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Bubbles and Bees: Historical Exploration of Psychosocial Thinking

DAVID JONES

Introduction

This paper is written from the belief that there is considerable benefit from a historical exploration of psychosocial thinking. It examines the work of Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), who wrote what became a somewhat infamous piece of social theory in the early decades of the 18th century. There are two principal purposes to this historical study. Firstly, it makes the case that psychosocial thought needs to be understood as products of particular social and cultural circumstances and therefore such reflection can help us put our own efforts to ‘think psychosocially’ in the early 21st century into context. Secondly, there are some important parallels between the early 18th century and the contemporary period that can help us understand more about the resurgence in interest in psychosocial thinking that emerged at the end of the 20th century.

It will be argued that Mandeville was a psychosocial thinker because not only was he interested in the relationship between society and the individual, but he also clearly assumed that society was itself a function of the collective influence of the psyche; he developed a sophisticated form of psychological theorisation that made links between the most intimate, and hidden, emotions such as shame with notions of society and its governance. To understand how Mandeville developed such a view, we need to understand the landscape that he was surveying. Mandeville lived and worked in London when it was witnessing remarkable social changes that would lead to it becoming a global city. Mandeville’s work, I will argue, was shaped by his early 18th century observations of the emergence of what were to become key characteristics of modernity (Ogborn 1998). The social fabric was being altered by the globalised flows of capital that were unleashed by newly emerging international finance markets that fuelled the development of a consumption driven secular society that made its appearance in the 18th century (Berg 2005). There are clear parallels between Mandeville’s time and the early 21st

century. A welter of literature over the past few decades has argued that the degree of flux and fragmentation in the contemporary world means we live in a 'post modern' world. However, as Mckeon (1985) suggests, the picture of life in 18th century London can also lay claim to high levels of change and uncertainty with the early decades witnessing both epistemological and social ruptures as the older orders of religion and sovereignty were being swept away. The English civil wars of the mid-17th century had led to Charles I losing his head in Whitehall, followed in 1689 by the so called 'Glorious Revolution' which deposed James II in favour of the protestant and more democratically inclined and business minded William of Orange. At the very least this was a powerful symbol of the old aristocracy ceding power to a growing middle order which was becoming rich and powerful through trade. Yet the industrial revolution, with its organisation of mass employment leading to identifications with 'class' (particularly amongst a 'working class'), was yet to happen. This was also an era where there was an ever quickening distribution of ideas through the availability of printed material and the slackening of government censorship. It was thus the beginning of an age when everyday experience began to be mediated: books, pamphlets and magazines began to be available on an unprecedented scale (Black 1987). 'Everyday life' (middle class life at least) began to be remarked upon and reflected upon in print. As Watt (1957) argued through his influential thesis of the rise of the novel, the popularity of the novels of Defore, Fielding and others in 18th century signalled major social shifts including the emergence of an individual consciousness of agency. Driven by the pen of Henry Fielding, the personality, whims and flaws of a character, with an inauspicious background like Tom Jones, could sustain a whole novel. Levels of literacy increased enormously, particularly in London. Estimates suggest that female literacy in London rose from around 22% in 1670 to 66% by 1720, whilst English male literacy reached 40% by 1750.¹ George Rousseau (1969) went so far as to argue that the combination of scientific (particularly physiological) exploration and literary endeavour at this time meant that England in the 18th century was the time and place where 'the imagination' as an individual characteristic with corporeal basis was discovered. At the same time that these features of modernity were

¹ http://www.umich.edu/~ecc/student_projects/female_tatler/readership.html. See also R. A. Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500 - 1800

appearing, the organisation and centralisation of health, education, and welfare were for the most part, if not totally undeveloped, existent in nascent form only. It was thus arguably an age before ‘the social’, which Rose (1996) suggests was on its death bed by the end of the 20th century, had come into existence.

