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BEEHIVE-IMAGES AND POLITICS
IN BERNARD DE MANDEVILLE'S *THE FABLE OF THE BEES*:
EMPIRICISM VS INNATISM

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Beehive-Images and Politics
in Bernard De Mandeville's
The Fable of the Bees:
Empiricism *vs* Innatism

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*And Virtue, who from Politicks
Had learn'd a thousand cunning Tricks,
Was, by their happy Influence,
Made Friends with Vice.
The Fable of the Bees, Remark F*

In this essay I shall examine the diachronic evolution of the beehive as an image related to central political and religious issues, to delineate its use, by different writers and artists, to visually signify the relation between the people and power.

When, in the year 1714, the first edition of *The Fable of the Bees*¹ was published, no beehive image appeared in the work, and it was only in later editions (cf. image 1) that publishers started inserting standard drawings of beehives in the book. Therefore, we can say that we are here working with 'evocated images' and that we are thus referring to rhetorical hypotyposis, i.e., a highly iconic, verbal description that readers, through their imagination, transform into a visual-image.

¹ Bernard De Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Virtues, Publick Benefits*, ed. F.B. Kaye, 2 vols., Clarendon Press, Oxford 1924 [which uses the 1732 edition, the last authorized one during Mandeville's life]. References, hereafter, to this edition will be given directly inserted in the text as FB1 or FB2: and page number. The Fable is preceded by *An Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, and *Remarks*, present in FB1.

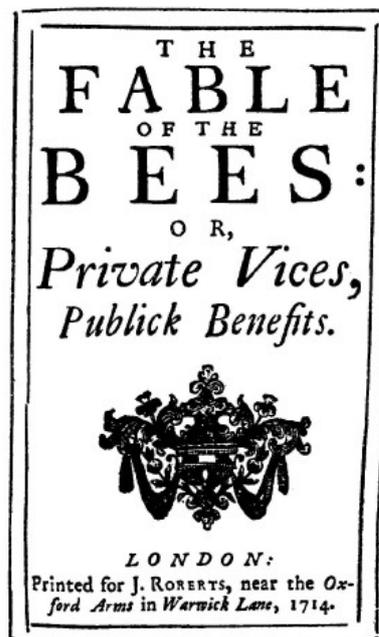
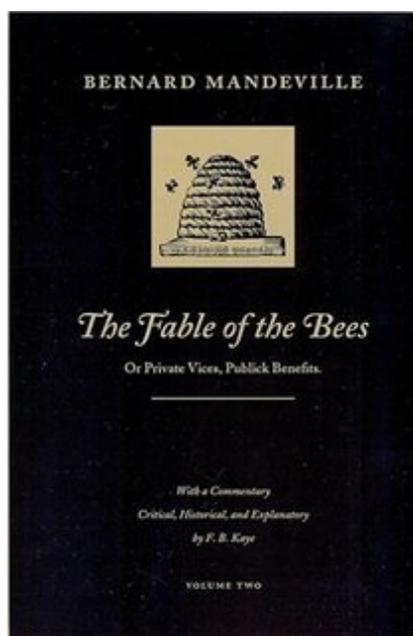


Image 1. Cover of De Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F. B. Kaye, 1932 and the first edition title page 1714, downloaded from the public domain, wikimedia

De Mandeville's work *The Grumbling Hive: or Knaves Turn'd Honest* (1705)², preceded the 1714 edition of *The Fable*, and if we consider that the last version of the Fable appeared in 1732, we can say that De Mandeville has worked on it, altogether, for 27 years, a fact which underlines the capital importance this book had for him and that it has in his macrotext.

The points I am going to make about De Mandeville and his work are the following:

1. I will claim De Mandeville's outstanding position among the Fathers of the Enlightenment, and will thus set him among the Masters of the Empiricist Tradition, i.e. Bacon, Locke and, later, Hume;

2. De Mandeville, as I shall demonstrate, shares with the Fathers of the Enlightenment their primary issue whose common core is the effort to

² *The Fable*, was originally published anonymously as *The Grumbling Hive: or Knaves Turn'd Honest* (FB1:17-37), whose pirated edition appeared in 1705, and was then reworked in the 1714 version of the Fable, still anonymous.

dismantle innatism,³ and all that is connected with it: mainly the design theory and the connected principle of authority it upholds. In contrast to the empiricist, De Mandeville will nevertheless ground his attack on a different standpoint than that of science, i.e. on ethics;

3. from the point of view of images I will demonstrate that his use of the beehive metaphor in the Fable has to be connected to the first English edition of Hobbes's *Leviathan, or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651, Lat. 1668),⁴ in that it is directly linked to the image on its frontispiece, an engraving by the French artist Abraham Bosse (cf. image 2). Not only does it descend - visually - from this, in that the chest of the King, as it can be observed, is itself designed as a sort of hive, in which people appear, imprisoned, as if they were swarming bees; but, also, because De Mandeville reworks the same imagery in his book, with the purpose to dismantle and critique Hobbes's work and its philosophical rationale. De Mandeville, metaphorically, recasts Abraham Bosse's visual image of the bees subverting its ratio, creating an antonymic hyper image of the original hypo image. Bosse's chest of the King is re-configured in De Mandeville's book into a real beehive, on which the King does not preside, but is cast as just one of the many participants of the animal society. Therefore, De Mandeville corrects *Leviathan's* image of the external Head of the presiding King, a real 'Head of state', by comprising him within the hive, making him just one of its stakeholders, even though a privileged one, being on top, but without giving him - visually - the privilege and authority of presiding over them. Society, that is, prevails on the King.

