradle to hide even from our selves the vast Extent of Self-Love, and all its different Branches’ (FB I: 135, emphasis added).

We need not read too much into these different formulations presently, for in most cases self-deception is not an all-or-nothing matter, so we could at least see hypocrisy engendering self-deception up until the point where we become completely unaware of ourselves as being anything other than the façade we display in public. Even if we are not cognisant of all the hidden motives behind our actions – and the more successfully we are socialised, the deeper they are buried – most of us nonetheless remain aware that our public persona is a persona and typically understand some of the ways in which we present ourselves and our motives in an overly favourable light. Mandeville probably thought this true of Shaftesbury, although he was not overly concerned with specifying the precise balance of self-deception and conscious hypocrisy that best captured his adversary’s characteristics.

**Fashionable and Malicious Hypocrites**

We have seen, so far, that Mandeville argues that hypocrisy is necessary for sociability while criticising Shaftesbury’s notions of virtue for engendering hypocrisy. As this suggests, Mandeville is not committed to the view that hypocrisy is always beneficial. It can be turned to good or ill use, a point he develops in *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* by distinguishing between ‘Malicious’ and ‘Fashionable’ hypocrites. Malicious hypocrites ‘take Pains to appear Pious and Devout, in order to be Villains’ by deceiving others
who take them to be sincere. Fashionable hypocrites, by contrast, attend church and ‘counterfeit Devotion . . . without any Design upon others . . . from no other Principle than an Aversion to Singularity, and a Desire of being in the Fashion’. While malicious hypocrites are ‘the worst of Men’, fashionable hypocrites ‘are rather beneficial to Society, and can only be injurious to themselves’. This distinction is not unique to religious cases, with Mandeville’s discussion of hypocrisy returning to one of his favourite themes and concluding that all ‘good Manners and Politeness must come under the same Denomination’ (OH: 201–202). Hypocrisy can prove beneficial when it leads people to conform to social norms. It starts to become malicious when people feign sincerity in order to wield power over others through the pretense of moral purity. Even though fashionable hypocrisy is generally beneficial and malicious hypocrisy generally harmful, the key distinction between the two is one of motivation (not outcome): fashionable hypocrites deceive out of a desire for social approval without intending to harm anyone else, whereas malicious hypocrites act from more nefarious motives.

Mandeville’s distinction between these two types of hypocrisy occurs towards the end of a long discussion of Oliver Cromwell, the archetypal hypocrite of the period, and the use of Christianity in motivating his army during the civil war. Both Cromwell and the clergy supporting him satisfy the criteria of malicious hypocrites, for they were well aware of their own moral shortcomings – or, in Cromwell’s case, lack of sincere belief altogether – but presented their cause as unequivocally righteous to spur enthusiasm among the troops (OH: 163–194, 217–218). The dangers of malicious hypocrisy, however, come across most strongly in Mandeville’s discussion of the clergy elsewhere:

Hypocrites are under greater temptation to be cruel, than other Sinners; because they are always in hopes that we shall (what many are Fools enough to do) judge of the Holiness and Purity of their own Hearts from the hatred and strong aversion they express against Vice, which must make them unmercifully severe against the least Frailties of others (FT: 159–160).

Mandeville’s concern here is with malicious hypocrites, who act as if they are exemplars of virtue themselves, with the authority to castigate the shortcomings of others and demand a moral reformation. These prove to be the most intolerant of people, seeking to punish others for the slightest of faults and thereby shelter their own vices under a façade of moral austerity. What is more, malicious hypocrites tend to see everyone else’s hypocrisy as an evil that needs to be rooted out of society, failing to recognise that fashionable hypocrisy is indispensable for sociability and prosperity.

