

An Analysis of Remark B of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*: regarding Knaves

[Uma Análise da Observação B da *Fábula das Abelhas* de Bernard Mandeville: a respeito dos Patifes]

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Abstract: Bernard Mandeville's poem "The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves turn'd Honest" explores the subtle interplay between morality and business practices, particularly through the lens of the term "knave". This article examines Mandeville's use of "knave" in juxtaposition with the value of honesty portrayed in the poem's title. In contrast to the spiritual transformation depicted in the poem, in which all the bees in the hive become honest through divine intervention, Mandeville suggests a different kind of change in moral practice, one that incorporates previously unacceptable behavior into the social fabric. Through a varied historical reconstruction of the uses and understandings of the term in question, the study explores Mandeville's concerns about the acceptance and normalization of dishonesty in various segments of society, as illustrated by the anecdote in Remark B, which shows how dishonesty permeates all aspects of commerce, involving buyers, sellers, merchants, traders, and dealers. By analyzing Mandeville's portrayal of dishonesty and its integration into social dynamics, this study aims to elucidate the underlying tensions between ethical standards and the pursuit of self-interest.

Keywords: Mandeville. Knavery. The Grumbling Hive. Morality.

Resumo: O poema de Bernard Mandeville "The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves turn'd Honest" explora a sutil interação entre moralidade e práticas comerciais, especialmente por meio das lentes do termo "patifaria" (*knave*). Este artigo examina o uso de knave feito por Mandeville em justaposição com o valor da honestidade retratado no título do poema. Em contraste com a transformação espiritual retratada no poema, em que todas as abelhas da colmeia se tornam honestas por meio de intervenção divina, Mandeville sugere um tipo diferente de mudança na prática moral, que incorpora ao tecido social um comportamento anteriormente inaceitável. Por meio de uma reconstrução histórica variada dos usos e entendimentos do termo em questão, o estudo explora as preocupações de Mandeville sobre a aceitação e a normalização da desonestidade em vários segmentos da sociedade, conforme ilustrado pela anedota na Observação B, que mostra como a desonestidade permeia todos os aspectos do comércio, envolvendo compradores, vendedores, comerciantes, atravessadores e negociantes. Ao analisar o retrato que Mandeville faz da desonestidade e sua integração na dinâmica social, este estudo busca elucidar as tensões subjacentes entre os padrões éticos e a busca do interesse próprio.

Palavras-chave: Mandeville. Knavery. The Grumbling Hive. Moralidade.

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“we have no great Reason to suspect a future
Change in it, while the World endures”
The Fable of the Bees, Remark T, 1723

“Sometimes, doing the right thing feels like committing a crime”
The End of the Fxxxing World, 2019

The anonymous 1714 edition of *The Fable of the Bees*, which contains Mandeville’s twenty remarks on certain verses of the poem *Grumbling Hive: or Knaves turn’d Honest* (1705), has a detailed nine-page table of contents listing the topics covered. Remark B includes two sentences with their respective page numbers:

No Traders strictly honest 46
A Story of two Merchants that both took
Advantage of their Intelligence 47
(MANDEVILLE 1714 n.p.)¹

The index was removed from later editions for unknown reasons, and Mandeville never referred to it. The message of the passage, however, is clear: people in trade can be many things but honest. They cheat for their own benefit because it is the nature of the trade.

The two verses of the 1705 poem that led to Remark B, “These were call’d Knaves, but bar the Name / The grave Industrious were the same” (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 19), captured in condensed form the changing moral character of society. A term that originally referred to a particular group began to be applied to other social categories that had previously been excluded. Mandeville himself acknowledges on the title page of the 1714 edition that “human frailties (...) may be made to supply the Place of Moral Virtue”. That is, if these weaknesses help us to adapt to changing circumstances, they may indeed substitute for virtues. In Remark B, Mandeville satirizes the prevailing moralism of his day by arguing against the idea that the ability to deceive is a substitute for virtue; the argument centers on the knaves as the main characters,

¹I am most grateful to Andrea Branchi for providing the facsimiles of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1723) and *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711).

who are presented as a perfectly acceptable social type. However, these two verses still present a diagnosis based on a profound perception of reality: virtue cannot improve or solve this general state of affairs. As indicated on the title page, Mandeville believed that this corrupt world was created during a period of “the degeneracy of MANKIND” without any potential for reform (MANDEVILLE, 1714, n.p.).

This is not to say that there were no immoral and vicious categories in history prior to the emergence of knaves. Yet Mandeville wrote and rewrote his multifaceted *Fable* under circumstances in which such traits seemed to have escalated, which he saw as a positive thing. These reprehensible social traits had become deeply ingrained and were practiced in everyday life without restraint or inhibition. As a result, once the knaves were socially integrated, they were absolved of any blame, so any moral censure was inappropriate. In the past, harsh moral criticism, often in the form of offenses against wrongdoers, was used to guide people towards ethical behavior. But this is no longer the case, at least not since Mandeville's demarche.

The third stanza of the *Grumbling* poem, which includes the two aforementioned verses, implies that not only habitual and inveterate knaves, but also respectable individuals who would hardly be labeled with such an epithet, “knew some Cheat.” The poem introduces new characters – previously unknown knaves – who are now comfortable with a treatment that is no longer subject to stern admonishment. Thus, while these social types may be criticized for encouraging and replicating dishonest behavior, the new knaves are praised on an emergent moral scale. In addition to contributing to society's prosperity through their wealth, the lack of significant profits could have a negative impact on trade, so moral condemnation could also obstruct their business activities.

Mandeville's use of the term “knave” in contrast to the importance of honesty in the title of his poem “The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves turn'd Honest” suggests a potential shift in moral practice that is not to be confused with the spiritual transformation of the *Fable*, in which every bee in the hive suddenly becomes honest thanks to the intervention of a goddess. Rather, it indicates a shift in which previously unacceptable behavior is now incorporated into the social scenario; a change in behavior and traditions that can mitigate or eliminate the condemnation of bad behavior. But what specifically troubled Mandeville in this case?

Remark B presents a brief anecdote to demonstrate that knavery pervades “all the Trading Part of the People”, including “Buyer” “Sellers”, “Dealers”, “Tradesman”, and “Merchant”. As such, the term “knave” encompasses much more than those usually referred to when interpreted in a broader sense (“if the Word Knave may be understood in its full Latitude”). Thus, in a futures market negotiation for the buying and selling of a shipment of sugar from Barbados, whose fleet is about to land in England, two apparently very civilized men, Alcander and Decio, attempt to deceive each other by using privileged information. But Mandeville’s story does not focus on insider trading, as it was not considered a crime at the time.² Instead, it highlights the act of deception between two individuals in their pursuit of wealth who have a close relationship, as indicated by the terms “Friend” and “Chap”. At the beginning of the case, Alcander receives a confidential message from his assistant “at a Tavern near the *Exchange*”³. The assistant holds a “Letter from the *West Indies*” and informs Alcander of a large shipment of sugar that may cause a drop in its selling price. As an experienced dealmaker (“a cunning Fox”), Alcander understands the importance of not appearing too eager (“too precipitant”) to sell and incur greater losses. So he interrupts negotiations with the buyer, Decio, and with “Jovial Humour” invites him to a weekend at his country house. In the new scenario, after being “splendidly entertain’d”, Decio goes for a walk and meets an acquaintance who informs him that the Barbados fleet has been destroyed by a storm, causing prices to rise. According to the acquaintance, “Sugars would rise 25 *per Cent*” based on information obtained at “*Lloyd’s Coffee-House*”⁴ (MANDEVILLE,

²As Goldsmith notes, “[n]either of the merchants in this story of the bitter bit is doing anything illegal; each merely acts on information unknown to the other. (...) Mandeville seems to accept the world of commerce as it is without having to dignify it or disguise it” (GOLDSMITH, 1985, p. 136).