³ Innatism dates back to Plato who speaks of the remembrance and recognition of a previous knowledge present in our souls before becoming incarnated. Of this, he speaks in his works *Fedone, Fedro, Menone*. From Plato, it passes then, through Marsilio Ficino, to the Cambridge Platonists, led by Herbert of Cherbury, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, and from them to the Scottish Neoplatonists, A.A. Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson.

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651, Lat. 1668), Penguin, London 1985 [1968].

Let us now study Abraham Bosse's image (cf. image 2).

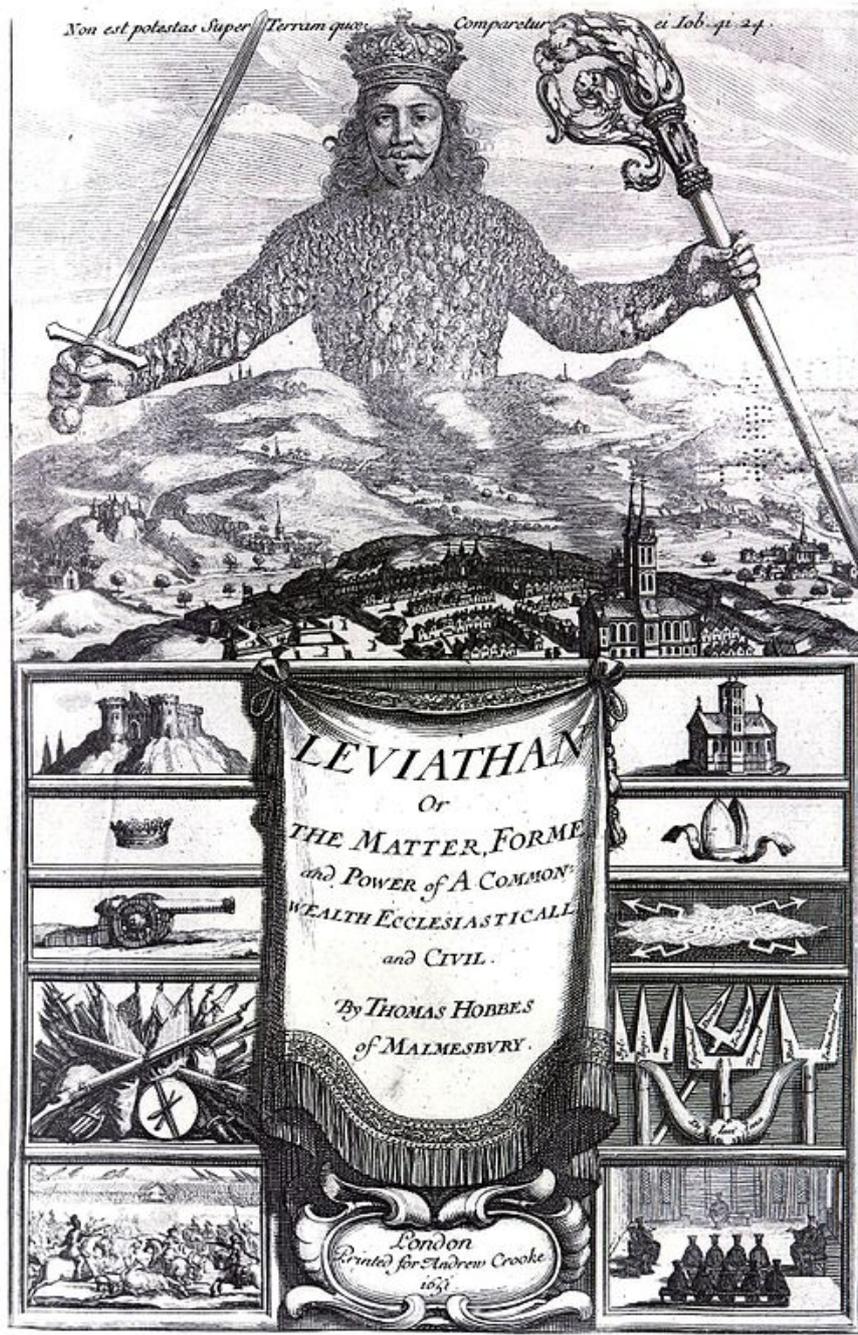


Image 2: The body-politics frontispiece, by Abraham Bosse, of Thomas Hobbes's, *The Leviathan* (Engl. ed. 1651, Lat. 1668), downloaded from Wikimedia

Bosse's image perfectly transcends the rationale of Thomas Hobbes's understanding of power in the *Leviathan*. He conflates visually, on the one

hand the authority of God – the holistic, theo-teleological reading of the world which had kept people meek and acquiescent through the instilled fear of an after-world in hell – and, on the other, the authority of the King, seen as God’s representative on earth and acting on his mandate. This latter was also the implicit justification of Henry VIII’s Schism from Rome (1534). The theory of the divine right of kingship, or the political theology of power, would be invoked later, in *Basilikon Doron* (1599), by James I of England and VI of Scotland, who will justify his authority on the same principle. Shakespeare’s historical play, *Richard II*, contests it and rewrites it in the theory of the double body of the king.⁵

The idea that lies at the back of the link between God and King is visible in image 3, by Didacus Valades. Here one finds the medieval vision of the hive-like upper world of God and his hierarchy of angels, meant to act as a symmetrical confirmation of the specular but ‘fallen’ world of humans on whom the King presides.

⁵ See Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s study of political theology, *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton UP, Princeton 1957.