This theme permeates Mandeville’s work and he reserves a very critical tone for the hypocrisy of his main adversaries: the clergy, moral reformers and ‘haughty Moralists, who cannot endure to hear the Dignity of their Species arraign’d’ (FB I: 126). Reading the Fable should lead those ‘People, who continually find fault with others . . . to look at home, and examining their own Consciences, be made ashamed of always railing at what they are more or less guilty of themselves’ (FB I: 8, also 409). In his Free Thoughts on Religion, Mandeville likewise observes that ‘our State Hypochondriacks are daily buzzing in our Ears’, casting himself as the ‘State Physician’ who seeks to cure his readers of their ‘Discontent and Grumblings’ with the current condition of society (FT: 187). The problem with the ‘State Hypochondriacks’, or ‘haughty Moralists’, is not that they are mistaken about society’s moral shortcomings, but, instead, that they fail to recognise that these are the necessary price for living in a flourishing and wealthy state, and that the only alternative would involve economic ruin (FB I: 12–13, 183–185, 229, 325, 346,
In uncovering the hypocrisy of his antagonists, Mandeville is not proposing that we should look elsewhere for exemplary moral authorities. We are far better off if we can rely on a well-constituted system of government that ‘provides against the worst Contingencies . . . and preserves itself firm and remains unshaken, though most Men should prove Knaves’ (FT: 167; more generally, see FB II: 323–340). Mandeville’s politics generally eschews appeal to moral exemplars, for those who proclaim their own rectitude tend to do far more harm than good. Beware the morally righteous, Mandeville warns, for theirs is the hypocrisy that breeds intolerance and civil discord.

To what extent does the distinction between malicious and fashionable hypocrisy help us to make sense of Mandeville’s hostility towards Shaftesbury? One possibility is that Mandeville thought Shaftesbury shared much in common with malicious hypocrites. Shaftesbury had adopted an exemplary authorial persona, even claiming towards the end of the Characteristicks that his aim ‘has been to correct Manners, and regulate Lives’ (Shaftesbury, 2001, vol. III: 114). As with malicious hypocrites, Mandeville appears to have thought that exposing Shaftesbury’s lack of virtue and hypocrisy – or, at least, the depths of his self-deception – would prove an effective way of dismantling any moral authority his writings carried. Nonetheless, the type of hypocrisy that Mandeville claims Shaftesbury’s ideas encourage, and which much of the Fable seeks to unmask, is the fashionable hypocrisy central to polite society. The main problem with those who imbibe Shaftesbury’s philosophy is less that they are likely to become malicious hypocrites and more that they are liable to deceive themselves, as well as others, regarding the extent of their own moral shortcomings by mistaking their good manners for virtue.

In exposing the fashionable hypocrisy behind good manners and polite society, Mandeville leaves himself open to the following objection: if human sociability and moral practices rely on hypocrisy and (self-)deception, then is this a truth that should be widely disseminated? Many of Mandeville’s contemporaries thought that the Fable was a deeply subversive work. In most cases, critics complained that it abounds with dangerous errors, but a more incisive worry is that it divulges truths that are best left hidden. John Hervey (1732: 45–46), for example, observed that the Fable contains ‘many great Truths’, but also ‘many disagreeable ones, and what are much less fit to be told, than if they were not Truths’. Would Mandeville not have done better to keep his penetrating insights to himself?

To this objection, Mandeville could simply respond that he always remained sceptical of the public learning much from even the most ‘instructive and elaborate Writings’ and that he never claimed any good would come from reading the Fable ‘besides the Reader’s Diversion’ (FB I: 8–9). It was not written for the improvement of society, but for Mandeville’s own pleasure and the amusement ‘of People of Knowledge and Education, when they have an idle Hour which they know not how to spend better’ (FB I: 404–405, also 369; FB II: 5; LD: 30). To expect nobler aims is rather to miss the point. Although some of his contemporaries relished pointing out that Mandeville, on his own account, could not really be virtuous and must have written for selfish reasons – the Fable itself being ‘the sophistical Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride’ (Campbell, 1733: 186–187) – this line of criticism leaves his arguments untroubled, for there is no reason to suppose that he thought himself exempt from the pride and hypocrisy which he uncovers in others (on this point, see also Sandeman, 1757: 271–272; FB II: 6–7). Unlike Shaftesbury, Mandeville is not so easily refuted by his own character.
Mandeville does, however, respond to the charge that his work is subversive. For the most part, this involves maintaining that there can be no harm in making us better known to ourselves \((FB\ I:\ 57,\ 230)\). Indeed, most people are ‘so desperately in Love with Flattery’ that they would be unwilling to accept the uncomfortable truths he reveals anyway; ‘nothing would more clearly demonstrate the Falsity of my Notions’, Mandeville claims, ‘than that the generality of the People should fall in with them’ \((FB\ I:\ 230–231)\). In the final defence of his work, though, responding to George Berkeley’s attack, he directly addresses the question of whether it is more beneficial to accentuate the positive or negative side of human nature:

> You, Sir, think it for the Good of Society, that human Nature should be extoll’d as much as possible: I think, the real Meanness and Deformity of it to be more instructive. Your Design is, to make Men copy after the beautiful Original, and endeavour to live up to the Dignity of it: Mine is to enforce the Necessity of Education, and mortify Pride \((LD: \ 48;\ \text{see also FB II: 296})\).