However, just as ‘the individual’ was emerging as a significant agent and object of interest, it is also helpful to remember that the assumption that there should be a systematic conceptual separation between the individual and ‘the social’; exemplified by the separate development of the disciplines of sociology and psychology, had also yet to appear. This division can be traced in the work of Comte (1855) and Durkheim (1895) – who despite their own differences shared the view that the sociological world could, indeed should, be studied as separate from the psychological. Durkheim argued most famously that social facts were *sui generis*. The social world to these sociological innovators had a meaning of its own and needed to be understood in its own terms, it could be understood without recourse to psychology or indeed biology. Such division was not envisaged by earlier social theorists, such as Hobbes (1665) or even Rousseau (1862) writing towards the end of the 18th century. Both saw an understanding of individual psychology as central to understanding how society might function. Thus it is perhaps helpful to understand more about what factors might be prompting us to think psychosocially again in the early decades of the 21st century by understanding more about psychosocial thought and the conditions that produced it at a different period – the 18th century in this case. It will be argued that Mandeville’s geographical location in the East of London, can also help us understand the institutional emergence of psychosocial studies in East London, with the first undergraduate programme in psychosocial studies being born towards the end of the 20th century.

Mandeville’s controversial piece of 18th century social theory – the fable of the bees began life as a poem called *The Grumbling Hive* (published in 1705) but grew into a longer treatise through several editions as Mandeville responded to the abundant criticism (Hundert 1994). Mandeville’s writing had considerable impact through the 18th and into the 19th century in such a way that makes his relative

obscurity by the middle of the 20th century worthy of investigation. Bragues (2005) notes that some of the great minds of the 18th and 19th centuries; ‘Joseph Butler, Frances Hutcheson, George Berkeley, Samuel Johnson, David Hume, Adam Smith and Jean Jacques Rousseau took the intellectual challenge posed by Mandeville as sufficiently serious to warrant the attempt to refute him’. (2005:181). Yet, as Hundert (1994: 248) notes Mandeville was ‘completely disregarded by St-Simon, Comte, Durkheim and Weber’, and mentioned only very briefly by Marx (who uses Mandeville to make a satirical point that suggests he missed Mandeville’s own satirical point, see below). It is surely no accident, however, that the fathers of sociology should have little time for Mandeville. They were interested in the study of society as though it could be considered distinctly from the individual. Perhaps as Rose (1996) suggests, there was a thing called ‘society’ in a way that there was not in Mandeville’s time. I will argue here that his work has meaning now as there important parallels between his times and ours.

Mandeville might be an odd choice of writer to champion. His work has been condemned by Hutchinson (1725), and Thorogood (1726) amongst other contemporaries. It was prosecuted by the Grand Jury of Middlesex for its threat to public morality (Dennis 1724). Mandeville’s work was leapt on gleefully by Marx (in Chapter 25 of *Capital*, p1) for his ‘honest and clear headed’ view of capitalism’s need for a poor and ignorant labouring class (in *On Charity Schools*, published as part of *Fable of the Bees* in 1723). More recently he faced the arguably greater ignominy of being applauded by Freidrich Hayek (Hunderdt 1985: 249), the guru of the free market and Margaret Thatcher’s favourite economist.

Mandeville was hated because he seemed to not only present a gloomy view of human nature but also because he appeared to promote and celebrate those aspects of human character that most people lamented – greed, avarice, pride and selfishness - as the foundations of society. There is a reading of some of his work that could be taken as the creed; ‘Greed is good’. Some have tried to rescue Mandeville on the grounds that he was simply being satirical (Harth 1969), and was actually interested in progressive reform. There is surely some truth in the idea that he was satirical, the target of his work was indeed often hypocrisy. As part of the

later development of the fable Mandeville wrote an attack ‘on charity schools’, which could be read as an assault on the idea of educating the poor, but was also at the very least also an exposure of the hypocrisy of those who wanted the kudos of being seen to help to educate the poor, whilst their own wealth depended on there being an ignorant labouring class. It also mocks the idea that religion and education had much to do with each other, and argues for the support of secular university endeavour. Although he became best known for his piece of social theory, Mandeville also wrote popular pamphlets and magazines. He was a regular contributor to innovative (yet short-lived) journal *The Female Tatler*, for example. He was also a physician and wrote on medicine and health – in particular a treatise on hypochondria (1711), which will be discussed later on as this work puts his highly controversial social theory work into context and locates him as a psychosocial writer. For whilst he no doubt wanted his writing to provoke and entertain, there were serious intentions, and I am going to argue that there are aspects of his work that have been relatively overlooked. Mandeville was a physician, who specialised in what we might now call ‘psychiatry’. He wrote about and, from what we know, treated hysteria and hypochondria. It is consideration of this work that puts his social theory into context. His psychological work reveals an acute witness, and Mandeville’s fine grained observations based in his practice puts his social theory into a very different ethical light. It is his bringing together of social observation and fine grained psychological observation that marks him out as a psychosocial writer.

