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## DISTANCE, CONTIGUITY AND IMAGINATION IN MANDEVILLE'S ACCOUNT OF PASSIONS

**ABSTRACT.** More than a matter confined to Mandevillean thought, the discourse on the relationship between imagination and sensibility is a significant theoretical framework of eighteenth-century philosophical thought. Sensibility and imagination appear in Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* as anti-theoretical concepts, because they are fully articulated according to a natural and deterministic criterion of the expression of passions. Such a materialist understanding of the passions places a premium upon the proximity of stimulus and accordingly problematizes the responsive role of imagination. I intend to show in this paper that the primacy of expression takes place, at first instance, regarding the imagination, which, as we can detect in all Mandeville's oeuvre, is well exemplified by the mimetic function that art itself earns.

**KEYWORDS.** Art, Contiguity-Remoteness, Expression, Imagination, Passions.

### 1. *Introduction*

Studies of Bernard Mandeville's thought have focused for the most part on the relationship between his concern with the virtue-vice binary and his conceptions of society and social life. Moral philosophy and political philosophy appear here in perfect alliance, and can prompt, within the wider context of the enlightenment, innumerable comparisons between the author of *The Fable of the Bees* and those who have, explicitly or implicitly, criticized him with or without vehemence<sup>1</sup>. Although the satirical critique of commercial society does in fact lead Mandeville to present passions under the aegis of vices and virtues – because it was in moral thought that they were widely implicated and analyzed – this argument rests ab initio

on several postulates about the natural dispositions of human beings, whose theoretical features represent a significant part of the legacy of eighteenth-century philosophy.

In modern thought, the philosophical rediscovery of nature as a source of human socialization and individuation requires a new emphasis on the concept of expression. Inspired by the increasing autonomy of art and its main forms, modern thought was based on the capacity of expression to undertake several inquiries in fields little explored by science, and, on the other hand, like it is quite visible in Mandeville's oeuvre, to conjecture about its origins. The idea of nature advanced by Mandeville is anchored in the expression of emotions. Both the nature of humans and the nature of animals are presented through their expressive anatomy, and, as far as the critique of commercial society is concerned, such expressiveness serves simultaneously to display the overlapping of the artificial dimensions of social life over the natural disposition of human beings. As a result, the Mandevillean anatomy of bodies – whether natural, political, artistic, etc. – always presents itself as an anatomy anchored in emotion expression.

In a concomitant way, the inquiry into the expression of emotions brings with it, in this philosophical context another issue of epistemological importance, which was also at the heart of the speculative debate on human faculties the subject of imagination. As I will attempt to argue, the main assumptions of Mandevillean thought on the passions are largely based on an antithetical and paradoxical relationship between expression and imagination; a relation of irreconcilability that brings into view two opposing cultural patterns, namely morality and commerce. It is from the premiss of an unresolvable tension between morality and commerce that Mandeville sets up his critical discourse on society – a discourse that points out how their disparity underlies an overtly ethical system. Yet to make the whole ethic would be fully out of phase with the flourishing of commercial society. Imagination thus emerges as a key concept to understand the rigid, often criticized division between virtues and vices, since it is used by Mandeville as a pivotal criterion for distinguishing the proper features of each passion.

## 2. Appearance and symptom

In what is considered to be his truly scientific work, *The Treatise of hypochondriack and hysterick Passions* (1711), Mandeville presents several forms of treatment of hypochondriacal and hysterical disorders, nevertheless reiterating that, in fact, these disorders are not only centered in the psychophysiological sphere of patients, but they also have social foundations and causes. The therapeutic methods proposed by Mandeville are based on a necessary connection between psychic states and physiological symptoms, which implies, *ab initio*, the theoretical assumption of the mind-body unity and the palpable evidence of it in the expression of emotions. It is up to the physician, through the therapeutic relationship with the patient, to identify the pathological symptoms and proceed to their diagnosis. From this medical view of human passions we can infer a general tendency that underlies the whole satirical and critical path followed by Mandeville, namely the path that leads him to contrast the individual passions with the social symptoms of them.