This defence sits uneasily with Mandeville’s own explanation of the origin of moral virtue, where, as we have seen, he argues that we need to be deceived by a picture of human excellence that provides us with an ideal to emulate. Mandeville’s arguments sometimes pull in different directions, but a charitable way of trying to reconcile them is by noting that it is one thing to present a standard of human excellence against which we will invariably be found wanting,\(^{18}\) and another to expect, or even demand, the widespread practice of virtue. In his defence against Berkeley, Mandeville has the latter view in his sights and argues that if our expectations are too high then we will forget that evil, if not the basis of civil society, is ‘at least a necessary Ingredient in the Compound’. It is naïve to think that the good of society is consistent with the good of each of its members, or that affluence can be achieved without the vices flourishing \((LD: \ 48–49)\). Society can never be a harmoniously ordered whole, for large-scale coexistence is necessarily characterised by compromises, not just between different groups and interests within society, but equally between economic prosperity and real virtue. It is important to recognise this, lest we demand the impossible and then decry corruption whenever society inevitably falls short. Those who extol human nature too often elide these trade-offs, however, pretending that social utility and moral purity are mutually conducive, and in such cases, it is beneficial to pull ‘off the Disguises of [the] artful Men’ who propagate these falsehoods for self-serving reasons \((LD: \ 8, \ \text{also 22–25})\).

Mandeville does not address the worry that revealing the ubiquity of fashionable hypocrisy may undermine the practice of sociability, yet it is difficult to see how he could challenge the mistaken view of society endorsed by those who call for moral reform and seek to improve our manners without drawing attention to the more general relation between hypocrisy and sociability. We should also keep in mind that, although Mandeville denied that his work is subversive, his main goals – unlike Shaftesbury’s – were not guided by the practical imperative of moral improvement. What if revealing the truth about human nature does not perfect morals and does turn out to be socially disadvantageous? From Mandeville’s perspective, there is no reason to assume that truth and social utility will necessarily converge, which is to say that we might have to choose, to some degree at least, between an accurate analysis of human nature and one which encourages a certain type of conduct. Faced with this choice, Mandeville opts for the truthful over the useful, in marked opposition to Shaftesbury’s ‘generous and refined’ notions, which may be capable ‘of Inspiring us with the most Noble Sentiments concerning the Dignity of our exalted Nature: What Pity it is they are not true’ \((FB\ I:\ 324)\).
Mandevillean Reflections on Hypocrisy

The main aim of this article has been to reconstruct Mandeville’s views on hypocrisy, both by explaining why he accords it such a prominent role in understanding our moral and social norms, and by trying to make sense of his criticisms of Shaftesbury’s rival ethical theory as a vast inlet to hypocrisy. Given the relative neglect of these topics among Mandeville scholars, I take this to be a worthwhile goal in its own right. I also think the case of Mandeville is illuminating for thinking about hypocrisy more generally, not least because he theorises the social benefits and harms of hypocrisy at the same as he seeks to expose the hypocrisy of his opponents. By way of conclusion, then, I draw on both of these dimensions to offer some Mandevillean reflections on the complexities involved in evaluating political and social hypocrisy. In doing so, my aim is not to advance a single thesis about how we should evaluate hypocrisy; instead, I follow Shklar (1984: 6) in holding that the best way to shed light on a topic such as hypocrisy is by way of ‘a ramble through a moral minefield, not a march toward a destination’.

In some respects, Mandeville’s analysis of hypocrisy is deflationary. Hypocrisy may well be a moral failing, but it is one ubiquitous among humans trying to live together peacefully. Mandeville insists that human society is a morally compromised achievement (e.g. *FB* I: 6; *FB* II: 64, 74), which means that we should not overact whenever we spot the vice at work. But nor should we be too complacent. If we hope to avoid the false dichotomy of supposing that hypocrisy is always benign or always pernicious, then one of Mandeville’s contributions is in offering us a theoretical framework to distinguish between good and bad strands of hypocrisy. Before we condemn someone else’s hypocrisy, we would do well to ask whether it is of the fashionable or malicious variety. There will doubtless be cases that do not map onto this distinction – there is no reason to assume that Mandeville regarded it as exhaustive – but it remains a helpful starting point for differentiating between a form of hypocrisy that is indispensable for sociability and one that is closely bound up with abuses of power. Yet this is not the only question we should ask.