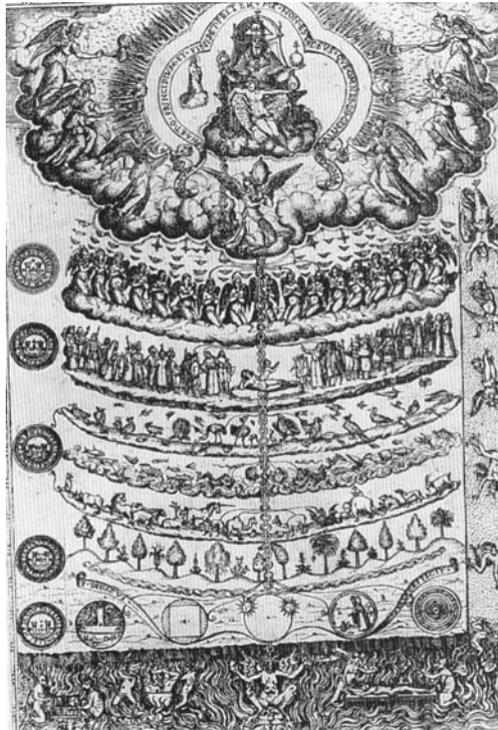


Image 3, by Didacus Valades (Diego Valades) *Rhetorica Christiana* 1579 (drawing)
open access public domain: Wikimedia

Both Hobbes's work, composed in Paris (1640–51), and published in London, and Bosses's emblem, implicitly justify the theory of absolute sovereignty. Accordingly, the people of a country give over their liberty to him, submit, and accept his supreme authority in exchange for his protection. The chest of the Sovereign, is depicted, in Bosse's image, as a hive that 'visually' frames the people, his subjects, who look enticed by his charisma, and are protected by him, with a view to evade the consequences of the "bellum omnium contra omnes", the war of all against all, dictated by envy. As can be seen they literally 'look up' at him, not only in a metaphorical sense but in a mesmerized and grateful way. The engraving perfectly illustrates Hobbes's theory.

The King wears the imperial crown and carries, on the one hand, a sword, and, in the other, a bishop's crosier, indicating his exercise of both

civil and ecclesiastic power. Gentlemen wear a cloak and a tall hat, and some of them have a clerical attire. The Latin inscription: *Non est potestas super terram quae comparetur ei* is, not by chance taken from the *Bible*, Book of Job 41:24, reads: “There is no power on earth which can be compared to his.” The King’s earthly power is thus connected to that of God in heaven as it is, also, visually represented in the image.

The King exercises his power over a walled city and its countryside, signifying the nation. His power is graphically inscribed in the symbols which appear in the etching: the castles of the aristocracy represented by the coronet and its implied hierarchy status. Under the King’s sword the emblems of his stately power expose, but also betray, that they are the result of violence and fear: the power that his military force might use both against internal rebels, frightening thus the onlookers, or enemy countries represented by battle scenes, a cannon, miscellaneous weapons, crowned by the King’s victories, materially signified by trophies and the setting of flags. In parallel, under the crosier, his absolute power over the church and its hierarchy is represented by a church, the bishop's miter, and a thunderbolt, signifying the wrath of God, and the rhetorical logic, i.e. eristics, needed to discuss ecclesiastical quiddities hinted at in the representation of the scene of a theological dispute, reminding people of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the victory of Protestantism.

4. Finally, I claim that, through his personal revision of the hive image, on the one hand, De Mandeville undermines Hobbes’ graphic system of authority, and on the other hand, he debunks the previous holistic and emblematic Scala-Naturae, which, as we have seen in Valades’ drawing (cf. image 3), iconized the same hierarchical principles and ratio only from the point of view of religion. In doing so De Mandeville upholds the Constitutional Monarchy principles, focusing on the reciprocity of

responsibility and accountability of all actors. But not that only. His hive-politics also implies one of the main principles of democracy of a collective body: the possibility of ousting the queen bee, if she does not fulfil the expectations of the worker bees that can then force her to leave the beehive.

The order and degree ideology represented in Valades's *Rhetorica Christiana* is, in the *Leviathan* emblem, represented in the converse class and rank ideology. Both images present a holistic, single, teleological and theological view defended by those who demagogically used it for their personal interests: the Church, the King, Deists, Scottish Neo-Platonists, and all those who believed in the theory of the Divine Right of Kingship. The supreme authority they represent kept people submissive and under control. Fear of the power of the King went hand in hand with the fear of the wrath of God and hell. Both images champion the old world picture in a visual cipher that emblematically represents it. The images command to all, both literate and illiterate, the strict abidance by, and compliance to the imposed secular, or religious laws. Besides, they are a perfect iconic badge for the prescribed immobility of those on the hierarchical layers of the *Scala Naturae*,⁶ stability on which the absolute political power of the apex depends.⁷

The attack undertaken by De Mandeville on earthly and divine rank will be set by contesting the principles of taken for granted Authority, and the axioms on which they had been created in the first place: God, his representative on earth, the King, the Bible, Nature used as an open visual book there to be read in order to ascertain God's design. Nature was thus

⁶ Cfr. Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, Harvard UP, Harvard 1936.

⁷ For the change from the old, holistic vision of the world, held together by one single explanation, to the 18th-century variety model, see Yvonne Bezrucka, *Genio ed immaginazione nel Settecento inglese*, University of Verona, Valdona 2000, downloadable in gold open access form at Researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yvonne_Bezrucka

the vehicle for claiming the abidance by the Law, which accordingly could be interpreted as being a 'Natural' Law. De Mandeville will precisely contest this point. He will deconstruct and dismantle it, demonstrating how religious and secular power go hand in hand in the promotion of their joint project of keeping people deferential, acquiescent, and submissive, instilling fear for retaliation and revenge: either in hell, prison or death.