According to Horatio – the main interlocutor of Cleomenes in Mandeville's Dialogues – nature is described by Cleomenes in a way that relies on rhetorical images that do not always correspond to a naturalistic understanding – which, for Horatio, is entirely sacred – of the life of humans. «You are a good Painter», Horatio remarks, confronting Cleomenes immediately with the following question: «But, after all, why would you judge of a Creature's Nature from what it was perverted to, rather than from its Original, the State it was first produced in?» (Mandeville 1988b, 234). Horatio's affirmation and question are, moreover, the focal point of the dynamics of expression in Mandeville's oeuvre. In the Mandevillean lexicon there are two main ways through which the expression is conceived: artificial signs allude essentially to the *appearances*, and natural signs come out named as *symptoms*. The latter are the natural expression of human passions, because they are connected in a consistent and intelligible manner to specific mental states, neither censored nor eliminated by the human beings' social life. In this regard, and as is well demonstrated by the author in an excerpt of *The Fable of the Bees*, «when a Man enjoys himself, Laughs and Sings, and in his Gesture and Behaviour shews me all the tokens of Content and Satisfaction, I pronounce him happy, and have nothing to do with his Wit or Capacity» (Mandeville 1988a, 314). Interestingly,

the emphasis here is placed on the immediate somatic visibility of emotions and their alleged power to awaken in the observer a corresponding psychological effect, albeit without his interference and any sort of judgment.

Indeed, the expression of emotions – whether in men or animals – has, for Mandeville, a symptomatic character, since it lays bare the true constitution of beings, that is, their passions. As it appears in several popular proverbial versions, the dictum *The eyes are the windows of the soul* also serves Mandeville to refer to either the object or the method of human nature analysis. If the object are the passions, investigated from the emotions that require and arouse, the method is, in turn, the expressive anatomism, or, if you like, lives up to the epistemic heritage of the so-called physiognomic method. Mandeville suggests that by studying emotions, as they are expressed, we can understand the underlying passions. This theoretical bond enables the author to undertake a range of considerations about the idiosyncrasies of human beings, as well as show the changes that social life provokes in their behavior. The relevance that the idea of symptom acquires – which, in particular, is a perfect semiotic alliance between medicine and satire<sup>2</sup> – echoes the Mandevillean thesis that, in general, social passions are always composed of certain basic emotions, the individual psychophysiological nature of which is sometimes completely antagonistic. Now the abstraction and identification of such basic emotions that embrace social passions presuppose a sort of inductive inferential reasoning in close connection with their expressive display. Therefore, conceived as physical sign, the symptom appears as the semiotic operator that best allows such inductive process.

In this sense, the signs that appear, in contrast to real symptoms, have a full importance to the objective understanding of human expressiveness. Since «every where less in Reality, than there is in Appearance» (Mandeville 1988b, 348), a broad study of passions should always embrace the observation of their superficial manifestations. According to Mandeville, it is there, in that sphere settled mainly by vice, that human nature is more clearly exposed. Luxury becomes thus an excessive expression of passions and, for any anatomist of society, displays the deeper nature of human beings, namely the self-love and self-liking that pervade each individual's interests.

Also within this issue of the over-expression of passions, we find, in Mandeville, another criterion – the criterion of visibility. Concealment and display play an important role in his account of the emotional traits of psychic life; symptoms of passion, sometimes a cause of embarrassment, are at other times put on display. Such is the case, for example, in the distinction he draws between shame and vanity. The first, due to the psycho-somatic effects it arouses, occasions the subject to wish for invisibility; while the second, because governed by pride, leads to the opposite desire – the individual, sums up Mandeville, «would be glad that all the World could take notice of him» (Mandeville 1988a, 68).

### 3. *Contiguity and remoteness*

Mandeville's claim as to the transparency of the passions' expression, as well as his attempt to draw a picture of nature according to its peculiarities, reveals, above all, a theoretical primacy of expression over imagination. This point is rather important, if we consider, for example, the fact that Charles Darwin, about a century and a half later, will justify his doctrine on the expression of emotions as the right method of determining the true nature of beings without the direct influence of imagination. Like Mandeville, Darwin believed that natural signs are not determined by human imagination – and this both in terms of the observed or of the observer. Albeit he acknowledges the fact that the faculty of imagination generate in us a feeling of sympathy, which is important for our social life, but in Darwin's view our imagination has a deceptive character, so that the study of the expression of the passions should look at the animal kingdom, since, «in observing animals, we are not so likely to be biased by our imagination; and we may feel safe that their expressions are not conventional» (Darwin 1872, 17).

Mandeville long anticipates this physiological account of the expression of emotions; and his contribution was pivotal to the rebirth of sensibility in eighteenth-century philosophy as a core human faculty, especially in shaping sociability and defining its features. The nature of passions depends, in the first instance, on the degree of proximity to the sensible object that may arouse them. So as Mandeville has it: watch the pained expression of someone who is phys-

ically near us, and we will experience stronger and more lasting compassionate feelings. As may be seen from the following quotation, Mandeville believes that emotions are revealed by their direct expression, even in those circumstances where closeness is figurative rather than literal, as in the relationship between parents and children:

Our Love to what never was within the reach of our Senses is but poor and inconsiderable, and therefore Women have no Natural Love to what they bear; their Affection begins after the Birth: what they feel before is the result of Reason, Education, and the Thoughts of Duty. Even when Children first are Born the Mother's Love is but weak, and increases with the Sensibility of the Child, and grows up to a prodigious height, when by signs it begins to express his Sorrows and Joys, makes his Wants known, and discovers his Love to novelty and the multiplicity of his Desires (Mandeville 1988a, 76)<sup>3</sup>.