³Chapter XII [“Trade, etc”] of John Ashton’s compilation *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne Taken from Original Sources* (1882) describes events unfolded between November 29 and December 1, 1709 at the Exchange in London. The excerpt taken from the *Hickely Pickelty, or a Medley of Characters Adapted to the Age. Relating to different Persons and Perswasions*, reads: “The Exchange is the Land’s Epitome, or you might call it the little Isle of Great Britain did the Waters encompass it. (...) ’Tis a vast heap of Stones, and the confusion of Languages makes it resemble Babel. The Noise in it is like that of Bees; a strange Humming or Buzzing, of walking tongues and feet; it is a kind of a still Roaring, or loud Whisper. It is the great Exchange of all Discourses, and no Business whatsoever but is here on Foot. All things are sold here, and Honesty by Inch of Candle; but woe be to the Purchaser, for it will never thrive with him.”

⁴Socializing took place not only in churches, courts, and universities, but also in coffeehouses, which evolved from traditional Alehouses (CLARK, 1983) and provided opportunities for socializing, promoting gentlemanly behavior, and facilitating commercial transactions. Lawrence Klein (1996) argues that new meeting places emerged after the Restoration, which also aimed to reassert the authority of these institutions, which had been weakened in the seventh century. This urban transformation led to the reconfiguration of authority in the “boisterous setting” where “untrammelled discourses” prevailed (p. 33). Lloyd’s Coffee House, the setting for part of Mandeville’s Remark B, was established in 1688 and can be seen as a prototype of the business spaces of modern commercial society, where buying and selling define behavioral traits. The substance consumed in these rooms, caffeine, was said to promote “sobriety, seriousness, and mental briskness” (p. 41). Lloyd’s was a successful place that brought together insurers and bankers, provided shipping news, and stimulated productive debate, playing a role in the rise of a polite public sphere outside the traditional institutions often associated with moral control that viewed coffeehouses as encouraging unsupervised interaction, that is, as dangerous and seditious environments: freedom from external constraints, Klein argues, was essential for good conversation, where authority’s gaze should not be a meaningful participant. This provided

1924, vol. I, pp. 61-2).

Returning to Alcander's house, both are now equally concerned about the prospect of financial loss. Since they have different market information and strictly follow the no-emotion rule, they show no expression ("might not seem") that might reveal their underlying intentions. Despite the secret intentions they have in common ("how desirous soever he was to sell, the other was yet more eager to buy"), they "[counterfeit] all the Indifference imaginable" in order to show as little interest in the negotiations as possible. Finally, after a few more detours and camouflages, the deal is concluded at the price Alcander originally proposed ("a *Guinea*") when they began negotiating in the London tavern, with both parties completely unaware of their interlocutors' secret knowledge.

Although Alcander and Decio display exemplary politeness ("other's Civility"), Mandeville's anecdote challenges the view that this elegant behavior, which suspends the sugar transaction in the city and offers a pleasant stay in an idyllic rural setting, embodies rather than substitutes for true virtue. First of all, it should not be overlooked that Alcander's invitation to his country house is intended to prevent Decio from gaining access to information about the latest movements of the sugar shipment. The "fair dealing" mentioned at the end of Remark B, which supposedly implies the use of honest business practices, does not convince Mandeville, even though it is clear that the price offered by one in the sale is accepted by the other in the purchase. It seems most likely that both parties are avoiding potential losses resulting from the unforeseen problems with the Barbados fleet by employing strategies such as deflection, maneuvering, and concealment. There is indeed a real problem, but it cannot be confronted directly. Alcander and Decio get along well because they both try to hide their emotions, thus inhibiting moral judgments that might disrupt the negotiation process.

Determining the true intentions of other parties in a business context can be complicated, as what they display in conversation may not necessarily reflect their true thoughts. The lack of transparency suggests, according Mandeville's diagnosis, that the knavery that prevails in such social types does not encourage

an environment that slowly eroded key social distinctions and gave the coffee-drinking non-gentlemen a "patina of gentility". Moreover, the conversations about issues of public concern in which the new groups began to engage, and which took place in the midst of commercial exchanges of private interest, generated a desirable prestige of civility. According to Sweet (2002, pp. 365-366), even investors broadened their narrow and self-serving vision. Thus, despite a diffuse "fragmentation of traditional certainties" related to social reproaches of manners that might generate some anxiety and apprehension about how the new adepts of civility would be perceived, people generally lived or would live better.

the performance of actions that promote virtue in any sense, but that can make commerce more efficient. While it is crucial to create a bargaining atmosphere that instills confidence in the parties, honesty is not necessary to the bargaining process. Other factors are likely to be more important.

There is no evidence to support a connection between the final interaction between Alcander and Decio, marked as “all Indifference imaginable”, their delusional disregard for possible losses, and the sarcastic “indifferent Compliment” mentioned at the beginning of Remark B, which seems to be an oxymoron, an emblematic response of merchants when they are called knaves, taking it as a compliment rather than an insult. However, as the above table of contents indicates, if all individuals in the trade are considered to be knaves, then no one is a true knave: it is an indifferent term, and being labeled as such carries no outrage.⁵ Thus, an apathetic response to an insult is akin to a coldhearted attitude toward things that really matter. So it may not be a problem to be untruthful, and deception is not inherently wrong once the value of truthfulness has been diminished. On the one hand, deception is increasingly accepted as appropriate behavior, as long as it is not explicitly called a lie. On the other hand, even if truthfulness is no longer expected to remedy the situation, it is not advisable to overtly attack it. Henceforth, honesty may be a personal choice for those who find dishonesty disturbing and who find real satisfaction in truthfulness. But it is no longer a social requirement. Practically speaking, for one’s own well-being, it becomes necessary to be more deceptive, fallacious, delusional, so that others remain unaware of one’s thoughts and feelings. Otherwise, a sincere person may cause trouble for everyone.⁶

Remark B can be interpreted as a criticism of individuals who deviate from honesty. Alcander and Decio’s sincerity is questionable despite the peaceful and civilized nature of the events. At the same time, they are simply negotiating: the negotiation process is driven by a buyer seeking the lowest price and a

⁵Farrant and Paganelli have a similar perspective, drawing on David Hume’s idea of the prevalence of self-interest: “If the rules of the game governing both private (market) and public (government) choice alike are structured in accordance with the assumption that all men are knaves, and if men are indeed knaves, nobody is worse off”(Farrant - Paganelli, (2005). Tolonen (2013, p.227, 245) discusses the knave issue from a perfectionist perspective, according to which Humean educational, legal, moral and political frameworks are realistic only if they acknowledge the fallibility of human beings and do not ignore their “foolish” nature.

⁶Goldsmith notes that people generally lack fairness, especially in commercial societies. This is considered acceptable because sellers are not required to disclose everything they know about what they are selling. However, buyers are expected to know what they are doing: “[I]f all were honest, locksmiths and many others would be unemployed. (...) Of course, Decio, Alcander and all their like at every level of society do not possess the virtue of justice; traders and merchants in a commercial society operate on the principle of caveat emptor, not on that of revealing all and of taking no advantage of buyer’s ignorance about their wares. They are honest enough when they keep within the law” (GOLDSMITH, 1985, p. 150).

seller aiming for the highest price. Thus, as we become familiar with the events that take place in this short story, we do not perceive Alcander and Decio to be entirely dishonest, even though they deceive each other, presenting all facets of dishonesty, as the word "knave" in all its Latitude suggests.

Remark B highlights similarities between certain characteristics of the knave and those described in the *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711), albeit in a different context, which may allow for further elaboration on the knave's traits. In the *Treatise*, Misomedon, the hypochondriac husband, argues that his wife's symptoms and the acquisition of goods as a result from her illness are not indicative of the professionalism of the person who treated her. So he contends that owning "a Coach is a very weak Proof of a Man's Honesty, that comes up from nothing by buying and selling in a Trade, where *Knaves have a great Latitude*" (MANDEVILLE, 1711, p. 218, emphasis added). One may wonder what exactly he is referring to. Upon consulting the table of contents, it pertains to a "long debate between Misomedon and Polytheca on the Honesty, Ability, &c. of Apothecaries in general" (p. xxiii). Therefore, one can say that the ownership of a carriage, regardless of its cost, is not a reliable indicator of honesty. Who owns such a thing? Pharmaenio, Polytheca's apothecary.