The foregoing discussion also invites us to approach the topic from another perspective and ask what is at stake when we criticise others for their hypocrisy. These two questions are complementary. We should consider not only the alleged hypocrisy of the accused, but also who is advancing the charge of hypocrisy and to what end.

One straightforward takeaway from Mandeville’s analysis is that we should be deeply suspicious of accusations of hypocrisy that serve to enhance the moral standing of the person or party advancing the charge, especially to the extent that they occupy a position of moral authority which allows them to exercise power over others. Crucially, this is not because the accusations in question are likely to be untrue. When Mandeville attacks the intolerance and moral severity of the clergy, for example, his point is not that they are wrong to identify the sinful or vicious nature of others, but rather that they do so only for self-serving and hypocritical reasons. Malicious hypocrites present their intolerance of others’ vices as a sign of righteousness, thereby masking their own shortcomings and deceiving others into mistaking them for paragons of virtue. The evil of malicious hypocrisy is its propensity to serve cruel and intolerant ends, for ‘Hypocrites are under greater temptation to be cruel, than other Sinners’ (*FT* : 159–160). Although Mandeville’s point is about the way malicious hypocrites decry the vices of others in general, the charge of hypocrisy is especially dear to malicious hypocrites because it projects onto others the failing that they most desire to conceal about themselves. Accusations of hypocrisy are a potent weapon for those who present themselves as champions of moral purity; for an extreme example,
consider Hannah Arendt’s (2016: 95) account of how ‘the war upon hypocrisy’ in the French Revolution ‘transformed Robespierre’s dictatorship into the Reign of Terror’.

We see something of the malicious hypocrite in more common cases where one person accuses another of hypocrisy in order to elevate their own claims to moral authority. The politician or activist who denounces the hypocrisy of their rivals to bolster their own image of authenticity and integrity is perhaps the most familiar example. We should be suspicious of those who cry hypocrisy to condemn the moral failing of others while seeking to occupy the moral high ground themselves. Mandeville, of course, cries hypocrisy more than most, so is this a suspicion we should have of him? In the main, probably not. In unveiling the hypocrisy of his foes, Mandeville’s aim is to bring the morally righteous down to or even below the level of the rest of us, without setting himself up as any kind of moral authority in their place.

We are all hypocrites, on Mandeville’s account, so if we hold too rigidly to the ‘judge not, that ye be not judged’ maxim then nobody would ever have the standing to condemn someone else’s hypocrisy.20 But we are not all malicious hypocrites. If we refrain from moral righteousness then we are better placed to expose the malicious hypocrisy of others without succumbing to it ourselves. We need not pretend to be without fault to condemn the malicious hypocrite. As we have seen, Mandeville often adopts a self-deprecatory tone and does not suggest that his own work could or should be taken as exemplary. This much counts in his favour (even if we might suspect him of false modesty), since the strongest case for advancing charges of hypocrisy is to unmask those who brandish their supposed moral authority to exercise power over others, which is a more plausible charge when there is no suspicion that it is merely a ploy to usurp rather than undercut the moral authority in question.

Jessica Isserow and Colin Klein have recently argued that hypocrisy should be taken seriously precisely because it undermines someone’s claim to moral authority, where moral authority is understood as a form of social standing through which someone can confer moral esteem and disesteem on others. Even people from a diversity of moral or ideological perspectives, they argue, can converge around the moral failing of hypocrisy (Isserow and Klein, 2017: 218–221). Mandeville does not make the last claim, but his own attempts to reveal the malicious hypocrisy of those who abuse positions of moral authority fit nicely with the more general viewpoint. Yet his reflections on hypocrisy should also lead us to question the extent to which our social practices are well served by moral authorities whose social standing allows them to pass judgement on others.21 Rather than seeing the charge of hypocrisy as a way of keeping our moral authorities in check, we might instead (or additionally) see the prevalence of malicious hypocrisy as a reason not to invest too much moral authority in such figures in the first place.