The paper will consist of two further sections. Firstly, there is a description of the social and economic context in which Mandeville was writing. The second section will look more closely at Mandeville’s work, both his social theory, and his ‘psychiatric’ work.

London, Globalisation and the 18th Century: Revolution and the South Sea Bubble
Mandeville was observing London at a crucial and fascinating time. It was, as Roy Porter (2000), put it the birth of the modern world. Arguably his vantage point on the Eastern edge of London was ideal. He was a Dutchman who found a home in the increasingly cosmopolitan London. His home was not in the richer and more

fashionable west end of London but instead was in Hackney. Albeit, this was a prosperous growing 'village' on the edge of East London, but still suggests a perspective that would have promoted awareness of the gritty reality of trade, commerce and poverty. Daniel Defoe that most prolific commentator on 18th century Britain was another 'Hackney writer'. The contrast between East London and the increasingly affluent Westminster and City of London was already well established by the early 18th century but, as Ogborn (1998: 35) notes, the East was already rather more 'global':

The poorest areas north and east of the City were densely populated, dirty and dangerous. People were crowded into poorly built and decaying houses in a labyrinthine cluster of courts and alleys that covered any spare ground behind main streets. Short leases and the absence of guild restrictions meant that foreign immigrants crowded into areas like Spitalfields, while the dominance of the docks and wharves in the east's riverside parishes made them into a separate urban world, as well as one of the places where the world entered London. (Ogborn 1998: 35)

The close relationship between East London and the docks has meant that immigration has been a hallmark of its development. Whilst East London itself has never been the wealthiest part of London, it borders the City of London and its associated financial districts which became during the 18th century amongst the most wealthy and powerful locales in the world. Mandeville was observing, if not the birth of global capitalism then certainly its first notable manifestations. Political changes altered the relationship between government, money and power. Capital began to drive social change at an unprecedented rate. New wealth amassed through trade was able to begin to push aside the old social certainties and change the relationship between the individual and society, ushering in a consumer society. This period witnessed the birth of share dealing and the money markets that grew on a global scale because they were useful to government as they funded the overseas wars that were colonising the world.

Through the so called 'Glorious Revolution' in 1689 the English parliament, that had emerged from the civil wars of some decades earlier as a relatively powerful

force, removed King James II from the throne and invited in William of Orange from Holland to take the throne. It was conceivably a more remarkable shift of power than that symbolised by the literal decapitation of Charles I several decades earlier; as in the so called 1689 Glorious Revolution:

. . . the nation had joined together to depose another rightful monarch and to exclude the next fifty-seven prospective heirs to the throne. In their place was crowned a foreigner, and in the place of sovereignty by genealogical inheritance was affirmed sovereignty by achievement . . . (Mckeen 1985:176)

Whilst historians can still debate the exact whys and wherefores of the removal of James, in part he was removed as he was seen as too Catholic and too wedded to monarchical power, and not sufficiently ambitious to see England extend its power (Miller 1983). William of Orange was Protestant and happier to work with parliament that had designs for England becoming a more significant global power. William and parliament's wish for more control over territory overseas led to expensive wars being fought at considerable distance overseas. These wars were funded by credit and it was this Government borrowing that provided the crucial impetus to the growth of the City of London as a financial centre at the heart of the global money markets. The Bank of England was created in 1694 in order to administer Government finances and manage the national debt. The initial deal that set up the Bank of England was a much needed loan to the Government. By the beginning of the 18th century, the chief mechanism for raising credit was through share dealing. It was Government need for funds that grasped hold of this mechanism and fuelled it so that it grew into a huge monster.

Share dealing, that came to be associated with several coffee houses grouped near Exchange Alley, became a feature of London life in the 1690s. It was immanently tied up with globalisation and colonisation because an important engine of the growth of share dealing was the share markets used to fund the expensive colonial voyages. Individuals could buy a share in a voyage, the money being used to fund the initial hiring, stocking and crewing of the ship. Such shares could then be re-sold for greater or lesser sums according to reports of the voyage. Individual shareholders would then own a share of the profits when their ship came in. The

voyaging companies (such as the East India Trading Company) funded by share trading, were the instruments of British Empire as they were not merely trading but they were effectively doing the colonising (India in the case of the East India Trading Co, e.g. Sutton 2000, Robins 2006). They, of course, played an enormous role in the slave trade.