We can find other words of the author that encapsulate this sensual (indeed gravitational) understanding of emotive interaction. «The nearer the Object is the more we suffer, and the more remote it is the less we are troubled with it» (Mandeville 1988a, 256) – such is Mandeville's seminal formula, which, strictly speaking, is a kind of version of the popular dictum *Out of sight, out of mind*. In order to illustrate this fact the author makes use of the violent example of public executions. He relativizes the view of the observers who behold executions, noting that distance alone renders them oblivious to the intense suffering felt by the criminals at the very moment in which they are executed; the observers, under such circumstances, are not «near enough to see the Motion of the Soul in their Eyes, observe their Fears and Agonies, and are able to read the Pangs in every Feature of the Face» (Mandeville 1988a, 256). The main concern of Mandeville is, in this particular case, to assert the importance of the body on the setting up of individual's emotional life. The sensible dimension of the object that arouses the emotions always presupposes the direct involvement of the empirical sensory materiality of the body. Hence, as the author reiterates, «when the Object does not strike, the Body does not feel it» (Mandeville 1988a, 257)<sup>4</sup>.

There is, in this last Mandevillean formulation, a bridge to the thought of Francis Hutcheson, although the latter developed his moral philosophy in a speculative field diametrically opposed to that

of Mandeville. For the Scottish author, life in society rests above all on normative principles supported by natural passions, which in turn constitute the true universal moral sense, an entity prior to all cultural influence. To this moral sense, essentially Christian in connotation, he apposes the classical virtue of *benevolence*. This disposition for the good and for the love of others appears subordinate, however, to the conditions of distance and contiguity among human beings. To illustrate the effects of contiguity on the moral life of individuals, Hutcheson alludes to the physical principles of Isaac Newton's law of gravitation. Benevolence, understood from the analogy with the force of attraction of bodies, «increases as the Distance is diminish'd, and is strongest when Bodys come to touch each other» (Hutcheson 2008, 150). But, taking into account contiguity only by analogy with physical laws, Hutcheson makes no reference to those cases in which habit and repetition cause emotional indifference to the psychic states and concerns of other human beings.

Mandeville, conversely, kept this in mind. Just as usually happens with compassionate feelings, imagination is not skilled in carrying humans to fully overcome the physical and empirical nature of such already mentioned dual materiality (that of the body and that of the object). There are, nevertheless, experiences that suggest the reverse of Mandeville's seminal formula. The passions of *pity* and *fear* tend to give a new status to the articulation of object's and body's materiality; and, in this respect, they lead Mandeville to an extension of his formula, which he expresses thus: «the more we are conversant with Objects that excite either Passion (pity and fear), the less we are disturb'd by them» (Mandeville 1988a, 258). Precisely on the opposite side of these two feelings lies, in Mandeville's descriptions, envy. True to his idea of the composition of social passions, he describes this feeling as above all «the Compound of Grief and Anger», whose intensity and violence «depend chiefly on the Nearness or Remoteness of the Objects as to Circumstances» (Mandeville 1988a, 135-136). So contiguity can also be a function of the affinity between two or more individuals. As he sneeringly observes, «If one, who is forced to walk on Foot envies a great Man for keeping a Coach and Six, it will never be with that Violence, or give him that Disturbance which it may to a Man, who keeps a Coach himself, but can only afford to drive with four Horses» (Mandeville 1988a, 136). In other words, the greater the degree of similarity, the more

the relation of contiguity will be enhanced as a provocation of the passions.

#### 4. *Remoteness and imagination*

Although contiguous relations do not by themselves guarantee a total emotional involvement of individuals, Mandeville makes the social subsistence of emotions depend on their degree of authenticity. The criticism of the hypocrisy of commercial society, always present in the main theoretical postulations and reflections of the author, leads him to conceive certain praised social passions as mere simulations, as is often the case with pity itself<sup>5</sup>. In this restricted sense, the simulation of passions implies a negative role for the imagination, since this role relies on imitation rather than the true expression of feelings. Mandeville's following formulation on pity attests to this conception:

Those who have a strong and lively Imagination, and can make Representations of things in their Minds, as they would be if they were actually before them, may work themselves up into something that resembles Compassion; but this is done by Art, and often the help of a little Enthusiasm, and is only an Imitation of Pity; the Heart feels little of it, and it is as faint as what we suffer at the acting of a Tragedy; where our Judgment leaves part of the Mind uninform'd, and to indulge a lazy Wantonness suffers it to be led into an Error, which is necessary to have a Passion rais'd, the slight Strokes of which are not unpleasant to us when the Soul is in an idle unactive Humour (Mandeville 1988a, 257)<sup>6</sup>.