Even though Mandeville does not accuse others of hypocrisy to claim moral authority for himself, his encounter with Shaftesbury nevertheless highlights some of the risks involved in reaching for the charge of hypocrisy. Perhaps Mandeville thought Shaftesbury’s hypocrisy was of the malicious kind, but the form of hypocrisy Shaftesbury’s ideas supposedly advance is the more benign and fashionable variety, which makes it tempting to read Mandeville’s attack on Shaftesbury as itself an instance of self-serving (if not quite malicious) hypocrisy. Our sociable and moral practices only work so long as people do not unmask us and see the true motives behind our conduct. If this is the case, however, then the charge of hypocrisy should be used sparingly, reserved only for clear cases of malicious hypocrisy. Again, this is not because the charge would be inaccurate. To the contrary, if Mandeville is right then we are all hypocrites and, were we not so, then we would struggle
to live peacefully together at all. Seen in this context, to expose someone else’s hypocrisy is to run the risk of criticising them for successfully navigating the demands of social life. It has been suggested that the accusation of hypocrisy is not so prone to the dangers associated with other forms of moral censure (Szabados and Soifer, 2004: 184), but this neglects the fact that hypocrisy is a vice we are regularly called upon to practise but which must be overlooked in our day-to-day interactions. We put on a façade because we desire social approval and if we are criticised for doing so then we have little reason to continue playing our part. This was not a lesson Mandeville always heeded himself, of course, but if we are to take anything away from this discussion then we should realise that his own failings do not discredit his ideas. Once we start advancing charges of hypocrisy, it is difficult not to find ourselves deeply entangled in the very conduct we are supposedly trying to uncover.

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Notes

1. All references to The Fable of the Bees (Mandeville, 1988) are given by volume and page number in this form. The follow abbreviations are used for other oft-cited works: FT= Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness (Mandeville, 2017); LD= A Letter to Dion (Mandeville, 1732a); OH= An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War (Mandeville, 1732b).
2. For the considerable impact of Mandeville’s moral psychology and theory of sociability on eighteenth-century debates in moral and political philosophy, see especially Crisp (2019: 60–73), Hundert (1994), Maurer (2019: 58–85), Robertson (2005: 256–324), Sagar (2018: 27–66) and Tolonen (2013).
3. For helpful summaries of and contributions to these more fine-grained philosophical discussions, see, at greatest length, Szabados and Soifer (2004) and, more recently, Isserow and Klein (2017: especially 210–218). Isserow and Klein criticise what they term ‘the pretense account’, which is probably the category that best captures Mandeville’s position, and my point here is certainly not to suggest that all contemporary philosophers would endorse his understanding of hypocrisy (indeed, it is unclear that any single conception commands widespread philosophical endorsement).
4. The most notable exception is Runciman (2008: 45–73, 209–212), although his analysis is more focused on how we should judge the hypocrisy of politicians and less on the question of sociability. As subsequent notes clarify, I also disagree with his interpretation of Mandeville’s distinction between ‘malicious’ and ‘fashionable’ hypocrites. Davidson (2004: 31–40) discusses the role of hypocrisy in Mandeville’s ‘An Essay on Charity, and Charity-Schools’, and Dickey (1990) shows how Mandeville reworked ideas of hypocrisy from seventeenth-century French moralists. Despite its title, Olsthoorn (2019) focuses more on honour than hypocrisy.
5. On the extent to which this opposition shapes Mandeville’s later works, see Stuart-Buttle (2019: 118–148), although he does not focus on hypocrisy. For present purposes, I leave aside the question of whether Mandeville’s presentation of Shaftesbury’s philosophy is fair or accurate. For the complaint that Mandeville merely ‘set up a straw man to attack’, see Hollander (2020: 48).

6. By ‘naturalistic’, I mean that the ‘Enquiry’ eschews all knowledge of revealed religion and addresses the problem of how those unenlightened by scripture, such as the pagans, could have acquired notions of virtue and vice (FB I: 50–51).

7. As some of his eighteenth-century critics observed (Bluet, 1725: 23–24; Hume, 1985: 279–280), Mandeville’s naturalistic explanation of the origin of virtue in the ‘Enquiry’ may be in tension with his more famous ‘private vices, public benefits’ thesis, according to which the widespread practice of virtues such as honesty would lead to economic ruin. I take no stand here on whether this general tension can be adequately resolved (for defences of Mandeville, see Herdt, 2008: 271–272; Monro, 1975: 189–190, 203–209, 222), but it is worth noting that, on the definition from the ‘Enquiry’, it is unclear that what Hume (1998: 146) called the ‘monkish virtues’, which involve withdrawing from all social and economic activity, would satisfy the criteria for virtuous actions.