Government desire for credit latched onto stock trading which led in 1720 to the iconic ‘South Sea Bubble’ arguably the first major international stock market crash (which continues to provoke debate, eg, Temin and Voth 2004). Dugaw (1998:44) suggests this was ‘a notable moment in history [w]ith it the Early Modern World slips below the horizon and our Modern World of venture capitalism comes into view’. The South Sea Company was a shipping company that traded to the South Americas. Its trading activities were to be dwarfed by its activity in the financial markets. With the encouragement of the Government the South Sea Company bought, through a series of deals, the total Government debt (of eventually tens of millions of pounds). The Government were committed to paying back this massive loan at a substantial rate of interest. The South Sea Company raised the money themselves by selling shares in this ‘debt’ – clearly it seemed to be a solid investment given that the government were guaranteeing the loan. However, things did not stop there. Shares in the South Sea Company were sold and re-sold, second and third issues of shares were made, all accompanied by fairly wild speculation and the hyping of the value of those shares. Huge claims were made about the wealth and power of the company and what plans it had. At the beginning of 1720 a share was worth the very considerable sum of £128, by the middle of summer they were selling for around £1000. Clearly people made fortunes – potentially getting 7 or 8 times their investment within a 6 month period. There are tales of many ordinary people selling what they had to pile onto this gravy train. The problem was that it was indeed a bubble. There was ultimately no real substance to this value. The value of the shares in the South Sea Company rose because people thought, or hoped that they would carry on rising, but of course they did not. And when faith was lost the value of the shares collapsed (Balen 2002, describes the bubble in some detail).

Despite the disastrous consequences for some individuals, enthusiasm for share dealing continued. In some ways the legislation after the bubble led to the greater institutionalisation of share and stock dealing (Schubert 1988). Share dealing began to shape the development of London itself. Daniel Defoe (that other resident of Hackney): ruefully noted the extent of the influence on London:

That many thousands of families are so deeply concerned in those Stocks, and find it absolutely necessary to be at hand to take advantage of buying and selling, . . . they find themselves obliged to come up and live here constantly here, or at least most part of the year. This is the reason why notwithstanding the encrease of new buildings, and the Addition of new cities, as they may be called, every year to the old, yet a house is no sooner built, but 'tis tenanted and inhabited, and every part is crowded with people, and that not only in the town, but in all the Towns and Villages round . . .

Defoe foresaw this property boom collapsing if the Government were to get its finances in order and thus no longer required credit on this scale. Defoe was not the only one to be concerned about the scale of change driven by the rapid accumulation of wealth. There were widespread anxieties about the social order, as the older certainties about where authority lay – in the monarch, the aristocracy, the church – were falling away. Questions were asked about the location of authority. How could a civil society be ordered, as these new forces of capital and globalisation swept older certainties away?

So, around the early decades the 18th century in London, just as Mandeville wrote his fable of the bees, we have here a potent and strangely familiar brew. As Schubert (1988) argued the deregulation of the London finance markets that funded the development of Canary Wharf in the 1980s 'bears striking similarities to that of the early 18th century'. Then capital became a global force in its own right. British trading companies were at the fore front as a globalising force as they explored, carved up, and controlled huge and far flung parts of the globe from India, to the South East to the Americas in the West. Yet, as the bubble had clearly demonstrated this wealth and power was distinctly unstable, driven as it was by human action; aspiration, dreams and follies.

Globalisation was becoming visible on the streets of London – fabrics, spices, new materials and furnishings from overseas were becoming available and transforming life for a growing middle class (Berg 2005). Prominent voices predicted that these new waves of wealth would lead to doom. The celebrated physician George Cheyne (1733) argued in *The English Malady* that the wealth of England was putting its health at risk. The affluent classes were becoming ever more prone to hysteria and melancholy due to the excess of rich food and drink alongside luxuriant and decadent living. The third Earl of Shaftesbury, the aristocratic parliamentarian holding various government positions (part of a considerable dynasty of aristocratic reformers) wrote on morality and virtue in the early years of the 18th century. Something of a foil to Mandeville, Shaftesbury held an optimistic view of humanity and argued that there was such a thing as a natural ‘moral sense’, that given the right influences individuals would develop in such a way that it was bound to lead to virtuous behaviour. His work was taken up and used by thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith to oppose the more pessimistic outlooks of those such as Hobbes and Mandeville. Yet Shaftesbury, like many of his day, was troubled by the degree of wealth they saw growing around them. He saw danger in the luxurious living of the wealthy and argued that it was essential that the wealthy, the newly emerging money men, set the moral tone for the rest of society. If they were lazy and indolent then they would set that standard for the ‘lower orders’². So instead it was essential, he argued, that the ruling classes showed self-discipline in their behaviour. They should still work regularly, be restrained in their habits and avoid the temptations of the consumer culture around them which would lead to indolence and vice.