The irremediable inability of the imagination to affect human passions with the same intensity as sensible experience was largely described and theorized by Thomas Hobbes. The author of *Leviathan* characterizes it as a "decaying sense", in so far as it obscures the impressions received from sense-objects, and, by extension, the greater the spatio-temporal distance relative to them, the lesser its power of evoking them (Hobbes 2010, 43). Mandeville's basic agreement with this account is implicit in his powerful critique, present throughout his oeuvre, of that conception of the passions advocated in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, where



Shaftesbury, true to his moral taste theory, equates the objects of moral discourse with the objects of perception, finding in them both an almost omnipotent existence that subsists even when they are empirically absent. Such an aesthetic analogy is described by him in the following terms:

as in the sensible kind of Objects, the Species or Images of Bodys, Colours, and Sounds, are perpetually moving before our Eyes, and acting on our Senses, even when we sleep; so in the moral and intellectual kind, the Forms and Images of Things are no less active and incumbent on the Mind, at all Seasons, and even when the real Objects themselves are absent (Shaftesbury 2001, 17).

From a strictly aesthetic point of view, it is obvious that these authors are in two diametrically opposed camps. By calling himself *anatomist of society*, Mandeville emphasizes, for this purpose, a primacy of the parts over the whole, which allows him to identify and caricature in the alleged virtues of human beings all those behavioral traits which issue from rude self-interest. In this respect, it may be said that, in general, the emphasis on the parts is an integral element of all satirical discourse, which follows from its need to constitute and differentiate its subjects. Mandeville is, in this sense, a good example of such practice, since he tends to select his subjects according to their paradoxical potential. As in the previously mentioned case of the public executions of criminals, the parts, not submitting absolutely to the whole, generate with this an insurmountable tension. Precisely the opposite is true of Shaftesbury. In his philosophical thought, the whole has an absolute ascendancy over the parts – a tendency very noticeable in the accounts he gives of painting and art in general –, and this in turn determines his conception of virtue and his unshakeable distinction between virtue and vice.

As consequence of his seminal formula («The nearer the Object is the more we suffer, and the more remote it is the less we are troubled with it»), Mandeville divides the causes of passion under the categories of *material objects* and *spiritual objects*. These objects arouse different feelings, with connected implications for both individual and social life, but, just as those things and events «that immediately strike our outward Senses act more violently upon our Passions than what is the result of Thought and the dictates of the most demonstrative Reason», so there subsists a ‘«much stronger

Bias to gain our Liking or Aversion in the first than there is in the latter» (Mandeville 1988a, 316). It is in social life, however, that the gap between material objects and spiritual objects is most conspicuous. He who speaks, for example, with good manners, using few gestures, appeals more easily to the rationality of his speech partner, thereby modifying the intensity of the immediate feelings that may arise. Basically, he allows the speech partner to apprehend his goodness by virtue of this distance achieved over the passions.

The distinction between material objects and spiritual objects serves Mandeville to show, also, the benefits that certain passions – considered, by many authors, the real distortion’s causes of virtue – contribute to life in society. The apparent failure of virtuous feelings is due firstly to the imaginary structure that sustains their referents, to the spiritual background that contains the “Self-denial” of the most basic and instinctive passions of human beings. The contrary case is given by honor. In the case of a social feeling that has a material structure based on the ego’s over-expression, Mandeville notes that the invention of honor was more beneficial to civil society than the invention of virtue.

The influence of Mandeville’s thought on eighteenth-century philosophy is sometimes difficult to assess, especially since his oeuvre was considered detrimental to society and accordingly relegated by many authors to the rank of mere burlesque. There are, therefore, few direct references to the author of *The Fable of the Bees*. But despite this, we can find some plausible evidence in some eighteenth-century philosophical writings that point to Mandeville’s relevance in awakening certain theoretical inquiries. Such is the case, for instance, with David Hume’s account on the relation between contiguity and remoteness in the shaping of human passions in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. If, on the basis of his criterion of empirical closeness, Mandeville divides objects into material and spiritual, Hume, in turn, will categorize them into two distinct epistemological classes: *contiguous objects* and *remote objects*. Thus, according to Hume,

the former, by means of their relation to ourselves, approach an impression in force and vivacity; the latter by reason of the interruption in our manner of conceiving them, appear in a weaker and more imperfect light. This is their effect on the imagination. If my reasoning be just, they must have a proportionable effect on the will and passions. Con-

tiguous objects must have an influence much superior to the distant and remote. Accordingly we find in common life, that men are principally concern'd about those objects, which are not much remov'd either in space or time, enjoying the present, and leaving what is afar off to the care of chance and fortune. Talk to a man of his condition thirty years hence, and he will not regard you. Speak of what is to happen tomorrow, and he will lend you attention (Hume 2007b, 274).