8. More recent research on moral hypocrisy (e.g. Batson, 2016: 93–148) broadly supports Mandeville’s position.

9. This is a one-sided view of Shaftesbury’s position, but his account of virtue does allow the possibility of being ‘cheaply virtuous’ in cases where we do not need to overcome any passions (Shaftesbury, 2001, vol. II: 22; see also Douglass, 2020: 282).

10. For the claim that ‘a hypocrite must be self-conscious to a certain degree’, see, for example, McKinnon (1991: 323).

11. On this passage, see also Luban’s (2015: 848–850) discussion of ‘refined hypocrisy’, where we are not necessarily conscious of the gap between our actual and professed motives.

12. For the stronger view that it is difficult to identify hypocrites precisely because hypocrisy typically involves or engenders self-deception, see Statman (1997), who argues (on very Mandevillian grounds) against those who see hypocrisy and self-deception as opposites.

13. This, of course, depends on the social norms themselves being beneficial. Mandeville was well aware that social norms can be oppressive, as is perhaps most clearly displayed in the Virgin Unmask’d, the main aim of which, Mandeville (1709) explains in the ‘Preface’, is to expose ‘whatever is dreadful in Marriage’ (marriage being, among other things, an extremely powerful social norm). Here and elsewhere, he repeatedly describes (married) women as having been enslaved by men (e.g. Mandeville 1709: 30, 86, 127; Mandeville, 1999: 119, 171, 202). Or consider the ‘Tyranny which Custom usurps over us’ when it comes to inflicting cruelty upon animals. Were it not for custom, Mandeville suggests, ‘Men of any tolerable Good-nature could never be reconcile’d to the killing of so many Animals for their daily Food, as long as the bountiful Earth so plentifully provides them with Varieties of vegetable Dainties’ (FB I: 173).

14. Cf. Runciman (2008: 57), who claims that the distinction is drawn ‘in terms not just of motive but of self-awareness . . . [because] the fashionable hypocrite acts without design’. Mandeville, however, is clear that the malicious and fashionable hypocrite both know that they are being hypocritical; his point about acting ‘without design upon others’ (emphasis added) concerns the motivation of the fashionable hypocrite.

15. Cf. Runciman (2008: 58–64), who argues that Cromwell was both a malicious and fashionable hypocrite. Runciman’s discussion of Cromwell is otherwise very insightful and my disagreement here turns mainly on how he understands the malicious/fashionable distinction.

16. This is his general line, at least, although Runciman (2008: 66–69) points out that, in 1720, Mandeville offered a surprisingly moralistic defence of the Whig ministry against the Tories.

17. In the ‘Preface’ to the Virgin Unmask’d, Mandeville (1709) criticises the ‘Hypocrisie and Dissimulation’ of authors who preface their books by claiming to have written them with ‘no other Aim than the Reader’s Good, which commonly is an Abominable Lie’.

18. In the ‘Enquiry’, for example, the lawgivers present the species as divided between a class of ‘low-minded People’, who unreflectively indulge their natural appetites, and a class ‘of lofty high-Spirited Creatures’, who seek to conquer their passions and promote the public welfare. The lawgivers make clear, however, that becoming a member of the higher class is extremely demanding; they stress that it is ‘troublesome to resist, and very difficult wholly to subdue’ our natural inclinations, with success coming only to those who make ‘a continual War with themselves’ (FB I: 43–44).

19. This is the main focus of Runciman’s (2008: 45–73, 209–212) discussion, although he extrapolates a different distinction (that Mandeville does not himself draw) between first-order and second-order hypocrisy, which does not always track that between fashionable and malicious hypocrites (and which Runciman argues often collapses in practice).
20. Wallace (2010: 317) explains the chief wrong of hypocrisy in terms of criticising others when we do not ourselves have the moral standing to do so. For more general discussion of the maxim and the question of who has the moral standing to condemn others, see Cohen (2013: 115–133).

21. I see no reason why Isserow and Klein would necessarily disagree with this, although it goes against the general direction of their analysis. They do not dwell on the likelihood of people abusing positions of moral authority and many of their examples of positive moral authorities are ones where the authority confers limited power over others (e.g. because it is only exercised over a small number of people or pertains only to a specific sphere of influence).

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