Misomedon expresses skepticism towards all apothecaries, while Polytheca disagrees; she thinks they will never come to an agreement on the topic of medicine (p. 210). Polytheca trusts in Pharmaenio, whom she considers highly accomplished and different from ordinary apothecaries: he is known for being careful with medicines and is highly respected in the area; he is also a man of wealth, having owned a carriage for many years. (pp. 210, 218) Polytheca states that there are "honest Men among them [apothecaries], as well as there is in all other Callings" (p. 213). In contrast, Misomedon refers to them as "impudent Rascals," (p. 217), specifically "an industrious Apothecary" (p. 215), who do not wait for the illness of well-paying patients to sell their medicines; besides, Pharmaenio's prescription not only failed to alleviate Polytheca's symptoms, but also contained medicines that "tasted of wine or brandy" (p. 209). In turn, the physician, as a somewhat real moral standard, only attends those who require medical assistance (p. 215), and prescribes medications that have been used by his colleagues before (p. 214). Conversely, apothecaries make unnecessary visits and use any excuse to sell their products to even those who are in "perfect health" (p. 216). The "great Latitude" or significant free-

dom enjoyed by these knaves is due to their focus on maximizing profits. More important than knowing the properties of medicines is knowing how to market them.

In the *Treatise*, Philopirio, an empiricist physician and Mandeville’s representative, diagnosed Polytheca and her daughter with a hysterical affliction based on a list of symptoms (pp. 210-212). The prescription for the daughter’s recovery is “one Month a course of Exercise, and no Medicines at all” (p. 212) – Polytheca repeats this prescription without fully understanding it. According to Misomedon, the difficulty may be attributed to the use of “such Language [that] never came from an Apothecaries mouth”. Philopirio’s treatment differs from the typical overuse of medication often promoted by apothecaries who sell whatever they want “as [their] conscience will allow of”. The overconfidence in apothecaries – as “Saints” – is mistakenly based on the “unlimited Authority” of a “reputable Employment” (p. 213).

To accentuate his social hierarchy perspective, Misomedon refers to apothecaries as “Servants” who “Cook whatever they [physicians] order” (p. 214). As such, they are “knaves” originally created to reduce the workload of physicians. At the same time, he criticizes physicians who are “meddling with what is thought to be beneath [them]” (p. 214), so much as he condemns apothecaries who prescribe medication beyond their capabilities: those who treat “what is infinitely above him” commit an “unpardonable crime” (p. 215). This descriptive background highlights three similarities in the characterization of the knave between the *Treatise* and the Remark B. They are usually wealthy (“men of substance”), hardworking (industrious), and show great skill in cheating when given complete freedom (“full Latitude”). Furthermore, in his poem *Grumbling Hive*, Mandeville first employs “Knaves” to describe actions that are unmistakably deceitful:

Sharppers, Parasites, Pimps, Players,
 Pick-pockets, Coiners, Quacks, South-sayers,
 And all those, that in Enmity,
 With downright Working, cunningly
 Convert to their own Use the Labor
 Of their good-natur’d heedless Neighbour.
 (MANDEVILLE, 1924, vol. I, p. 19)

It portrays a society where the cunning exploit the gullible and take advantage of the easily fooled. They are objectively identifiable. In social situations, seeking justice through values such as honesty and truthfulness or supporting punitive measures that condemn, correct, and redress deceptive practices is reasonable, since such practices undermine the efforts of those who promote a consistent connection between their statements and actions, creating a reliance on others for similar behavior. Regardless of whether such actions are deemed acceptable or not, it is inconceivable for a society to defend fraudulent behavior or openly confess to cheating. Commercial relationships are measured by different standards that encourage individuals to act in their own self-interest, even if it means going against previously established social values, as exemplified by the actions of Alcander, Decio, and Pharmenio. To highlight the changing meaning of the term "knave" over time, it may be worth exploring the connotations associated with the term. This could illuminate the subtle yet significant shift that Mandeville seems to be forecasting in Remark B and what this shift ultimately points towards.

The term "knave" has an unclear original meaning, and little research has been done on its derivation and lexical implications. In the earliest records, *cnafa*, related to Proto-Germanic *knabon* and German *Knabe*, denotes a "boy, male child; male servant". It is also applied to a "young squire" who undertakes menial tasks, such as carrying the knight's weapons and belongings while accompanying him *on foot* during horseback rides. This role is similar to that of a "footman". In the mid-14th century, the term "fot-knave" referred to a low-ranking servant who accompanied a knight or a squire. In the late 14th century, the term "fot-folwer" referred to a foot servant who traveled on foot. By the 16th century, the term "knave" still referred to someone of low social status, with the added connotation of lacking special work skills; as "menial" (later *menage*) originated as a term for a domestic servant, a pageboy, someone uncultured, humble and servile, associated with "rascal" or "rogue", referring offensively to one deemed worthless and contemptible (OED, 2022). From this perspective, someone of lower social status, standing at ground level, was perceived as inferior to the nobleman he served, who stood at an elevated perspective and displayed haughtiness toward the lower-classes. In 1614, William Combe referred to the *diggers*, who resisted the enclosure of Welcombe's open fields by covering the ditches, as "Puritan knaves & underlings in their colour" while mounted on horseback (LINEBAUGH & REDIKER, 2002, pp. 17-18).

Additionally, the "masterless men," as described by Christopher Hill from a 1627 play, were the antithesis of a feudal society that typically functioned on the basis of "no land and no man without a lord." The emergence of capitalism during the 16th century resulted in economic conditions that led to the expulsion of certain tenants from their land holdings. This caused an influx of individuals labeled as "vagabonds", "servants to nobody", "subverters", and "potential dissolvents of the society" to London and other major cities where "there was more charity, and there were better prospects of earning a dishonest living". This group of jobless individuals can be viewed as the target criticized in a marginal note in a copy of the Geneva Bible as "rascals and very sink and dunghill knaves of all towns and cities" who were willing to "to be hired for every man's money to do any mischief". Hill explains that the enclosure of the open fields led to the emergence of an "underworld" with considerable social mobility, including individuals who were considered "disaffected elements, separatists, itinerant preachers". Among those were "forest squatters, itinerant craftsmen, building labourers, unemployed men and women seeking work, strolling players, minstrels and jugglers, pedlars and quack doctors, gypsies, vagabonds, tramps"; some of whom were also members of the groups that settled in "Ireland and the New World" (HILL, 1991, pp. 38-41, 48-49).

Ruth Goodman traces the evolution of the "term" knave, highlighting how it underwent major changes: "from a simple signifier of social status to an insult" (GOODMAN, 2018)⁷. Thus, the same designation for certain social behaviors was once considered acceptable, latter disapproved, and then acceptable again: "Almost any man would have felt aggrieved to be called a knave in 1590, but far fewer would have objected fifty years earlier, or indeed fifty years later, as the term waxed and waned in its offensive impact". Most importantly, Goodman notes that "only a man (...) could be called a 'knave'". The lowest in the hierarchy, a knave was a young man in the service of the nobility. They were often idle – there were many of them – and used violence, molesting young girls or robbing and disturbing the village while using their title, however minimal, to demean those who had none.

This sense of clandestine or covert action began to describe men who were perceived to be "crude and rather deceitful" and gave rise, for example, to "Knavis tacches' (knavish tricks)", used in the 15th century to scold well-born children who behaved inappropriately. Also, from the mid-16th to the mid-

⁷The page numbers of the PDF book are unavailable. However, all the sentences in quotation marks can be found online.

19th century, a "lowest court card" with the initials Kn (for knave) was added to the deck. To avoid confusion with the K card (representing the King), the Kn card was replaced with a J (for "Jack"), which also signified a clever, versatile person with no skills: "one who is good at many things" (*Jack-of-all-trades*). Although it is now completely obsolete, possibly due to "overuse gradually eroding its power to shock" since at least the 1650s, it was not initially perceived as a "mild insult". It seems that the offensive qualities were intended to lower the social status of the individual and indicate his worthlessness. To call someone a "knave" implied that he was not to be trusted, that he lacked maturity and therefore did not deserve "social respect". Because titles of nobility were crucial to the "self-respect of Renaissance men",⁸ insults like "canting knave" (used to add extra syllables, depending on the insulter's anger) meant "one that holds forth loudly on subjects he knows nothing about," raising suspicion that he was "failing in his duties as head of the household". By the end of "Elizabeth I's reign" in the late 16th century, Goodman says, "knave" had become a highly pejorative term. It was used to describe men who were considered the "scum beneath your feet" and who, in social contexts, were deemed "not fit to be in the company of decent people".