The assumptions of the existence of a natural law will thus be implicitly contested by De Mandeville, who will attack both the Scottish Neoplatonist School, and his fellow Dutchman, Hugo Grotius, who insisted on a 'natural' right founding its premises in the supposed innatism of morality, the assumption that all people know instinctively whether an action is good or wrong. De Mandeville will, on the contrary, insist on space- and time-specific principles, that is on 'cultural' values that pertain to peculiar, in the plural, 'cultures', of the world. Dismantling the implicit holistic principles on which authority was set - the hierarchy of order and degree (i.e. rank) of the *Scala Naturae* and the specular one of earth - De Mandeville revises holism into utter particularism, by paring down society to a sum of egoistic individuals. But, in contrast to Hobbes's repressive view, he sees egoism as a passion that needs to be positively directed by legislators and exploited for the profit and good of a community. In this sense it is not by chance that his emphasis on the people's inclination towards self-interest would, soon after, be translated into the *laissez-faire* principle of economic liberalism, by Adam Smith. De Mandeville, that is, will question the intrinsic justification for the necessity of an abidance by the laws set by undebatable Authority, from which "imposed" law derives. On the contrary, he will ask for a negotiation of the law, directed by both actors: the people, and, the sovereign.

Before analysing De Mandeville further, let us set him in the tradition of the great figures of the Enlightenment, i.e. the Fathers of the empirical tradition.

THE MASTERS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Frances Bacon, in his *Instauratio Magna* (1620), had brought forth the inductive method in opposition to the diffuse deductive ratio that we can bring back to Plato and Scholasticism. The collection of data had, according to him, to forgo every conclusion about reality. First of all, in any epistemological process data should be collected, analysed, and then, beginning with the results thus obtained, predictions might be formulated. Hypotheses, reached through experimentation, had, nevertheless, to be further confirmed through trial repetitions of the experiment itself. Then, and then only, a scientific fact could be drawn and asserted.

The attack was clear, mere suppositions and opinions had to be testified by facts. Otherwise, they remained, as said, viewpoints without any truth guarantee. The attack was meant, foremost, against the rationalists, who thought that the mind, by itself, through reason merely, could formulate – truthful – deductions about outside reality. This outcome was grounded in their belief that one could rely on one's innate knowledge, retrievable through an appropriate *aletheia*-process, an act of dis-veiling and disclosure. Intrinsic, inborn, knowledge had thus only to be recovered, as established in Plato's philosophy of the Cave, and, in Christianity, through the mere right 'reading' of created Nature, being this the evidence of God's design, or it could be found in the Bible. Contesting this procedure, Bacon founded the scientific method, and, a *Novum Organum*: science, was invoked.

The attack on innatism was further pursued by John Locke, whose *Essays on Human Understanding* (1690), will authenticate the value of all manifestations of the outside world and not only the beautiful ones, stating that the origin of all knowledge had to be found in experience, in life itself; the mind being not a container of given truths, but rather a *tabula rasa*, a board on which only outside reality can imprint and write facts. He saw it also as a *camera obscura*: the light of knowledge coming in only from the outside.

Language, is by him, accordingly, seen merely as a conventional medium made of signs which provide ‘ideas’ about things, but not ‘things’ themselves, implicitly stating that no idea will ever cover reality entirely: a direct attack on those who believed in universals and did not accept Ockham’s nominalism, thus giving to reality an extra, ‘invented’, universal dimension that they would justify again through innatism, inborn knowledge. Along the same line, Locke stated that truth, unless backed up scientifically, remained merely a personal ‘opinion’. Accordingly, in his *Epistle on Tolerance* (1689), he spoke of the existence of non-ascertainable truths, religion being one. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that, given that all various religions believe their relative, cultural, set of values to be the only truthful and conclusive one, and there not being any proven incontestable standards on which to measure their truthfulness scientifically, none could be privileged or imposed as truthful. As a consequence, according to him, the State had to remain laic.

In opposition to Hobbes’s idea of the necessity of an absolute monarch to keep peace among avid human beings and as a guarantor of their abiding by the law, political power needs, according to Locke, to be the result of a negotiation. Laws will have to be negotiated by the various implied actors and stakeholders, and passed on by an ‘elected’ majority.

Therefore he makes political power and legislation rest on consensus, the result of a social contract. His work, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1689), clearly separates the realms of spiritual and secular power: Church is Church, and State is State. It was the work that debunked authority as such.

David Hume, coming after De Mandeville, in his 1739 *Treatise on Human Nature*, will back up Locke in focussing on how the mind reworks perceptions to create knowledge. Memory and the imagination will be shown to be faculties present, in quality, but not in quantity, in all human beings. Downplaying ingeniousness, now seen just as the result of chance and experience, in contrast to the idea of it being a gift from God or the gods, the new trust in creativity of the imagination will make every human being into a possible artist, a possible utopian re-writer of the universe and its laws, a revolution that would, soon after, be called 'Romanticism'.

Hume will also repeat Locke's nominalist conception of language, seeing universals only as hypothetical constructions of the mind, and thus as mere names, for, so to say, 'ideal' things. These, nevertheless, do not exist at all, and cannot be rationally proven to exist, and their material existence, independently of thought, is linked to their single, distinct, unique and not-typological forms. Hume inaugurates thus sceptical empiricism and directs it against 'universal' notions, in general, and metaphysics in particular.

What is then De Mandeville's contribution?

De Mandeville comes in after Bacon and Locke had, jointly, deconstructed innatism from within, dismantling deduction, preconceived ideas, the *idola* of the mind. He also comes in after Hume, that on his part, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), had deconstructed metaphysics. But, still, another

stronghold of innatism was kept, and, notwithstanding what had already been done, it was ethics.