In Hume's philosophy, imagination is thought and subordinated to sensible experience, but it is the faculty par excellence that gives vivacity – the colors of life – to all others, such as memory and understanding. He recognizes in man's psychic life a structural link between passions and imagination, to the extent that there is a close causal relationship between the two that is reflected and is deeply discernible in the degree of intensity of one's feelings. Hume asserts, in this regard, that «lively passions commonly attend a lively imagination» (Hume 2007b, 273). Devoid of such liveliness are, however, according to Hume, all the *pure fictions* of the imagination, since, by themselves, they are incapable of arousing corresponding intense emotions. Thus, objects that, spatially and temporally, are contiguous, increase the vivacity and intensity of passions and imagination. As the latter is committed to the present, that is, to the conditions and possibilities of the empirical existence of human beings, the opposite tends to happen with remote objects. Their mental conception depends, above all, on Hume's terminology, on a spatio-temporal "interruption", namely:

When we reflect, therefore, on any object distant from ourselves, we are oblig'd not only to reach it at first by passing thro' all the intermediate space betwixt ourselves and the object, but also to renew our progress every moment; being every moment recall'd to the consideration of ourselves and our present situation. 'Tis easily conceiv'd, that this interruption must weaken the idea by breaking the action of the mind, and hindering the conception from being so intense and continu'd, as when we reflect on a nearer object. The fewer steps we make to arrive at the object, and the smoother the road is, this diminution of vivacity is less sensibly felt, but still may be observ'd more or less in proportion to the degrees of distance and difficulty (Hume 2007b, 274).

Such an interruption limits the degree of intensity that the object can arouse in us, in as much as the abrupt discontinuity of mental

associations – that is, the multiple advances and retreats between our empirical existence and the remote existence of the object – nurtures, in turn, the decrease of vivacity of the experience itself. Compared with spatial distance, temporal distance tends to have a more negative effect on imagination, especially when it is a retreat rather than an advance. Hume justifies this assumption by the criterion of the natural order of succession. More than that of a future object, the conception of a past object overturns the normal course of the association of ideas, since imagination is, in this case, faced with a kind of regression of its own sequentiality, which, by extension, goes to hinder a full and lively image of all the parts that constitute the object. However, as with the effects that the vestiges of antiquity awaken in us, the difficulties of conceiving an object can increase its symbolic value and arouse great veneration.

It is clear from the foregoing that Hume, unlike Mandeville, conceives passions in full articulation with the power of imagination, even in those cases where there is a spatio-temporal proximity of the object that arouses them. Two main reasons that Hume finds to justify this natural articulation are, on the one hand, the liveliness that imagination adds to passions and, on the other hand, the fact that imagination helps passions endure in time and prevents them from disappearing when their objects are no longer present (Hume 2007a, 27-29). In contrast to Mandeville, who conceives the binary contiguity-remoteness in full accord with the immediate expression of emotions, Hume essentially attributes to it a markedly epistemological philosophical meaning. Proof of this is the nature of the following example from which Hume illustrates the opposing dynamics of the perception of contiguity and the perception of distance: «The breaking of a mirror gives us more concern when at home, than the burning of a house, when abroad, and some hundred leagues distant» (Hume 2007b, 274-75)<sup>7</sup>. In other words, Mandeville applies the binary contiguity-remoteness to social behavioral relations and Hume applies it above all to the cognitive relations between a subject and an object. There is, however, in Hume a relevant exception, especially when he suggests that sympathy is dependent on the closeness of human beings to one another. Hume, like Mandeville, does not find in man an innate disposition like that of the so-called *love of mankind*. On the contrary, in general, feeling the passions of others always implies a close relationship, not distant.

As can be read in the following excerpt, sympathy, though triggered in part by the power of imagination, is conceived by Hume as being dependent on the empirical conditions, possibilities, and boundaries of sensibility:

In general, it may be affirm'd, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. 'Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind, since this concern extends itself beyond our own species (Hume 2007b, 309).