Bernard Mandeville and The Grumbling Hive

It was into this environment that Bernard Mandeville was writing. Whilst we do not know a great deal about Mandeville, like many East Londoners he came from elsewhere in the world. He was Baptised in 1670 in Rotterdam – his family lived in a village nearby. He attended school in Rotterdam and then University at Leyden,

² *An inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit.* Book 2, Section 1, Characteristics, 1711

studying philosophy before training in medicine. He set up practice specialising in ‘hypochondriak and hysteric passions’ – thus arguably he was a ‘proto-psychiatrist’. He visited London, decided to stay, marrying in 1693 and having at least 2 children. By the time of his death he was living in Hackney but apart from that we know few facts.

Mandeville expressed the view that individuals were driven, not by reason, but by their passions in ways that they were not always aware. This itself was controversial enough, but what was more troubling was that he argued that these passions; the often rather seemingly anti-social passions were essential to the functioning of society. Indeed they were important to the social ‘good’; however paradoxical that claim might seem. This observation was playfully explored through *The Grumbling Hive or Knaves turned honest* a piece of ‘doggerel’ verse published initially in pamphlet form in 1705. It used the rather thin metaphor of a hive of bees to describe the thriving society he saw around him. Mandeville’s paradox was that the hive appears to happily thrive despite the fact that it was fuelled by vice and populated with knaves at every level. The hive had its openly criminal classes; pimps, pick-pockets, coiners, and quacks, but Mandeville goes further to describe villains in every profession:

The grave Industrious were the Same.
All Trades and Places knew some Cheat,
No Calling was without Deceit

There were the lawyers who made money by finding loopholes in the law. There were physicians ‘who valued Fame and Wealth; Above the drooping Patient's Health’. There were the many ‘thousands’ of priests who simply hid ‘Their Sloth, Lust, Avarice and Pride’ whilst earning a living by moralising to others. Whilst poking fun at the at the hypocrisy of the respectable classes, his fundamental point was that society was actually being sustained by the grubbier passions of individuals; trade and industry depended on consumption, which itself was driven by the pride, greed, vanity, lust and envy of ordinary ‘bees’:

Luxury Employ'd a Million of the Poor,
And odious Pride a Million more:

Envy it self, and Vanity,
Were Ministers of Industry;

Mandeville imagines his hive deciding to get rid of all vice, as prescribed by the many grumbling moralists and theorists (such as Shaftesbury). In Mandeville's hypothesised future the hive ground to a halt. Suddenly crime stopped, debtors paid their debts, and so the lawyers, the gaolers, the lock-makers were out of work. People wore clothes until they were worn out, which made the material traders, the dressmakers, and the tailors redundant. The demand for fashionable new furnishing, novel kinds of food and wines dries up, and so the voyaging companies go bust. The very rich no longer feeling the need to demonstrate their wealth had no need for grander houses and so the builders and stonecutters were soon in need of other work. More modest homes had no need for such numbers of domestic staff. Even the taverns grow quiet as everyone had less to spend. People began to live within their means so they no longer needed to borrow money, so the banks lose their income and thus can no longer fund the operations of Government, who can no longer fund an army. Eventually the hive falls apart.

Over the next two decades Mandeville went on to expand and develop the ideas in the poem – through a detailed series of remarks that are a line by line commentary on the poem and also by various essays – including 'An Inquiry into moral virtue'. So by 1723, three years after the south sea bubble it is a considerable book with a far more serious edge. The subtitle is now 'private vices, public benefits', indicative of the central paradox being on how public virtue might be maintained despite the ubiquity of individual vice.