While it may be difficult to assemble all of the various connotations of "knave" into a unified concept, the use of the term seems to capture a number of instances of social interaction, particularly among men, whose goal was to deliberately falsify what they made visible. Throughout history, the term "knave" has been used to describe someone who has engaged in publicly condemned behavior, implying a quality of unscrupulousness and shamelessness. By the Mandeville time, however, it had lost some of its negative connotation. By appearing as such in public, he was actually revealing as someone with secrets, someone who profited by not sharing information, by not letting others know what he knew. The ability to do something openly and publicly that was pre-

⁸This self-respect was tied to an old "agrarian paradigm" that traditionally embraced values such as "real [landed] property", with the assumption that "virtue [resided] in the man of landed property who could bear arms to defend both virtue and property" (NEALE, 1975, p. 5). But by the end of the 17th century, a new kind of social status based on the ability to accumulate "movable and intangible property" was emerging. Property was redefined as entitlement to the benefits of credit, significant growth in government business, war, and the expansion of the national debt, rather than land ownership. (Id). This was modeled primarily on concepts such as "credit mechanisms", as described by John Pocock, which allowed a "new world of the social and sentimental, the commercial and cultural, (...) to proliferate with alternatives to the ancient *virtus* and *libertas*" (POCOCK, 1985, p. 50). In this transformed value system, the virtues were derived from wealth rather than position, an achievement that did not require the new owner to reciprocate with any social obligation. Pocock suggests that some contemporaries, including Defoe, Montesquieu, and Mandeville viewed the new investor classes as incapable of controlling their intense emotions. Because the "rentier society" fostered a "nervous intersubjectivity" marked by "passion, fantasy and other-directedness", there was a self-conscious effort to transform the deeply passionate motivations of the "exchange and credit" system into a relationship of "confidence" that led to a rational "*episteme*" that eventually formed "systems of rationality based directly upon passion" (POCOCK, 1975, pp. 79-81).

viously considered reprehensible indicates a change in attitude: it may not be considered proper behavior, but it can no longer be considered totally unacceptable.

One of the most eloquent moments in English literature, in which a deceitful character is portrayed as an unworthy man, occurs in Act II, Scene II of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In a quasi-monologue of insults, the esteemed⁹ Earl of Kent (disguised as Caius) pontificates against the footman Oswald when they meet by chance, both carrying letters from their respective masters (from Lear to Gloucester and from Goneril to Regan). Kent then attacks Oswald with words before beating him:

A knave, a rascall, an eater of broken meates; a base, proud, shallow, beggerly, three shewted hundred pound, filthy worsted-stocken knave, a lilly-lyver'd action taking knave; a whorson glassegazing supersinical rogue, one truncke inheriting slave; one that would'st bee a baud in way of good service; and art nothing but the composition of a knave, begger, coward, pander, and the sonne and heire of a mungrell bitch, whom I will beat into clamorous whyning, if thou denie the least syllable of the addition. (SHAKESPEARE, 1608 *King Lear*, Act II, Scene II, n.p.)

As a lackey of Goneril, Lear's eldest daughter, Oswald is an accomplice in the plot she and her sister Regan hatch against their father. That is not all: Oswald writes Goneril's letters to Regan (I, iv, 354), reporting her fears about the (un)consequences of their father's madness. So Oswald is thus the weak type – paraphrasing, *a miserly servant in a pair of dirty stockings* – who, from the beginning, tries to make Lear trust in the loyalty of his two daughters, who really want to kill him and take over his power. He is submissive in order to rise in the hierarchy and not to be treated as a knave, which is why he flatters

⁹In the words of the Earl of Gloucester – who rivals Lear in the misfortunes that befall them both (Gloucester's blindness and Lear's madness) for not trusting the truly sincere characters – Kent is a "noble gentleman" (I, i, 24), that is, the only one whose sincerity there is no doubt, which is why, just after Lear has banished Kent from the court, Gloucester says: "And noble and true-hearted Kent banished! His offense, honesty! 'Tis strange." (I, ii, 115). In fact, Kent was banished for approving (I, i, 156-160) the unadorned speech of Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia, made in honor of her father – "My heart into my mouth: I love your Majesty. According to my bond; no more nor less." (I, i, 94-95) –, but to Lear uncontrollable disappointment. This is essentially how the tragedy begins.

and obeys his mistress, even if she seems more dishonorable or even evil than he is. As a loyal lackey, he remains devoted to those who betray all who trust them, perhaps because of a certain kinship. No wonder, then, that when Oswald is dying after losing a duel, he asks his murderer, Edgar, Gloucester's beloved son, to "give the letters which thou find'st about me / To Edmund [Gloucester's illegitimate and deceitful son]" – to which Edgar replies with no compassion: "I know thee well, a serviceable villain / As duteous to the vices of thy mistress / As badness would desire" (IV, vi, 275-283).

Thus, the initial confrontation between Oswald and Kent is a defining moment in which a despicable human being who refuses to recognize himself as such is clearly exposed, leading Kent, unable to control his anger at the actions of an inferior lackey and the resulting conflicts and political collapses, to go after Oswald. Later, when Kent is asked why all this anger and fighting ("Why art thou angry?" and "How fell you out?"), it is the social condition that supports his explanation: "That such a slave as this should wear a sword, / Who wears no honesty. Such smiling rogues as / these, / Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain", "No contraries hold more antipathy / Than I and such a knave" (II, ii, 74-77, 84-85). In particular, at the beginning of Scene II, when Oswald kindly greets the stranger Caius [Kent] and asks him where he can leave his horse ("Good dawning to thee, friend", and "Prithee, if thou lovest me, tell me), he is startled by the stranger's harsh reply – "I love thee not" – which leads Oswald to experience a momentary crisis of conscience, as he refuses to see himself as someone who should certainly be insulted, as he does not think he deserves such mistreatment, and asks Caius: "What dost thou know me for?", to which Kent replies with the line quoted above: "A knave, a rascall. . .".

In this collection of insults, it is clear that the word "knave", by its very repetition by Kent, indicates Oswald's origins, something he cannot deny, his lower class position, which, no matter how hard he tries to overcome or conceal it with the artifices of a courtier, will always follow him like his own shadow. The contrasting confrontation between the noble Kent and someone who seeks to be promoted is crucial here. Throughout the play, nothing in Oswald's is impressive, nothing characterizes him beyond what his superiors expect of him; and it is this lack of substance that may lead many to condemn Oswald as unworthy, unscrupulous and consequently unprincipled. The fact that Kent insults Oswald by saying that he lives on other people's scraps ["an eater of broken meats"] underscores this facet of serving the nobles, living among them, and wanting to be seen as one of them, but not being able to get rid of his undeniable inferior

status. So he is simply rude, insolent, stilted and superficial, in short, inauthentic, to paraphrase Kent's final blend of insults: beggar, chicken, pimp, and the son and heir of a mangy bitch. As a knave, Oswald arouses an uncontrollable revulsion by embodying that which is at the root of his advantage, that which no one seems to be in a position to attain, that is, his fulcrum, which is his own baseness.¹⁰

The last sentence of Remark B, alluding to the Golden Rule - "I am sure neither of them would have desired to be done by, as they did to each other" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 63) - makes it clear that Decio and Alcander, despite their almost professional pathological indifference to each other's feelings, would not want to be at the mercy of the intentions they deliberately inflict on each other. The knave's official gallery in the poem "Grumbling Hive", composed of lawyers, physicians, apothecaries, clergymen, soldiers and military officers, and government officials (MANDEVILLE, 1924, pp. 20-22), is filled with people who are experts in their fields, unknown to their eventual customers, so that their activities or what they offer may not accurately reflect the value of the exchanges: the price asked may not be the true value of the goods sold, and items described as having unique qualities may not be exactly what they were sold for. In any case, it's still not clear that Mandeville really thinks there's anything immoral about business life, or even that it's a problem. Who or what is Mandeville against in this case? Is he totally opposed to all forms of falsehood and in favor of unrestricted transparency in business dealings? Despite the firmness of such a high ethical moral code, people themselves would continue to lack confidence in it, to conceal their own thoughts, and to behave in silence as if there were no established principles of proper conduct. The question of concealment, especially of the "appetites" (or, as Mandeville calls this process, their "stifling")¹¹, is a key theme in the *Fable of the Bees*, and has fascinating psychological consequences.