The argument of the Scottish Neo-Platonists, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, was that every man knew ‘naturally’, that is to say ‘instinctively’, whether an action would prove right or wrong, good or evil, and this capacity they attributed to a ‘natural’, innate or inborn, self-evident sense of morality. As seen, this went hand in hand with their claimed existence of a “natural law” founded on the same premises. Indeed, exerting a sort of social innatism, this school of thought affirmed that, in the case of any doubt, one had safely to rely on “Common Sense”.⁸ Enticing as this might seem, it is indeed not, in that this kind of attitude does neither take into account the space-time contextualization of the various and different cultures, nor their blatant differences.⁹ In so doing Common Sense champions are protecting only - their regional, limited space-time specifics - those of the *status quo* of ‘their’ culture, unaware of its regionalism, mistaking those limited beliefs as universal values. Cultures, on the contrary, produce all sorts of beliefs, and each culture different ones. Common Sense is no guarantee for an ethical behaviour rather it betrays its cultural bias. Furthermore, Common Sense, being different for diverse cultures and not being “common” at all, implicitly denies a “natural” or “innate” sense of ethics. De Mandeville will thus also prove himself one of the detractors of natural jurisprudence, natural law, or *ius naturale*, which was exactly linked to the belief in the innate sense of morality that Deists and Neoplatonists

⁸ A.A. Shaftesbury, *Sensus Communis. An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, Sanger, London 1709 riedited in Shaftesbury, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Hemmerich, W. Benda, Frommann- Holzboog, Stuttgart 1981, i, 3, pp. 14-129, present also in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times*, J.M. Robertson, London 1900 [1711] (2 voll.).

⁹ Something the like will be developed, during the 18th century, in aesthetics. See my work: *The Invention of the Northern Aesthetics in 18th-Century English Literature*, forthcoming.

were defending.¹⁰ In “Remark C”, of *The Fable of the Bees*, he will thus strongly rely on the cultural power of education (that of a specific space-time environment), which he sees as one of the vehicles of ethics and its values:

The Multitude will hardly believe the excessive Force of Education, and in the difference of Modesty between Men and Women ascribe that to Nature, which is altogether owing to early Instruction: Miss is scarce Three years old, but she is spoke to every Day to hide her Leg, and rebuk'd in good Earnest if she shews it; while Little Master at the same Age is bid to take up his Coats, and piss like a Man.
(FB1:72)

De Mandeville will prove the champions of Common Sense to the contrary: believing, like Hobbes, that humanity is driven by egoism and passions, he sees morality as an artificial construct, the result of a process of acculturation that can also go wrong as the past demonstrates. Said in his own words, it is the outcome of the “bewitching Engine” of “Flattery” [BF1:43, BF1:42] used by “Lawgivers and other wise men” [BF1:42],¹¹ probably those of the Church, just the effect of a cultural discourse, exactly as Darwin will affirm in the 19th century - but certainly not the outcome of an inborn moral sense, rather the mere result of one’s environment, i.e. one’s ‘cultural’ context, the beliefs acquired and absorbed in one’s family, set out at school, and taken for granted and defended as if they were the Truth, by a ‘specific’ society.

¹⁰ In this sense, deists heavily relied on John Toland’s *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696) which eliminated every mystery from Christianity.

¹¹ B. De Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, 1723, II ed. of the Fable, FB1: 39-57.

The false, justifying, authority of a supposed universal, ‘natural’ ethics will thus be freed from the aura of metaphysics it had always had. De Mandeville will be extremely clear about this: moral sense is not innate, it is historical, space-and-time specific: a cultural, limited, epistemic product. In *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, he will say:

The first Rudiments of Morality, broach'd by skilful Politicians, to render Men useful to each other as well as tractable, were chiefly contrived that the Ambitious might reap the more Benefit from, and govern vast Numbers of them with the greater Ease and Security. (FB1:47)

But who, then, has the right to check passions and the egoistic drives of people? According to him only the state, through its ‘social’, ‘laic’ ethics, predicated by its ‘negotiated’ laws. The state will guarantee that egoism will be kept within safe limits and that wealth will be distributed to those in need. Indeed, if benefactors act, they usually act only for self-flattery or in order to be recognized by their fellows as generous, with the aim of augmenting their “public” virtue, private one being and remaining private and debatable. Therefore, their acts result to be far from being guaranteed. If “public” virtue is not the outcome of “private” virtue, what needs to be worked on is the only ostensible contradiction of De Mandeville’s *Fable* subtitle: “Private Vices, Public Benefits”. Indeed, if “Private Vice by the dextrous Management of a skilful Politician may be turned into Public benefits.” (FB1:369) and “these Qualifications [private vices], which we all pretend to be ashamed of, are the great support of a flourishing Society”,¹²

¹² B. De Mandeville, “The Introduction” to *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, 1723, II ed. of the *Fable*, in FB1:39-40.

the paradox to be reached is exactly the transformation of vices into virtues, i.e., into 'social' virtues.

Who can direct this inclination of egoistic private interest into a social benefit? For De Mandeville, it is not the King, but only the State, or, during his times, Parliament. Clearly, not the State indicated in the *Leviathan*, where the King passes laws for his own and his retinue's prosperity, a retinue, well described in the underneath part of Bosse's etching, of people all agreed in maintaining the hierarchy of the authoritarian system that guarantees them their top power. For De Mandeville, the means to paradoxically turn private interests into social pluses will be, and is a different state.

This new anti-Leviathan state already existed in England, it was the Constitutional Monarchy, set up in 1689, according to which the King – or Queen, in the hive's case – still sits on top of the arena, but not hierarchically imposing their will top-down, but being 'within' the hive, as everybody else, because it is the hive itself that, bottom-up, puts them in this position: a very remarkable difference. The Queen of bees is a 'constitutional' Queen, but bees – as is made clear in a later perfect visual example of the state of the art already of 1714, when the book appeared, and the Hanoverian dynasty was called to set foot and to reign over the United Kingdom – can get rid of her, once the interest of the hive-society on whom she presides, is in peril (see image 3).¹³

This allusion respected the reality of the animal society of the bees. Indeed, it was Charles Butler, in 1609, in his book *The Feminine Monarchie*¹⁴

¹³ This is marked, for example, by the conditions of the 1701's Act of Settlements that set that Royal heirs who were Roman Catholic, and those who married a Roman Catholic, were barred from ascending the throne "for ever".