The Psychology of Bernard Mandeville

Mandeville's economic and social theories has been picked over many times. Yet Mandeville's critics and perhaps even more importantly his supporters have overlooked his medical psychological work. There is another work by Mandeville, far less well known than the fable of the bees, called *The treatise of the hypochondriack and the hysteric passions* published in 1711 (this was once again published in the 1970s as part of a 'History of Psychiatry Reprint'). The treatise

consists mainly of a dialogue between a patient and a physician. The patient is a hypochondriac amongst other things. The physician, presumably Mandeville, listens comments and philosophises on his role as a physician. In many ways this represents a kind of talking cure – the physician in the case is reluctant to prescribe any more medicine as he feels overconsumption is part of the problem. Indeed his patient's symptoms first emerge around consumption; he suffers heartburn and then constipation. But later the 'cruel distemper had now likewise invaded my soul, as before it had tyranniz'd over my body' (26). He begins to be affected by headaches, poor sleeping and rather paranoid dreams : '[I] lay tossing whole nights in a thousand fears and anxieties; without closing my eyes; or if I did, I either dream'd of being Robb'd, or attempted to be murder'd, or else falling from a Precipice, Drowning or being hanged' (treatise p25)

The physician treats by listening and talking, as his patient approvingly comments some while into their first session:

One thing above the rest I admire in you, and that's your patience, which must be unaffected, because you can be gay in the exercise of it. You can't imagine, how a pertinent lively discourse, or any thing that is sprightly, revives my spirits. I don't know what it is that makes me so, whether it be our talking together, the serenity of the Air, or both; but I enjoy abundance of pleasure, and this moment me thinks I am as well as ever I was in my life . . . (treatise :45)

This publication throws considerable light on Mandeville's work. It gives a very different ethical perspective and also points us toward how detailed Mandeville was being in his work as observer of the individual. The treatise was published after the poem the grumbling hive, but before the later developments that formed the Fable of the bees. As he went on to develop his ideas in the Fable of the Bees, he makes observation on the phenomenology of the passions and the role they play in social conduct that are quite remarkable. What also emerges in his treatise is a statement of methodology and ethics. He is very critical of the way he perceived the medical profession to be developing. He suggests that his medical colleagues were being drawn away from observation and practice as they were seduced by the world of

theory and abstraction that was far more likely to lead to fame and fortune, but would do little for the patient or for understanding.

He argues that the studies of Latin, Logick, philosophy, anatomy, botany, and chemistry that were involved in becoming a qualified physician, whilst important, no more qualified someone to actually help others than the study of optics and paint might qualify someone as an artist. He goes on to say that whilst those studies are necessary:

.. they only make up the Easie, the Pleasant, the speculative part of the Physick: the Tedious, the difficult, but the only useful, in regard of others, the practical part which is not attempted by many, is only attain'd by an almost everlasting attendance on the sick, unwearied patience and Judicious as well as Diligent observation. . . . (32)

Such detailed work was likely 'too severe, unpleasing and tiresome' compared to the 'renown and riches' that might be achieved by gaining expertise in a narrow area of knowledge (treatise: 32). Mandeville goes on to make the case for the importance of fine detailed observation:

Tis observation, plain Observation without descanting or reasoning upon it that makes the Art, and all, that neglecting this main point have strove to embellish it with the Fruits of their brain, have but cramp't and confounded it.

Young physicians, in contrast, would find that spending time with patients 'would not only be too laborious, but a tedious way of getting' as 'self interest now gives better lessons to young physicians' (treatise: 35). The emphasis on the importance of observation has many parallels with a range of contemporary psychosocial writers (the development of 'practice near' research being particularly notable, eg Froggett and Biggs 2009, and see Clarke and Hoggett 2009).

It is only possible for me to guiltily agree that giving papers at conferences, writing books and papers can be so much more narcissistically rewarding compared to the more tedious details of everyday practice – for me that is giving feedback to students, marking essays, running seminars and tutorials. However, it seems to me

the best psychosocial work is based on time consuming, detailed observation, analysis of individuals, of films and texts; the point being that it is in the most intimate detail there are sometimes the most important, social processes. And of course Mandeville makes an ethical point that the small scale, ‘tedious’ things we do for clients, patients, students, (friends families) are also perhaps the most important.

Whatever one thinks of Mandeville’s ethical stance on celebrity and practice here, the results of Mandeville’s observations – his phenomenology is I think remarkable.