For Hume, sympathy rests, before its psychic effects, on a personal expressive behavior between two or more individuals, necessarily mediated by the empirical exteriorization of the feelings themselves. Inferring the affections of others means, consequently, entering into an interactive communicative process, thanks to which it is possible to form an image of what affects them. Adam Smith strongly discredited these Humean theses, since, for him, the true presupposition of sympathy lies in the negative fact that, «as we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected», even in those cases where someone expresses his feelings directly to us. According to Smith, this negative fact can only be converted into positive on account of the imagination's power of «conceiving what we should feel in the like situation» (Smith 1984, 9).

## 5. *Art and Nature*

*What human beings really are and not what they should be* (Mandeville 1988a, 39) is the cardinal maxim followed by Mandeville in his critique of the commercial society of his time. Once again, for the author of *The Fable of the Bees*, natural philosophy has primacy over moral philosophy. As far as art is concerned, Mandeville advocates, by extension, a radical realism, contrary, as can be seen from *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1975), to the fanciful inventions of romance, and extremely close to the aesthetic atmosphere of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*; an opera which is mentioned in the Preface to the sec-

ond part of *The Fable of the Bees*, and which proves, once more, the deep appreciation that Mandeville feels for the exacerbated expression of passions, even those commonly associated with vices. Consequently for Mandeville, art should imitate nature. Particularly the pictorial art «is an Imitation of Nature, a Copying of things which Men have every where before them» (Mandeville 1988a, 326). Painting puts objects in front of our eyes, makes them closer and, following the Mandeville's thesis on the contiguity effects of the object that arouses emotions, generates intense feelings. The intensity of pictorial art depends, above all, on the proximity of the represented subjects.

Now these formulations are deeply opposed to Shaftesbury's aesthetic theory. The opening paragraphs of *A Search Into The Nature Of Society* are quite revealing of Mandeville's critical program regarding the conception of *Pulchrum and Honestum*, advocated by Shaftesbury and applied by him to morals and art. In his own words, Shaftesbury imagines, «that as Man is made for Society, so he ought to be born with a kind Affection to the whole, of which he is a part, and a Propensity to seek the Welfare of it» (Mandeville 1988a, 323-324)<sup>8</sup>. In a dialogue between Cleomenes, Horatio, and Fulvia, Mandeville uses the subject of art to attack precisely the moral and aesthetic formulations of Shaftesbury and to argue that works of idealistic art, like the hypocritical behavior of commercial society of his time, are pale imitations of human passions, which conceal and dissimulate more than they properly reveal. As Ekbert Faas points out, in this dialogue, Horatio and Cleomenes take on Shaftesbury's aesthetic legacy, while the other intervener, Fulvia, seems to portray Mandeville's artistic skepticism (Faas 2002, 123). Fulvia does not yield to the Shaftesburyian arguments of Cleomenes and Horatio. In particular, when they discuss the subject of the pictorial representation of the birth of Jesus, Fulvia insists that what her two interlocutors regard as absolutely abject – in this case, the representation of the stable – is fully consonant with human frailty. She remarks that «the poor and abject State in which our Saviour chose to appear at his coming into the World, is the most material Circumstance of the History»; and, echoing the intense Mandevilleian critique of hypocrisy, she adds that such a pictorial element «contains an excellent Moral against vain Pomp, and is the strongest Persuasive to Humility» (Mandeville 1988b, 34). Horatio once again replies by showing

that the shaping and dissemination of virtue in the religious realm depends on an art founded on either the beautiful or the sublime. Only those magnificent and incomparable artworks, like «stately Buildings, Roofs of uncommon Height, surprizing Ornaments, and all the Architecture of the grand Taste», are, according to him, able «to raise Devotion and inspire Men with Veneration and a Religious Awe for the Places that have these Excellencies to boast of» (Mandeville 1988b, 34-35).

Now, as can be seen from the following excerpt from the dialogue between Cleomenes and Fulvia, the Mandevillean radical mimetic realism primarily carries with it the idea of deception, rather than of imagination. In Fulvia's words:

A Picture then pleases me best when the Art in such a Manner deceives my Eye, that without making any Allowances, I can imagine I see the Things in reality which the Painter has endeavour'd to represent. I have always thought it an admirable Piece; sure nothing in the World can be more like Nature (Mandeville 1988b, 32-33).

The deception of senses is here the true source of the act of imagining, revealing why such an act is devoid of any positive autonomy. The idea of perfection in what should be represented as nature embraces, on the contrary, according to Cleomenes, the imagination role:

Like Nature! So much the worse: Indeed, Cousin, it is easily seen that you have no Skill in Painting. It is not Nature, but agreeable Nature, *la belle Nature*, that is to be represented; all Things that are abject, low, pitiful and mean, are carefully to be avoided, and kept out of Sight (Mandeville 1988b, 33).