¹⁴ Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, Joseph Barnes, Oxford: 1609, contested, as was to be expected on gender reasons by Moses Rusden's, *Hierarchy of Bees: A Further Discovery of Bees*, published 1679 neglecting the queen and reinstating a King bee. See also George Sarton, "The Feminine Monarchie of Charles Butler", *Isis*, vol. 34, No 6, pp. 469-472.

who conclusively overturned the prevailing patriarchal myth of the beehive, identifying a female Queen as the ruler of the hive, and the drones as male. Not only that, but he also affirmed that the Queen, is driven, by her inferiors, to leave the hive as soon as she is considered to be too weak to ensure the wellbeing of the colony. The theory behind the bees-society was, later, more fully elucidated by Jan Swammerdam.¹⁵

Against the devaluation of the material world, De Mandeville proposes a new understanding of ethics based on reason rather than religion, or mysticisms of sorts, defending its rational necessity and importance against the recourse to the external grace or wrath of God, as had been stated in Bosse's emblem. The Queen partakes of the destiny of the State. The state will, therefore, become the supreme good, with politics seen cynically as a necessary evil: a matter related to the calculus people use to judge laws with, and made in the terms of a *do ut des* logic. State welfare will be regulated through the taxation system, wherewith the common good is re-distributed to those that do not have enough by the State, a first request for what would later be called the Welfare State:

It may be said, that Virtue is made Friends with Vice, when industrious good People, who maintain their Families and bring up their Children handsomely, pay Taxes, and are several ways useful Members of the Society, get a Livelihood by something that chiefly depends on, or is very much influenc'd by the Vices of others, without being themselves guilty of, or accessory to them, any otherwise than by way of Trade, as a Druggist may

¹⁵ Jan Swammerdam's other works, *Historia Insectorum Generalis* (1669), and *Biblia Natura* (1737 posth.), further elucidate Butler's queen theory, in providing scientific proves that the Queen bee is the sole mother of the hive.

be to Poisoning, or a Sword-Cutler to Blood-shed.

(BF1:85)

The only peril of politics is eristics, the use or better misuse politicians, make of persuasiveness for ideological reasons or manipulation.

Only Private Vices can create Public Virtues for De Mandeville as Adam Smith will be quick to understand and translate into its furthest possible development, the free-trade *laissez-faire* policy, liberalism, upheld by the certainty that the market self-regulates. Whereas Jeremy Bentham, conscious of the risk implicit in this type of geometrical excess, will mitigate it, translating it into the hazy ethical formula that will privilege uncountable qualitative ‘happiness’ rather than other, countable and quantitative, elements: “The greatest happiness for the greatest numbers”, the hedonic formula, that will become the basis for economic utilitarianism¹⁶.

Let us then have a look at G.S. Tregear’s hive-icon of 1837 (image 4), the year of Victoria’s ascent to the throne. "The Queen Bee in her Hive" explicitly accepts the implications of De Mandeville’s political use of the hive as a metaphor of English society and its hierarchy, updating it to his times.¹⁷

¹⁶ J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (1780, publ. 1789) worked on this topic along the lines of previous thinkers, amongst whom Francis Hutcheson, William Paley, and John Gay, but he was the first to propose it in a formula that took into account personal pleasure and pain and connected it to his famous *felicitic calculus*.

¹⁷ The drawing: “The Bee proffers Honey but wears a Sting” hints at the double nature of the queen bee: she can be beneficial, but she can also use her weapon. She is on top of her hive, which is formed as a hierarchical state. In the layer below hers, entitled “Head of Church”, the drones “enjoying the honey” are depicted as Bishops. The third layer belongs to “Lord, Ladies, and Gentry of Civil List, sucking away”. Under the middle image, we find this caption: “Let us dance ... we have no [illegible] “ and on the second line: “we have always [unreadable]”. The fourth layer presents, on the left, the title “ARMY”, where we find the “Lords of the Council, Embassadors [sic], Lords in waiting, Her Majesty’s Ministers, Officers of the [illegible], and on the right hand side: “Judges and Lords of the TREASURY”. On the curtain hanging from this layer, we read: “While their presence is thus necessary to the Queen they are suffered to enjoy all the sweets of life & Love. But when they become useless in the Hive - the Common Bees often declare a war of extermination of them - [illegible] Buffon [unreadable] Bees.” The curtain that covers, in part, the fifth layer is titled “Professional Bees”. Here we see, on the left, a military bee sitting on another one as if it were a horse and, on the right, a mariner bee on a small boat, with underneath a smaller unreadable caption.