The Phenomenology of the Passions: the significance of ambivalence

Mandeville revels in paradox and ambivalence. One noteworthy observation he makes concerns how passions themselves can be mixed and ambivalent:

the more a passion is a compound of many others, the more difficult it is to define it, and the more it is tormenting to those that labour under it, the greater cruelty it is capable of inspiring them with against others. Therefore nothing is more whimsical or mischievous than jealousy, which is made up of Love, Hope, Fear and a great deal of Envy . . . (the fable: 141)

Envy itself, of course, he saw as a significant motor of the economy. He further defines Envy as ‘a compound of Grief and Anger’ (p135) - as we feel sorrow for what we have not got, and anger with those that do. Mandeville observed how everyone had ‘been carried away by’ envy at some point in their lives, yet he had never met anyone admit that they ever felt envy. Despite the ubiquity of the feeling, it seemed that people were too ashamed to admit it. As Mandeville developed his social theory this powerful feeling of shame shifted towards the heart of his theorization of government.

The Psychosocial Significance of Shame

Shame became crucial to Mandeville’s theory of how government controlled their populations. Mandeville defined shame in terms that are recognisable today:

a sorrowful Reflexion on our own Unworthiness, proceeding from an Apprehension that others either do, or might, if they know all, deservedly despise us. (p57)

Mandeville argued that ‘wise governments’ had noticed the power of shame and pride and had made the manipulation of these fundamental to governance. His writing on shame is detailed. It is interesting that he picks on shame as being significant at that time. Shame has of course become a relatively fashionable topic in the last 20 years or so, but had previously been neglected (Pattison 2000). Even psychoanalysis which takes as its subject matter the intimate emotions had not been concerned with shame much until perhaps 30 years or so ago (Thrane 1979). Yet, here was Mandeville writing about shame, linking it with pride and implicitly to ideas of identity. Whilst this might say something about Mandeville’s prescience, it arguably also says something about the parallels with his time and ours.

Mandeville’s phenomenology of the experience of shame is detailed:

When a man is overwhelm’d with shame, he observes a sinking of the spirits; the heart feels cold and condensed, and the blood flies from it to the Circumference of the Body; the face glows, the neck and Part of the breast partake of the Fire: He is heavy as lead; the Head is hung down, and the eyes through a mist of confusion are fix’d on the Ground: No injurious can move him; he is weary of his being; and heartily wishes he could make himself invisible . . . (fable: p67)

If Mandeville’s attention to shame is remarkable, then his emphasis on shame as an instrument of governance (some 200 years before Norbert Elias was putting his thesis on the civilising process together) is even more so:

It is incredible how necessary an Ingredient Shame is to make us sociable; it is a frailty in our nature; all the world, whenever it affects them, submit to it with regret, and would prevent it if they could; yet the happiness of conversation depends upon it, and no society can be polished, if the generality of Mankind were not subject to it . . . (fable: 68)

As individuals we would like to conquer shame, but society makes sure that we are brought up to experience shame³,

. . . therefore from his infancy throughout his Education, we endeavour to increase instead of lessening or destroying this Sense of shame; and the only Remedy prescrib'd, is a strict Observance of certain rules to avoid those things that might bring this troublesome sense of shame upon him. But as to rid or cure him of it, the politician would sooner take away his life.

There are two particular aspects of Mandeville's work that are appealing here. Firstly the fact that he is clearly putting forward a psychosocial argument that 'society' is not divisible from the psychological; and secondly the belief that it was through rigorous observation and self knowledge that we reach a better understanding of ourselves. Such reflection might ultimately achieve a certain amount of liberation from our, not always helpful, passions and may move us a little closer to virtue. As he rather ruefully remarks towards the end of one of the later editions of the fable, having had his work so thoroughly condemned:

Now I cannot see what immorality there is in shewing a Man the Origin and Power of the those Passions, which so often, even unknowingly to himself, hurry him away from his Reason ; or that there is any impiety in putting him upon his Guard against himself, and the secret Strategems of Self-Love, and teaching him the difference between such actions as proceed from a Victory over the Passions obtained over another; that is, between Real and Counterfeited virtue . . . What hurt do I do to Man if I make him more known to himself than he was before? (Fable: P255 Remark T)

³ Mandeville notes particular gender differences in the way shame is inculcated: 'Miss is scarcely 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 the Little Master at the same age is bid to take up his coats, and piss like a man.'