¹⁰It is also worth noting that the sequence of humiliations Kent shouts at Oswald is preceded by a series of "knave" utterances by Lear: 1 - After getting Oswald's attention, Lear asks him if he knows to whom he is speaking - "Who am I, sir?" -, to which Oswald replies, "My lady's father". Lear then ridicules Oswald by repeating his sentence, stressing his submissive nature: "'My lady's father'? My lord's knave! You whoreson dog! You slave! You cur!" (I, iv, 79-81). This happened because Oswald, on Goneril's orders (I, III, 10-11), was to be sloppy and ignore Lear's command's. 2- Later, Lear addresses Kent, disguised as his faithful servant Caius, and thanks him for having "tripped" Oswald in response to his insolence: "Now, my friendly knave, I thank thee. There's earnest of thy service." (I, iv, 94-95) 3- And finally, because of the childish attitude of the Court Fool, who, seeing Caius rewarded for striking Oswald, also wants money, Lear comments, as if addressing a naughty child: "How now, my pretty knave! how dost thou?" (I, iv, 96-97)

¹¹See on this subject (MANDEVILLE, 1924, pp. 68, 69, 143, 146, 271, 309, 349).

Remark D of the same 1714 edition of the *Fable* adds an analysis of the behavior of businessmen, who are noted for their tendency to conceal their earnings. According to the passage from the poem that inspires that remark, the "Ministry" in the beehive "Knavishly" worked for the kings, receiving a low salary while they "liv'd high". This double standard motivated a public moral stance: they "boasted of their honesty" while using sophisticated language to manipulate the law to their own advantage - "Unwilling to be short or plain, / In any thing concerning Gain". Thus, those who boasted of their honesty erected a barrier to prevent others from recognizing the personal advantage they reaped from that disposition: "For there was not a Bee" that "dar'd to let them know / That pay'd for't". In essence, the public demonstration of honesty and the concealment of one's earnings become intertwined as part of the same movement. According to the explanation of the concealment process in Remark D, the main aspect that is concealed is the true value of things; in the case of commodities, this includes the "prime Cost of what they sell". In commerce, self-love and a lack of appreciation for others leads to partiality, the attitude of which makes us appreciate the "Smallness of the Seller's Advantage" as the only means of satisfaction in transactions. (MANDEVILLE, 1924, pp. 22, 23, 80, 81) Although self-gain and profit are also important, the focus is on the satisfaction that comes from the smaller gain or even loss of the other party in the transaction. Gains are satisfying to the extent that the other party gains less.

Balsemão Pires (2015, p. 42) suggests that Book III of Cicero's *De Officiis* positions Mandeville as "the opposite side of the ancient tradition", so that Cicero's consideration of "the social virtues as those which are in accord with nature" contrasts sharply with Mandeville's views. This opposition can be illustrated by the "Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" (1714), where Mandeville may have been negatively influenced by this Ciceronian assessment, relying on a scenario in which a manipulative lie perpetrated by "skilful Politicians" through "cunning Management" shaped the beginning of human society (MANDEVILLE, 1924, pp. 47, 347):

"The Chief Thing, therefore, which Lawgivers and other wise Men, that have laboured for the Establishment of Society, have endeavour'd, has been to make the People they were to govern, believe, that it was more beneficial for every Body to conquer than indulge his Appetites, and much better to mind the Publick than what seem'd his private Interest." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 42).

If this is the case, then in the end it is not only merchants, wealthy people and traders who may conceal and deceive. For *De Officiis* aforementioned, the primary aim of this work is the definition of the true connection between what is honorable (*honestum*) and useful (*utilitas*): the honorable way should always be followed to the extent that “it is in interest of society” (SCHOFIELD, 2021, p. 188). To paraphrase Cicero’s saying, whatever is honorable is also useful, and whatever is useful is honorable (*quicquid honestum esset, id utile esse censerent, nec utile quicquam, quod non honestum*) (CICERO, III, 11) – *honestum* being that which is considered respectable by those who aspire to be viewed as good people (*appellamus honestum, quod colitur ab iis, qui bonos se viros haberi volunt*) (III, 17). Cicero sought to revitalize the republican political landscape by educating the younger generation, including his son Marcus Tullius Cicero Minor, about their public duties, called *officium* (SCHOFIELD, 2021, p. 27), as the imperialist ruling class governed in their own interests.¹² His instruction aimed to counterbalance the domination of the ruling elite by advocating principles of self-government and civic responsibility. A significant element of *De Officiis* is the debate over whether the assassination of Julius Caesar (III, 19, 36, 83-85), who was labeled a tyrant (*tyrannus*), validates what is profitable in terms of utility. Cicero’s argument is that such an act, killing someone who wants to be a king in a civic body of a free people (*in liberis civitatibus regnandi existunt cupiditates*), is not only advantageous but also morally honorable because it contributes to the common good.

As a general principle of nature (*lege naturae*), it goes against the individual’s natural inclination of each person to seek advantage by causing harm to others; actions that seem beneficial at first, but violate honesty, undermine community life. Moreover, when self-interest masquerades as wisdom and gains at the expense of others, it becomes unreasonable and morally wrong, a malicious deception (*dolus malus*). It is a deceitful and dishonorable act, especially in the case of a tyranny, which is considered the most immoral act of its kind (*turpissimum est*) because it erodes the community spirit and undermines social structures, leading to their collapse: "There is nothing so contrary to nature as immorality" (*nihil est tam contra naturam quam turpitude*) (35); "reason

¹²For Schofield (2021, p. 19), despite its dialogic format, *On Duties* can be seen as an extended Cicero’s *epistola* to his son, which was a common form of education at the time. I would also point out that my reading is not a detailed analysis of the individual participants in the dialogue, who complement rather than conflict with each other, but a summary of the third book of Cicero’s work in terms of the problem of Mandeville’s knave issue. Although Mandeville refers explicitly to Cicero in one passage (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 333), there is insufficient evidence to determine whether Cicero’s writings on the morality of the trader influenced Mandeville. My focus is simply to highlight some significant asymmetries between the two authors.

demands that nothing be done with deceit, fraud, or malice" (*Ratio ergo hoc postulat, ne quid insidiose, ne quid simulate, ne quid fallaciter*) (68). Nature may permit one to prefer oneself to others in the acquisition of goods, but it is unacceptable to increase one's possessions by taking from others (23). Cicero's criticism of selfish behavior that harms others and leads to the breakdown of social bonds is accompanied by the assertion that a common purpose (*Ergo unum debet esse omnibus propositum*) (26) is essential to ensure that individual and common good are aligned. Honesty is the means of this end.

Dishonest individuals (*hominum non proborum*) (36) can take advantage of their neighbor's lack of knowledge for personal gain through what Walter Miller translates as "knavery that wears the mask of wisdom" (*in malitia simulatio intelligentiae*) (72). Their goal is to prioritize and acquire what is beneficial, while distinguishing it from what is honorable, and so they see this as the "right" course of action (*Est istuc quidem honestum, verum hoc expedit*) (75), leading to a disastrous outcome for life (*pernicies vitae*). Thus, by living without disclosing their wrongful intentions, *non proborum* individuals are free to engage in unjust actions, profiting from the ignorance of others and avoiding punishment and detection (*impunitate et ignoratione*) (72).