In this last sense, mimesis is thus bound here to an *aesthetic ethos*, which brings us back to Aristotle's *Poetics*; an oeuvre in which the philosopher argues that the tragedians should follow the patterns of portrait-painters, because these, making men like us and respecting their own shape, paint them as more beautiful than they are (Aristotle 1920, 57). And so, like Shaftesbury, Cleomenes and Horatio also claim that the artist must remove everything that is against the supreme representation of nature, namely those art motifs that are vulgar for good aesthetic taste.

The dialogue among the three characters follows in this respect the lines of demarcation drawn by Shaftesbury between the beauti-

ful and the abject. According to his terminology, the abject is the main effect of the deformation of the whole, particularly when some detail calls into question the virtuous unity of the artistic piece. In the case of painting, Shaftesbury asserts, although the artist is incapable of bringing «All Nature into his Piece, but a Part only», its beauty and truth must express «a Whole, by it-self, compleat, independent, and withal as great and comprehensive as he can make it» (Shaftesbury 2001, 89). Consequently, particular elements «must yield to the general Design; and all things be subservient to that which is principal»; since the aim of the art object is to induce a limpid perception, «a simple, clear, and united View, which wou'd be broken and disturb'd by the Expression of any thing peculiar or distinct» (Shaftesbury 2001, 89). It is obvious that, if we acknowledge the relevance of Shaftesbury's contribution to modern aesthetics, the acute articulation of the parts with the whole enhances the emergence of the artist's individual expression. Ernst Cassirer, in his *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, precisely recognizes the pertinence of Shaftesbury's aesthetic theory, arguing that it surpassed the mere designs of the imitation of nature and paid attention to the creative genius of the artist. In his words, although Shaftesbury confines art to nature, «the inner agreement with nature which is demanded of art does not mean that art is caught in the world of empirical objects and must be content to copy them but that in artistic creation the 'truth' of nature is attained» (Cassirer 1951, 326).

Mandeville, always very critical of the imitation of good manners by the hypocritical man, shows us that polite theatricality keeps us from the knowledge of ourselves. Horatio speaks for Mandeville when he says, «It is incredible, how prone we are to Imitation, and how strangely, unknown to ourselves, we are shaped and fashioned after the Models and Examples that are often set before us» (Mandeville 1988b, 39). But Horatio, like Cleomenes, does not see, art as having merely an imitative function of the natural world. It is another form of imitation, which, at this particular sphere, ceases to be involuntary and is now provided with an intentionality recognized by both the artist and the viewer. In Cleomenes words, the true art of the painter comes from the ability to express the “Dignity of the Subject” and not, on the contrary, to be faithful to the “Truth of the History” that the work can evoke (Mandeville 1988b, 35). And it is



precisely because of this aesthetic goal that Cleomenes proposes a distinction between *Scholars* and *Great Masters*. The main task of a Scholar «is to copy things exactly as he sees them». But the opposite happens with the art of a great Master. When he has the opportunity to independently express his creativity, «it is expected he should take the Perfections of Nature, and not paint it as it is, but as we would wish it to be» (Mandeville 1988b, 36). What this last assertion informs us is that Cleomenes, like Horatio, sees the masterpieces of art as a fairly close depiction of the virtuous life.

## 6. Final Remarks

Mandeville's conception of art is consistent with his general ideas about human nature and society. On the one hand, he criticizes the hypocrisy that tries to conceal man's imperfections and to simulate his nobility of spirit. On the other, and with regard to art, Mandeville believes that in the composition of an artistic picture all imperfections and all social vices must be preserved. Here, in the latter case, there is a direct matching with the mechanism of hypocrisy (simulation and dissimulation) described by Mandeville and that can be allocated to art: it is to deny the imperfect and affirm the perfect. But, again, this is a virtuous performance and, as such, does not fit with Mandeville's radical realism, aesthetic and moral. This also implies that for Mandeville, imagination itself acts more to negate imperfections than to affirm beauty. Now, in summing up the Mandevillean theses according to the opposing poles of expression and imagination, we may say that expression occurs in the true imitation of nature, and imagination, because, as we have seen, creates a certain degree of distance regarding the observed objects, is thus the polished and virtuous dimension of imitation.

In short, the negative view of the role of imagination is, above all, the theoretical corollary of the critique of passions that support moral virtues, as in the case of pity, which has in Mandeville, as we have seen, an egotistical psychological ground. Everything that seems to transcend the empirical boundaries of the human body is determined by the role of imagination, and, consequently, it is not considered by Mandeville to be a faculty capable of ensuring the true expression of passions. On the contrary, by acting as a kind of

“body veil”, it tends to call into question the expression itself. Commercial society, in Mandeville’s judgment, replaces the expression with the simulation, at the very moment when it adorns the human body with the gestures of dissimulated vices.