Fable :72

Conclusion: The Ambivalent View From East London

There are good reasons to view Mandeville as a psychosocial theorist. He believed that society was, in part at least, constructed by the inner (often hidden) workings of the minds of individuals. He also theorised that ‘government’ operated by manipulating those intimate and hidden feelings; notably shame. He was deeply aware of the ambivalence of modernity, which emerges no more strongly in this passage from letter to Dion where he notes the degree of hardship and cruelty being brought about though the demands of consumers for new kinds of goods: for different consumption and trade (that his view over East London would have well afforded) –

When we are thoroughly acquainted with all the variety of Toil and Labour, the Hardships and Calamities, that must be undergone to compass the End I speak of, and we consider the vast risques and perils that are run in those voyages, and that few of them are ever made, but at the expence, not only of the Health and Welfare, but even the Lives of Many: when we are acquainted with, I say and duely consider the things I named, it is scarce possible to conceive a Tyrant so inhuman and void of Shame, that beholding things in the same view, he should exact such terrible Services from his innocent slaves, and at the same time dare to own, that he did it for no other Reason, than the Satisfaction a Man receives from having a Garment made of Scarlet or Crimson cloth (letter to Dion:69)

Mandeville with a view over East London was in a good position to be very aware of the cruel paradoxes of modernity and a consumer society. Viewed from the University of East London the parallels between Mandeville’s time and ours seem striking. East London lies in the shadow of Canary Wharf, that late 20th century confident symbol of the power of capital, built in the wake of the de-regulation of the money markets in 1986. Yet now we, along with many parts of the globe, may continue to live in the shadow of the banking crisis that occurred in the summer and autumn of 2008 for some time. The fall out from that crisis threatens considerable upheaval as we are all left to ponder on the relationship between government, debt, war, global finance banking and our own livelihoods.

Perhaps it is no accident that the first, and thus far still unique, undergraduate programme, dedicated to Psychosocial Studies (begun in the mid 1980s) should be in East London. East London has arguably been at the forefront of a number of important social and cultural shifts that have required a psychosocial perspective. These shifts are connected to globalisation and the development of capitalism itself that Mandeville was observing. East London was arguably uniquely placed to have experienced the impact of these intertwined developments due its proximity to the Docks and to the City of London. Its location has meant that immigration has been entirely immanent to the social fabric of East London for several centuries at the very least. It is unlikely that people come to East London for the view or the good air, but more likely the hope of work and wealth. Whilst the docks no longer have the influence they did, the legacy of mass immigration continues. The vast majority of the students of Psychosocial Studies at the University of East London today are an embodiment of the forces of globalisation. In one sense they are 'local' in that they are East Londoners, but in other senses they are 'global'; they have close family roots in different parts of the world. They have roots, for example, in Africa, the Caribbean, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. They are part of a globalised population making lives in highly diverse communities. There are over 100 different languages spoken in the local London Borough of Newham, for example. Perhaps there is no wonder that there is an attraction to psychosocial thinking as a way of trying to make sense of ourselves and the world around us, where that very diversity makes issues of identity, meaning and belonging far more open to question and uncertainty. Students of psychosocial studies are also usually interested, of course, in their careers, they want better jobs – but very often the careers they are interested in are those that involve working with people. On the one hand this doubtless again reflects the economic reality of the shift from industrial employment towards the service and care industries. On the other hand there is also a concern there with 'virtue'; the wish to perhaps try, in a very direct way, work to make the world a better place. Academic psychosocial work at UEL has been shaped by these practical concerns. The work tends to be more concerned with identifiable social questions, rather than more abstract questions of the nature of the psychosocial world.

Of course psychosocial thinking now has wider resonance, certainly in the UK. It is arguable that we have we again entered a period where the relationship between the individual and society has become as problematic as it was in Mandeville's time. Mandeville's solution was that government should construct pride and shame to bring about public virtue. The academic interest (notably criminological interest, eg Braithewaite 1989) in shame suggests that shame has again come to the fore as a social force. Perhaps we have been through times where that relationship was more arbitrated by 'the social' structures provided by the welfare state and the relatively cohesive groupings of industrial economies. Post-industrial, and increasingly post welfare as the fiscal crisis leads to retrenchment of welfare policies, we now live in more individualised times where each of us is more exposed and prone to shame. Whether this is likely to lead to public benefits remains to be seen.

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