Perhaps the most important contrast between Cicero and Mandeville, highlighted by Mandeville's Remark B case of the sugar shipment from Barbados, concerns the idea of good faith (*fides*)¹³ or fair dealing – *quae salva fide facere possit* (44) – which encompasses the truthfulness and veracity of one's statements and the building of confidence (*constantia*) (23) in the information provided by another party throughout a transaction, without deception or ulterior motives. Since good businessmen conduct their affairs with the utmost honesty, it is a duty to be transparent and without fraud – hence the formula "*UT INTER BONOS BENE AGIER OPORTET ET SINE FRAUDATIONE!*" (70). Cicero illustrates this point with the story of an honorable man who sends a shipment of wheat from Alexandria to Rhodes, where the population is suffering from food shortages. When this man discovers that other merchants are also loading wheat for Rhodes, the question is whether he should sell at a higher price and conceal the information about the other ships, or tell the Rhodesians the truth

¹³As Schofield (2021, p. 158) notes, in the political lexicon of the Roman Republic "*fides* – trust – [is] the prime ingredient in the glue that held together all key Roman social and political relationships: as for example between patron and client, Rome and her allies (...), and friendship between individuals and peoples alike". In Book I, Cicero examines the etymology of *fides*, which comes from *fiat* (let it be done), meaning that being faithful means doing what is promised and expressing an individual's commitment to do so (I, 23).

(49-50). The answer is simple: if a man considers his actions dishonorable and acknowledges that he has acted against the public interest, he will not conceal this from the Rhodesians. Therefore, to ensure a good transaction, complete transparency is required, so that the buyer knows what the seller already knew. The honorable man who wants to make the common good his own should refrain from selling wheat at a higher price – in fact, if he has a larger stock, the honorable seller would even sell it for less than other merchants (51). The same dilemma applies to the sale of a house that is unfit for habitation because it lacks adequate ventilation: should the seller conceal this information or include the defect in the house advertisement “selling a noxious house” (*domum pestilentem vendo*) (55)? Hiding information, according to Cicero, goes beyond remaining silent and leaving the other party free to buy as he pleases. Deliberately withholding important information for personal gain at the expense of others is tantamount to “leading someone astray”: *scientem in errorem alterum inducer* (55). One must ask what kind of person would choose silence and engage in deceptive behavior (*dolus malus*).

Certainly not open, simple, candid, just, honest men, but rather shifty, obscure, astute, deceitful, malicious, cunning, crafty, sly (*Certe non aperti, non simplicis, non ingenui, non iusti, non viri boni, versuti potius, obscuri, astuti, fallacis, malitiosi, callidi, veteratoris, vafri*) (57).

Both simulations and concealment must be prohibited in order to avoid transactions where not all the facts were known: the seller must not invent a false buyer, and the buyer must not fraudulently bring in someone to make a counteroffer. Regardless of innocence or lack of knowledge, no one should pay more than the appraised value (61-63). And even if the custom of a society says that it is not dishonorable to conceal, the custom itself is corrupt, and the question is not whether honor exists, but whether one lives in a society that tolerates that corruption (70).

It may be argued that the complexity of ulterior motives in Mandevillian human interactions challenges the very idea of a virtuous person who does not deceive for personal gain. Despite any appearance of anachronism, the transcriptions of passages of Book III De Officiis are in keeping with the Mandevillian spirit: in dealing with the slave trade, Cicero emphasizes the importance of transparency and strictly forbids sellers from attempting to deceive (*sed etiam in mancipiorum venditione venditoris fraus omnis excluditur*) (71, see also 91).

For the transaction to be fair, the seller can only make a good deal if he clearly reveals the slave's health and criminal history to the buyer.

In fact, according to Myles Lavan, long-standing Roman commercial jurisprudence dictated that sellers participating in the slave trade of the time had to provide reliable, higher quality products. For example, there was a preference for newly enslaved individuals because they were more adaptable and trainable for their assigned tasks than those who had already served other masters. In short, these "legal norms (...) made the seller liable for latent defects" with the slaves they sold. Imperfections such as "diseases or defects (*quid morbi uitiiue*), [if he or she] was a fugitive (*fugitiuus*) or a vagrant (*erro*), or implied noxal liability (the owner's liability to third parties for a slave's past act)" were to be disclosed. Otherwise, the buyer could exercise *redhibition* and return the slave for a full refund of the original purchase price (LAVAN, 2021, pp. 194, 179, 186-187).

But in a society that viewed human beings as possessions and commodities, these measures to protect buyers unaware of the potential vulnerability of their purchases also served the interests of the ruling class. What was designed to prevent the fraudulent behavior of slave traders, who were known to trade in slaves considered "more difficult or less productive" (p. 182), was at the same time a way to satisfy the slave-owning class's demand that human property be sold on the basis of qualities such as "obedience, industry, and initiative," which were highly valued even if not directly explicit. In this way, owners took the opportunity to get rid of unmanageable slaves, an indispensable occasion in an economic context in which the large wealthy centers demanded a growing supply of slaves to work in agriculture and to expand the market in general (pp. 185-188).

As the main group of slave owners, the ruling elites endorsed the Edict of the Aediles to prevent fraudulent behavior while distancing themselves from the morally reprehensible act of deceptively fixing the price of unmanageable slaves. In fact, "slave traders" acted as intermediaries between buyers and sellers, with the main purpose of selling unproductive slaves according to the owners' wishes, and it is assumed that slave traders were labeled with the stigma of falsifying the quality of the product through "sharp practices" (p. 184).

The law protected uninformed buyers, allowing them to acquire valuable slaves while disposing of less desirable slaves with "vices of character" (*uitiia*

animi) that went unnoticed or were difficult to prove for restitution purposes (p. 189). Throughout history, traditional moral principles have supported honesty as a human virtue for the sake of social harmony, establishing protective laws with a perspective that prioritizes honor as the ultimate human goal. This legal practice, implemented by the political elite of Cicero's time, seems to have deliberately omitted the fact that, in order to such honorable people to exist, there must also be those who, as a morally inferior world, made up of deceitful people, have favored such highly esteemed virtue. (pp. 179, 180, 184, see notes 11 and 14).

There is no instance of Alcander and Decio calling each other "knave". The scene described in Mandeville's Remark B is a mere description of facts and thoughts, without any passage leading to accusation, reproach, or insult. The demonstration of knavery is almost imperceptible in the tender way in which the characters relate to each other in the countryside, away from the bustle of London. The isolation and tranquility of the setting allows for the display of subtle behavior. The characters mask their self-interest with polite behavior, both striving not to be deceived while not hesitating to deceive the other for personal gain. Knavery seems to have become more commonplace. The term evolved from referring to a young servant, to characterizing someone of questionable moral character, to becoming a vulgar word to describe dishonest individuals whom honorable people would avoid in order to protect their reputations and avoid being tricked. Similar to non-standard language, the meaning of "knave" has become less pronounced in everyday usage, and is no longer perceived as something inferior, base, or dishonorable, but rather admired in certain circumstances, favoring unprincipled individuals regardless of their actual character. As a result, this once offensive term became a common expression reflecting the social standards of the time (see HELLER-ROAZEN, 2013).

But while less condemned, Mandeville still disapproved of this behavior because it implied success at the expense of other people's ignorance through greater skill in deception. Moreover, the term has come to encompass a wide range of social categories and, as an insult, no longer had the power to humiliate and reprimand those who engaged in cheating. In other words, the moral judgments that could be ascribed to particular groups became more tempered, less abhorrent, even though the "grave Industrious" were just as knavish as those

who sold the very things they sold on the street:

The very Stuff, which in the Street
They sold for Dirt t'enrich the Ground,
Was often by the Buyers found
Sophisticated with a quarter
Of good-for-nothing Stones and Mortar;
(MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 23)

As a result of this moral transition, a knave could act without taking offense or resenting the ostracism to which he would once have been subjected; and questionable business transactions with unclear details became part of the public activities in which a knave could feel free to operate. The way in which Mandeville used the term, though it rarely appears in his works, illuminates the ambiguity of this human social type: society can benefit from unrestrained individual behavior that prioritizes wealth and pleasure, even if these actions are - or once were - morally unacceptable. Despite its limited use, post-Mandeville writers may have grappled with the implications of this concept in light of the new ethical view that was emerging. From this point on, these previously negative traits were no longer limited to individuals with deceptive behavior, nor were they specific to market traders, as stated in the *Fable* 1714 index ("No Traders strictly honest"). The primary principle in the conception of a social order is that of self-interest.

Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. (HUME, 1987, p. 42)¹⁴

Magnanimity, generosity, and justice, command so high a degree of admiration, that we desire to see them crowned with wealth, and power,

¹⁴Hume's excerpt is similar to a passage from Mandeville's *Free Thoughts* (1720): "That is the best Constitution which provides against the worst Contingencies, that is armed against Knavery, Treachery, Deceit, and all the wicked Wiles of humane Cunning, and preserves itself firm and remains unshaken, though most Men should prove Knaves." (MANDEVILLE, 2001, p. 167). Pierre Force (2003, pp. 214-215) points out a telling feature of Hume's essay: although it deals with a system of government that presupposes self-interest as the primary human motivation, it does not imply that human beings are inherently selfish, and thus that we are knaves by nature. It is not a statement about selfishness or altruism in human nature; Hume assumes a political economy in which human interaction is already part of a framework of self-interested commercial exchange.

and honours of every kind, the natural consequences of prudence, industry, and application; qualities with which those virtues are not inseparably connected. Fraud, falsehood, brutality, and violence, on the other hand, excite in every human breast such scorn and abhorrence, that our indignation rouses to see them possess those advantages which they may in some sense be said to have merited, by the diligence and industry with which they are sometimes attended. The industrious knave cultivates the soil; the indolent good man leaves it uncultivated. Who ought to reap the harvest? who starve, and who live in plenty? The natural course of things decides it in favour of the knave: the natural sentiments of mankind in favour of the man of virtue. (SMITH, 2002, p. 195).

In spite of all the moral worth which may be declared, defended, and accepted in virtuous action, industrious men may pursue a variety of ends different from those which honest men would expect to realize as undeniably more worthy. And if ever there was a reconciliation between the supreme good and a moral demand, now perseverance in work is definitely enough to justify the success achieved in this world of exchange and negotiation, regardless of the "natural sentiments of mankind".

As with the limited use of the term "knave," Mandeville rarely refers to the typical behavior of bees throughout the *Fable of the Bees*, as noted by William Farrell (1985, p. 511). But at the end of "The Grumbling Hive", the bees, shaken by Jove's intervention - "He'd rid / The bawling Hive of Fraud; and did / The very Moment it departs, / And Honesty fills all their Hearts" -, abandon their luxuries and, after a period of economic decline, return in some sense to their natural state, taking shelter in a "hollow Tree", as real bees do (MANDEVILLE, 1924, pp. 27, 35). In fact, they do this to "avoid Extravagance", that is, as conscious and henceforth virtuous beings. Farrel argues that the rejection of the long-standing comparison between the ordered society of bees and human communal institutions is the climax of Mandeville's "exorcism" - "a comic assault on the literary tradition that preserves the bee analogy" (p. 523) - which aimed to show that there was nothing more to be learned from the "ethical examples" involving bee behavior as a moral paradigm. The main characteristic of the hive, which is to be together and thus to inspire virtue for the common good, is considered "rather old-fashioned" (p. 520) and gives way

to the private sphere as a whole, leading to Mandeville's cynical praise of the "quality of his grumbling hive" (p. 518). As a result, the swarm of bees that flies into the hollow tree is no longer the exemplary hive. Instead, according to Farrell, it is a naturalistic colony in the Hobbesian sense, forced by its weakness to flee to avoid destruction by its rivals. Thus the surviving bees are now defeated by the "new-fashioned" morality, which has nothing to do with honest people (p. 527). As the final lines of "The Grumbling Hive" state,

Bare Virtue can't make Nations live,
In Splendor; they, that would revive
A Golden Age, must be as free,
For Acorns, as for Honesty.
(MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 37)

The poem concludes with the word "honesty", which is impressive given the many tricks and deceptions employed in the bee's dissolute life. Farrell's comments on this conclusion might be considered witty: "Readers are placed in a position where they must take acorns with their honesty – or dishonesty with their cashews" (FARREL, 1985, p. 523; cf. HARTH, 1969, p. 330). But Mandeville's equation between acorns and honesty is not as clearly linked, as one might think, to the Golden Age, which is often portrayed as an era of innocence and tranquility, as opposed to the extravagance associated with a more sophisticated life. Materially, it is imagined as a time when abundant supplies were rustic, crude and seasonal, and people lived simply. Yet it is unclear why one should expect to be blessed with acorns in the Golden Age if one relies solely on "Bare Virtue". Mandeville, I think, is alluding to Cervantes' *Valorous and Witty-Knight-Errant, Don-Quixote, of the Mancha* (1605). There is a passage in *Don Quixote* that sheds light on the subject: Mandeville's poem questions Cervantes' portrayal of the Golden Age as an idyllic paradise of prosperity, leisure, and freedom from the curse of hard work, implying that to dream of a just world of honest people, one must include acorns in that dream. In Cervantes' story, Don Quixote and Sancho were greeted by a group of *cabreros* (goatherds) who served them meat and wine on a sheepskin table set on the grass. For dessert, they served *bellotas avellanadas* ("sheld Akorns") and *medio queso* ("half a Cheese") that was harder than if it had been made from *argamassa* ("rough-casting"). After the meal, Don Quixote, lying on the grass, made a speech while holding a handful of acorns (this is an excerpt from Thomas Shelton's 1652 translation of *Don Quixote*):

Happy time [*Dichosa edad*], and fortunate ages were those, whereon our Ancestors bestowed the title of Golden, not because Gould (so much prized in this our iron age) was gotten in that happy time without any labours, but because those which lived in that time, knew not these two words *Thine* and *Mine*: in that holy Age all things were in common. No man needed for his ordinary sustenance to doe ought else then lift up his hand, and take it from the strong Oake, which did liberally invite them to gather his sweet and savory fruit. (...) *In the clifts of Rocks and hollow Trees did the carefull and discreet Bees erect their Commonwealth*, offering to every hand without interest, the fertile cropp of their sweetest travails (CERVANTES, I, XI, pp. 18-19, emphasis added).¹⁵

There is no notion of personal gain or reward for labor in the sequence of the excerpt: in the Golden Age, goods such as acorns, honey, and wool were available without the use of agriculture. Don Quixote notes, almost in reverie, that the Earth, called “our first mother”, provided for human needs without human intervention:

as yet the ploughshare presumed not with rude encounter to open and search the compassionate bowels of our first mother; for shee without compulsion offered up, through all the parts of her fertile and spacious bosome, all that which might satisfie, sustein, and delight those children which it then had (ID.)

For this reason, Mandeville’s “Grumbling Hive” seems to deliberately parody¹⁶ and distort *Don Quixote* in its emphasis on human intervention in the progress and refinement of a nation. On the one hand, he admits, as Cervantes

¹⁵Kleiman-Lafon & Wolfe (2021) use this passage from Cervantes to illustrate the connection between the natural organization of bees and the modern debates about republican versus monarchical government; they do not aim to evaluate the historiography that may have influenced Mandeville’s satirical vision of a ruined, virtuous hive. In summary, they cite the original text – “*En las quiebras de las peñas y en lo hueco de los árboles*” (p. 269) – and emphasize the resonance between Cervantes’ bee community and the republican political framework. The ultimate fate of Mandeville’s bees, after they have ceased to be knaves and become virtuous, remains outside their scope. Be that as it may, the very likely remote source of this “prelapsarian state”, as the translator puts it, is in Hesiod (2018, pp. 67, 45): “And Zeus, far-seer, keeps cruel War at bay./ Famine and folly pass the righteous by:/ The just feast on what well-worked fields supply./ The earth abounds for them: the mountain oak/ Is acorn-crowned, and bee-filled, for such folk./ Their sheep are heavy-laden with wool”).

¹⁶On the resource of satirical parody as “attempts to give form to shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence”, see (FRYE, 1957, p. 233). See also (HIGHET, 1962, p. 235); (ALFANO, 2015).

does, that in a simple way of life

Kind Nature, free from Gard'ners Force,
Allows all Fruits in her own Course

But on the other hand, the MORAL of the poem asks,

Do we not owe the Growth of Wine
to the dry shabby crooked Vine?
Which, while its Shoots neglected stood,
Chok'd other Plants, and ran to Wood;
But blest us with its noble Fruit,
As soon as it was ty'd and cut
(MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, pp. 34, 36).

Finally, Cervantes' excerpt describes a vision of the Golden Age in a fable-like form, presenting characters in an unadulterated way, that is, without any human vices:

“Fraud, Deceit, or Mallice had not then medled themselves with Plainnesse and Truth: Justice was then in her proper terms, Favour daring not to trouble or confound her, or the respect of profit, which doe now Prosecute, Blemish, and disturb her so much” (CERVANTES, I, XI, pp. 18-19).