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## NOTES

1. For an explicit criticism, see Smith 1982; Criticism in an implicit way, see Hume 1870; For a broad view of Mandeville’s critics, see, for instance, Welchman 2007.

2. In Mary Claire Randolph’s viewpoint, Renaissance’s satire is fraught with metaphorical motifs inspired by medicine and anatomical dissection; and, in this respect, the satirist can be fully compared to a surgeon who purges the evil of the objects he analyzes. According to the author, this tendency will, in large part, decrease with the dawn of the eighteenth century, which will be focused on an eminently rationalistic discourse: «In the eighteenth century such figures were to be very largely supplanted by rationalistic terminology: the satirist’s weapon or scalpel was Ridicule; the ailment to be pointed out by Ridicule was the ruling passion; and the curatives were Reason and Judgment; but in the Renaissance Marston, Hall, Jonson, and their fellows were still speaking chiefly in terms of the body, not the mind» (Randolph 1941, p. 145). But, as we will see in detail, the satirical and critical elements present in Mandeville’s thought are still ground on a discourse that has the body as pivotal touchstone. It is the body that must judge the mind, and not the reverse.

3. More on this issue, see, for instance, Sheridan 2007, 382.

4. It is also by means of this Mandevillean premise that one can best understand the author’s fierce criticism of social disguised behavior, shaped only with the hypocritical purpose of representing the virtuous character of human beings. As Paulette Carrive rightly points out in her exhaustive study on the nature of passions in Mandeville, social behavior inspired by the morality of good manners implies, above all else, the suppression of the causal nexus between expression and affection, that is, that one who dissimulates his own emotions acts as if the other did not really have the capacity to feel them – «comme si l’autre non plus n’en était pas affecté» (Carrive 1980, 60).

5. For a more detailed assessment of the simulation of passions as the main target of Mandevillean satire, see, for instance, Braga 2015.

6. This Mandevillean conception of pity can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes and La Rochefoucauld. Both authors describe it from a purely egocentric view, based on the calculation of individual interests, without any interference from empirical contexts, nor from the emotional spontaneity of individuals. Hobbes, stressing the role of imagination in calculating the effects of future actions, describes it as «imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity», adding, however, that «when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the Compassion is greater, because then there appeareth more Probability that the same may happen to us. For the evil that happeneth to an innocent man, may happen to every man» (Hobbes 1839, 41). La Rochefoucauld, for his part, is still more radical in his definition of pity. He sees in it a real opportunity for retribution, a skillful way of ensuring help for the solution of our future problems: «La pitié est souvent un sentiment de nos propres maux dans les maux d'autrui; c'est une habile prévoyance des malheurs où nous pouvons tomber; nous donnons du secours aux autres pour les engager à nous en donner en de semblables occasions; et ces services que nous leur rendons sont, à proprement parler, des biens que nous nous faisons à nous mêmes par avance» (La Rochefoucauld 1817, 61).

7. Hume also implies the binary contiguity-remoteness in his account on the constitution of the laws of justice and government, in particular with the aim of highlighting the immanent difficulty that always subsists in overcoming interpersonal relationships and the visibility of interests present in small societies and transferring to State and civil order their regulation. Since for Hume, as well as for Mandeville, human nature has inviolable and immutable dispositions, there is an irreparable tension between interests and justice, which is, in turn, expanded with the emergence of large-scale societies. As Mikko Tolonen rightly points out, «when the society increases in size men start to lose sight of their own interest in justice, which was prescribed as its first foundation» (Tolonen 2013, 232). Hume's answer to these difficulties is still given according to the natural determinism of relations of contiguity: «the utmost we can do is to change our circumstances and situation, and render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest, and their violation our most remote. But this being impracticable with respect to all mankind, it can only take place with respect to a few, whom we thus immediately interest in the execution of justice. These are the persons whom we call civil magistrates, kings and their ministers, our governors and rulers, who, being indifferent persons to the greatest part of the state, have no interest, or but a remote one, in any act of injustice; and, being satisfied with their present condition, and with their part in society, have an immediate interest in every execution of justice, which is so necessary to the upholding of society. Here, then, is the origin of civil government and society. Men are not able radically to cure, either in themselves or others, that nar-

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rownness of soul which makes them prefer the present to the remote» (Hume 2007b, 344).

8. On the influence of Shaftesbury's philosophical thought on Mandeville's writings, see, for instance, Primer 1975, 126-41.

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