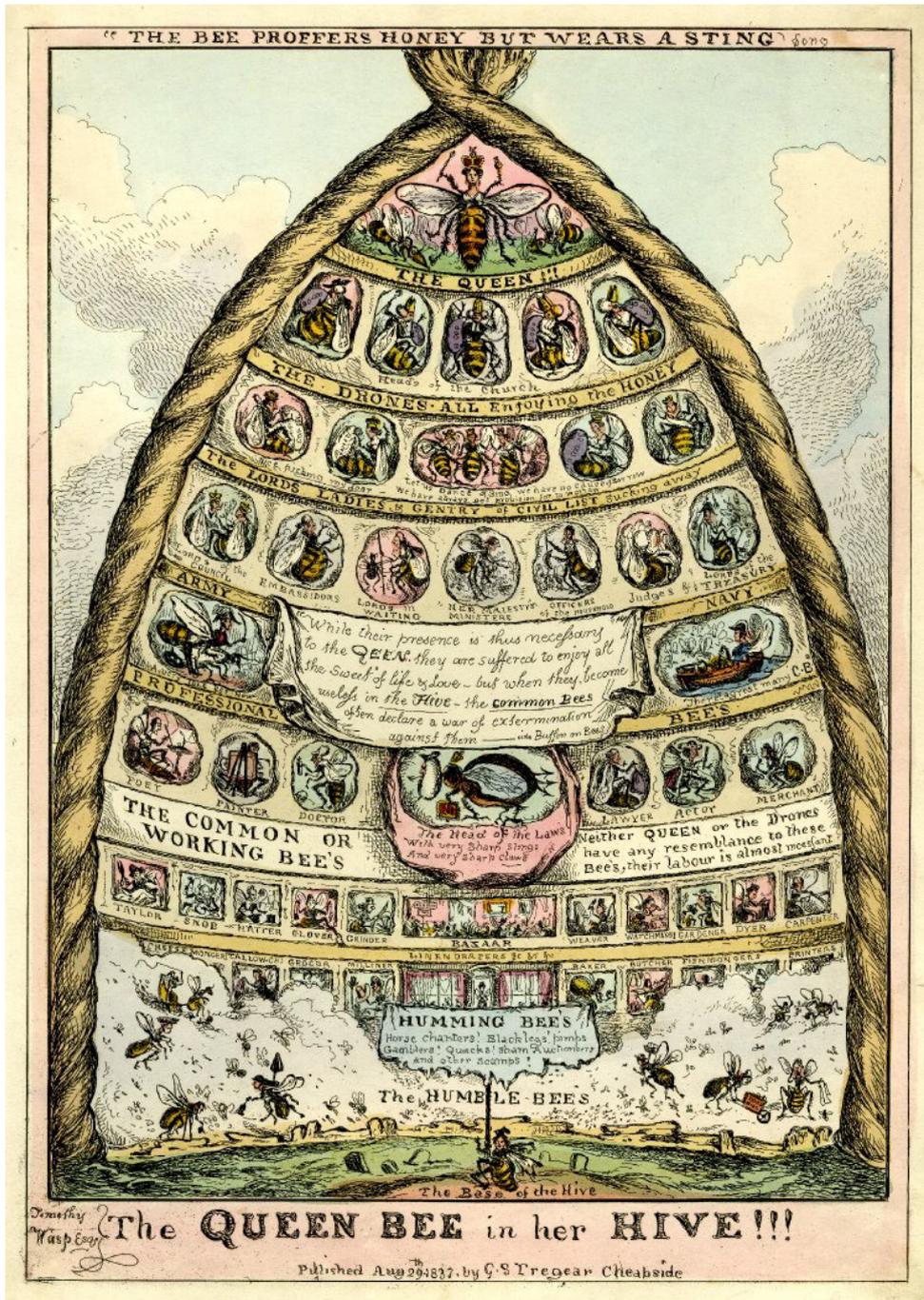


Image 4, Gabriel Shire Tregear, *The Queen Bee in her Hive*, 29.8.1837.

In the British Museum, London.¹⁸

The sixth layer presents the caption “Common or Working Bees” and we find on the left: “Poet, Painter, Doctor”, in the middle: “The Head of the Laws with very sharp Stings and claws”, and on the right “Lawyer, Actor, Merchant” and, as another caption, one can read: “Neither Queen or the Drones have any resemblance to these Bees, their work is almost incessant”. The seventh layer is composed, on the right, by “Taylor, Snob, Hatter, Glover, Grinder”, in the middle a “Bazaar”, and on the left a “Weaver, Watchman, Gardener, Dyer, Carpenter”. Underneath these, one can read: “Linen Drapers &&,” on the right: “Grocer, Milliner,” and, on the left side, “Baker, Butcher, Fishmonger.” The curtain coming from this layer reads: “Humming Bees” as its title, and underneath we find: “Horse Chanters, Black Legs’ Pimps, Gamblers, Quacks, Auctioneers and other Scamps.” On the ground level, “The Humble Bees” are busy collecting food for the Queen, but enjoying fresh air and flowers.

¹⁸ Gabriel Shire Tregear, "The Queen Bee in her Hive", 29.8.1837, in The British Museum, London, retrieved from the Museum's public domain:

Let us now comment the visual politics of image 4.

The image presents a hierarchical setting of English society in a series of layers that correspond to the stratification of society according to order and degree, i.e. rank. Prominent appears the Queen, her military power, and the Law. Lawyers, who have three stings, rather than one, can metaphorically kill. It is a typical *Scala-Naturae* type of representation of the stratification of British Society, which, again, depicts De Mandeville's model of a negotiated beehive-society.

Interestingly enough, only four years later, in 1840, with a further revision in 1867, the famous caricaturist, George Cruikshank, devised a new beehive. Cf. image, number 5.

