

came to be seen as the direct products of the individual striving and the material achievements associated with the projecting spirit and the commercial age.

The social implications of the broadening quest for economic returns and increased politeness championed by the authors of both the economic and improvement literatures were most fully explored during the early eighteenth century not by Defoe or Addison and Steele but by their contemporary, Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733). Mandeville was a Dutch doctor who was so taken with England when he visited in the mid-1690s that he married an Englishwoman and settled there permanently. In his controversial poem *The Fable of the Bees*, first published in London in 1705 and then reissued with a long prose introduction in 1714, Mandeville proposed a theory of social process and organization that was based upon a candid acceptance of the vices and passions of men. In this effort, he consciously built upon the insights of French moralists such as Jacques Esprit (1611–78), whose *Discourses upon the Deceitfulness of Human Virtues*\* was first published in Paris in 1678 and republished in translation in London in 1706; Francois, Duc de la Rochefoucauld (1613–80), whose *Maxims*,\* first issued in Paris in 1665, was published in English translation in 1694; Jean de la Fontaine (1621–95), portions of whose *Fables Choiesies* (Logan), which appeared in five volumes in Paris in 1678–94, were translated by Mandeville and published as *Some Fables after the Easier and Familiar Manner of Monsieur de la Fontaine* (London, 1703); and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), whose *Dictionary, Historical and Critical*,\* initially published in 1695–97, was issued in English translation in 1710.

Mandeville put his central thesis succinctly in the subtitle to the 1714 edition of *The Fable of the Bees*: “Private Vices, Public Benefits.” Not everybody in the British intellectual and political world of the early eighteenth century shared Defoe’s optimism about the new order. Rather, a significant proportion of informed opinion, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, thought that commerce discouraged virtue and public spirit and viewed the commercial developments of the era and the self-interested behavior they seemed to produce as powerful evidences of social corruption. In reply to these critics of the new order, Mandeville, following the French moralists, developed the radical and highly iconoclastic argument that the avarice, pursuit of self-interest, luxurious consumption, and political corruption associated with the new order actually produced beneficial results by employing millions and contributing to social prosperity. Beginning with the assumption that man was

selfish by nature and social only by necessity, Mandeville not only suggested that vice and self-interest, which were basic to human nature, produced the same results as virtue and public spirit, which were unnatural to man and had to be learned; he also argued that vice, in the form of self-interest, luxury, and corruption, was the necessary foundation for prosperity in commercial societies.

One of the earliest social analysts to appreciate the significance of the unintended consequence, Mandeville thus located the basis of social advancement and national prosperity in the energy of self-interest. In the process, he went further than any of his contemporaries in uncovering the implicit values and underlying assumptions of the new socio-economic order. But his categorical denial that virtue and public spiritedness were compatible with a commercial society based on self-interest and his dismissal of the concept of a virtuous society as a “romantic fancy” ensured that for the rest of the eighteenth century his work, like that of Hobbes a half-century earlier, would be primarily known as a target for its critics. However accurately he described the workings of the new social order that had come into being in early modern England and had always characterized the vast majority of the new English societies that had grown up in America, it was not until the development of utilitarian thought at the end of the eighteenth century that many people were willing to concede the force of his insights. Not surprisingly, the Library Company of Philadelphia contained no copy of *The Fable of the Bees* at the time of the Philadelphia Convention.

By contrast, the more benign manifestation of the individualistic ethos in the improvement literature that continued to be published in quantity throughout the eighteenth century and was highly influential among upwardly mobile Americans was well-represented in the holdings of that institution. This literature consisted of three related genres. First were the many practical treatises designed to increase economic productivity like William Ellis (1700–58), *A Complete System of Experienced Improvements*\* (London, 1749), which advised farmers on techniques for raising sheep; John Randall (1727–64), *Semi-Vergilian Husbandry; Or an Essay Towards a New Course of National Farming*\* (London, 1764); Arthur Young (1741–1820), *A Course of Experimental Agriculture*\* (London, 1770); and the multi-volume *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale; Or Select Papers on Agriculture, Commerce, Arts and Manufactures*\* (London, 1764–66), published by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (later the Royal Society of Arts). Second was the advice literature, manuals of