This may have contributed to Mandeville's characteristic construction of vices and virtues always working together:

“And Virtue, who from Politicks Had learn'd a thousand cunning Tricks,
Was, by their happy Influence, Made Friends with Vice” (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 24).

Mandeville's position is difficult to grasp because of the combination of opposing elements. In essence, he conveys a serious message through humor, generally implying that self-control is hopeless because human behavior is inherently motivated by an urge that defies regulation for a more organized social life, so that negative moral attitudes are often disguised as positive traits to make them more palatable. His focus on a less visible internalized social mechanism that actually allows individuals to prioritize their own interests while seemingly practicing "Self-denial" produces a tragicomic effect due to the fallacy of the human demand for truthfulness, honesty, and all the pomp and circumstance that accompanies this high aspiration. By using public spirit as a smokescreen, commerce enables individuals to overvalue their products and charge prices higher than they are worth. Thus, Mandeville denounces the hypocrisy behind these everyday practices, although he does not condemn the deliberate concealment of the true content of what is being sold, or bemoan the loss of good human nature of the Golden Age. Although he himself says that his opinions are in accord with "the strictest Morality", his critique is not that of a hard-line moralist who might hope to implement moral principles into business practice (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 229). And perhaps with good reason, because it is hopeless, he can at least make fun of it.

In Remark T (1723), Mandeville justifies his *Fable of the Bees* by restating the verses that explain how the desire to live luxuriously led married women to steal from the state: "to live great, / Had made her Husband rob the State". Indirectly discussing the issue of "the Whores", the remark may have served as an outline for *A Modest Defense of Publick Stews* (1724)¹⁷. Frye's famous definition of satire as "militant irony" is apt here: the satirist chooses "absurdities" to expose a "moral act" (1957, pp. 223-224). If this is indeed the case, then Mandeville's combination of humor and seriousness in this remark was taken to its ultimate consequences in terms of whom he intended to attack.

In response to the claim that all women of ill repute - "every Strumpet" - should be banished, Mandeville argues that they make a small contribution to

¹⁷One should not forget the pioneering public policy context for regulating and guiding social behavior in London, which was undergoing intense demographic change. As Mauro Simonazzi notes, with the creation of the Society for the Reform of Manners at the end of the seventeenth century, an association that "fought to close brothels, moralize fellow citizens, and protect against drunkenness, blasphemy, and disrespect for the sanctity of festivals", more than 100,000 lawsuits were filed between 1691 and 1738 against acts considered contrary to the morals of the time. In particular, in 1722, the year preceding both the publication of Remark T and the *Modest Defense*, 7251 such "actions" were filed. See (SIMONAZZI, 2011, pp. 241-243). In fact, the defense of prostitution as a reason for Mandeville to satirize the idealizations of moral reform in contrast to the precarious state in which prostitutes lived in London had already been considered in his Remark H (1714).

commerce, which ultimately benefits the work of “peaceable Drudges”. By this logic, he targets women “who enjoy the happy State of Matrimony”, who cannot resist the temptation to shop, and who, in order to satisfy their desires, end up resorting to deception, “pinching their Families, Marketting, and other ways of cheating and pilfering from their Husbands”, especially the young and beautiful who have no “scruple to employ the most tender Minutes of Wedlock to promote a sordid Interest” (p. 227). According to Mandeville, if they behaved “as a sober wise Man could wish them” to do (p. 225), the situation would be worse and more negative for the state. Therefore, instead of carefully considering actions before undertaking them as a general rule of prudence, it is important to the common good to simply do what they want-“to gratify the fickleness and luxury of women” (p. 226).

The men who are fooled by these tricks, whether because they only seek “to indulge and satisfy their low Amours” (p. 225), because they have “a real Passion for their Wives,” or even because they “take a Delight in a handsome Wife, as a Coxcomb does in a fine Horse”, are what Mandeville calls “common Rogues” or “lesser Villains” (p. 227), since there are also the “great ones” who belong to the “highest Ranks”. All of these types of men try to anticipate their wives’ consumer desires and control their spending, which basically means satisfying some of their wives’ desires in advance without having to satisfy all of their “Extravagances”. However, despite husbands’ efforts to please their wives without ruining themselves financially, they manage to escape control by exploiting their husbands’ masked denials, often obtained through the manipulative use of sex. Thus, a woman with a good reputation is “worse than a Whore”. The husband’s refusal, disguised as a kind gesture, turned into a transactional exchange (reminiscent of the earlier bargain between Alcander and Decio, who “both took Advantage of their intelligence”), whose final response from him may have been a “yes” in the form of an inevitable male orgasm:

[She] first excites to Passion and invites to Joys with seeming Ardour, then racks our Fondness for no other purpose than to extort a Gift, while full of Guile in Counterfeited Transports she watches for the Moment when Men can least deny. (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 228)

Remark T thereby reiterates Mandeville’s thesis in the *Fable of the Bees* by emphasizing the manipulative behavior of women - their “hateful Qualities” - who feign interest in others in order to receive gifts:

"a considerable Portion of what the Prosperity of *London* and Trade, and consequently the Honour, Strength, Safety, and all the worldly Interest of the Nation consist in, depends entirely on the Deceit and vile Stratagems of Women" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 228).

Although this last statement allows Mandeville to immediately defend the need to encourage virtue and discourage vice, and to admit that virtuous people - including women - can exist "in a rich and powerful kingdom" (p. 229), the focus here is on the wealth of a nation. Put simply, can wealth be achieved virtuously? As he admitted, people in a rich nation can be virtuous, but they may find it difficult to justify how they became rich and virtuous at the same time. This is why Mandeville's purpose in the *Fable* was to make man "better known to himself" (p. 232), not by hiding but by making explicit the "Ugly Nakedness" (p. 234-5) that is "the origin and power of those passions" on which men's minds are "wholly bent". It doesn't matter whether this justification leads us to believe that it may be socially pointless to pursue virtue, or that becoming immoral is a preferable option (as, for example, being "Quarrelsome or Covetous" warrants the large number of vacancies for lawyers). Indeed, if we take Mandeville's proposal seriously and consider it as a moral project to be implemented, we will see a comically nonsensical sense of reality mixed with an abundance of very distant implementations of it, as absurd as the good man's plan to banish all the prostitutes from London in the face of divine grace that will bring prosperous heavenly returns. Mandeville's proposal is not viable because the absence of moral basis is the effect of his serious-comic textual elaboration. Although his proposal claims to promote a change in the nation by encouraging "Temperate, Honest, and Sincere" manners, it comes across as a disjointed mixture of religious practices and worldly measures with arguably bizarre consequences:

break down the Printing-Presses, melt the Founds, and burn all the Books in the Island, except those at the Universities, where they remain unmolested, and suffer no Volume in private Hands but a Bible: Knock down Foreign Trade, prohibit all Commerce with Strangers, and permit no Ships to go to Sea, that ever will return, beyond Fisher-boats. Restore to the Clergy, the King and the Barons their Ancient Privileges, Prerogatives and Possessions (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 231)

As the MORAL of the “Grumbling Hive” states, “Bare Virtue can’t make Nations live”. Other factors come into play. The attenuation or even absence of moral judgment in trading means that traders are free from guilt or complicity except when they lose. Although fraud and other deceptions are still unacceptable, they are now cloaked in the Mandevillean figures of grave industrious knaves, which allows individuals to put their own desires and profits ahead of the good of the nation without feeling morally reprehensible. Individuals no longer need to justify their actions by saying “I was only joking” to cover up their wrongdoing. Whether Mandeville’s goal was to prove the radical separations or to reveal the persistence of intrinsic moral traits in commercial activities, it is wise to consider additional factors, such as the so-called human vices. And so, in the open-ended persistence of a fundamental antagonism without a normative middle ground for his readers (PALMERI, 2006, p. 66), instead of idealized and fanciful philosophical prescriptions, Mandeville calls for dealing with the “vast Swarms of Cheating Knaves” (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 232), since it is not possible to eradicate them, even if the wording of this last passage says otherwise.

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