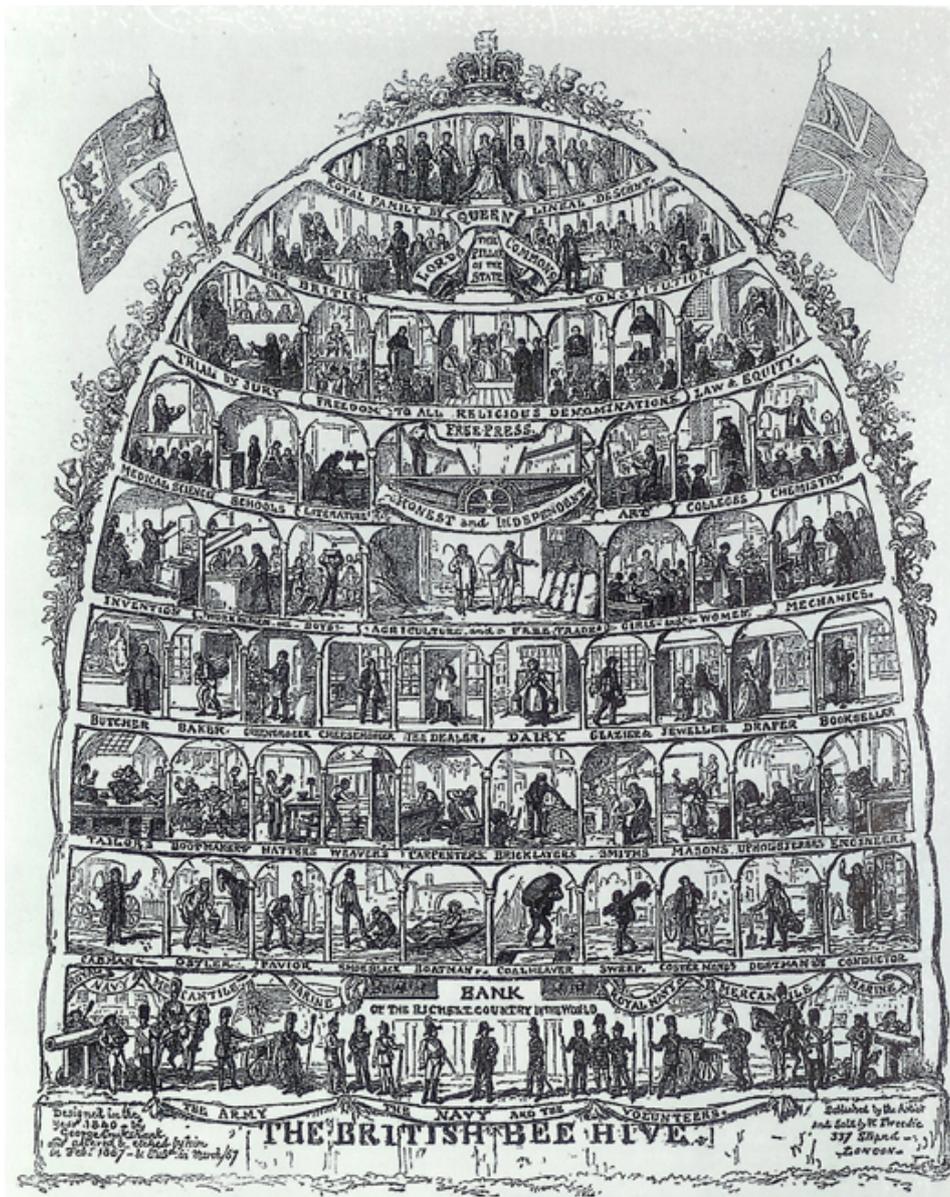


Image 5. George Cruikshank, *The British Bee Hive: A Penny Political Picture for the People*

1840, revised 1867

(copyright permission to use the image has been granted by The Victoria and Albert Museum).

What is interesting in this last image is George Cruikshank's changed stratification of the hive. Under the Queen and her Family, a prominent place is given to Law and Equity,¹⁹ and to the medium of the Press. What

¹⁹ For the issues of Law and Equity during the 19th century see my article: "A Tale of Two Cities": Charles Dickens's Political Examination of Law, Legalized Violence, Authority, and Retributive Justice", in *Practising Equity, Addressing Law: Equity in Law and Literature*, D. Carpi ed., Winter, Heidelberg 2008, pp. 317-33.

strikes, nevertheless, is that the basis of the hive rests now on the Bank of England, which had not appeared before, sided by the military force. Mammon is indeed the new, or better other hidden King, of the hive. Indeed, the hive itself should be set upside down. The age, as it is hinted at, bases everything on capital, wealth, and gain. These are the new ideals which supersede everything else and that characterise Victorian society from within. Money and the consumption of goods are now the only ideals worth pursuing, as Carlyle²⁰ was early to point out.²¹ The Bank is now as important as the Queen, being her new symmetrical and real antagonist.

Cruikshank, in using the Bank image, hints at the fact that money can now be speculated upon and gained, without even the least need for real work. Indeed, the old ethics of work, of hard work, is over. The real stratification of the nation-hive proceeds now only according to affluence standards. But, if some will beget money out of speculation only, others will have to work hard only to survive. As Carlyle points out, some people will “live to dress” and others will just be “Ragged Beggar[s]”,²² a condition making the inequality divide between people greater and greater. But, even though two Disraelian nations face each other, the drive to gain riches, prestige, and distinction, is the shared goal of both. Money has become the dream that unifies both rich and poor. Cruikshank’s image points exactly to this: in putting the Bank – another hive but with rules of its own – at the basis of his hive, it hints at how it oozes its persuasive philosophy that permeates all.

The former beehive as an image has lost its symbolic aura. But why and how? In not representing the actual hierarchical stratification of the

²⁰ “We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human being”, cfr. Thomas Carlyle, “Gospel of Mammonism”, in *Past and Present*, Dent, London 1960, p. 141.

²¹ On the disparition of being into having see my book: *Oggetti e collezioni nella letteratura inglese dell'Ottocento*, Ares, Trento 2004, gold open access at researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yvonne_Bezrucka

²² Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, OUP, Oxford 1987 [1833-1834], p. 212.

hive, which is now based on mere money, capitalism and its quantitative logic, the image of the old hive is not coherent anymore, and its visual power has gone lost.

What now counts are mere mathematical hard facts, arid bits composing diagrams and chunks of colour signifying financial waverings, i.e. just figures, not immaterial values. Overwhelmed by calculus, all strata of society – indistinctively – are now debunked and submitted to the questionable ethics of economic success.