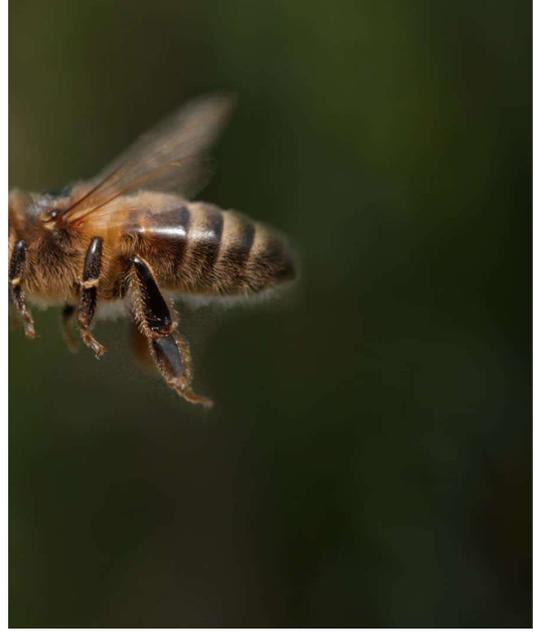


Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*

A Plea for Veganism

Burak Sezer



Bernard Mandeville (1670 – 1733)



- Matriculated at University of Leyden (1685), student of medicine, specializing in "Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases" (concerning the stomach)
- "neither a *Saint* in his Life, nor a *Hermit* in his Diet. . ." (xxi)
- He calls alcohol "this Liquid Poison" (*Fable* 89);
- Not a (strict) vegan. He gave Lord Macclesfield dietary counseling: "Is this ragout wholesome, Dr. Mandeville? May I venture to taste the stewed carp?" "Does it agree with your lordship, and do you like it?" "Yes." "Then eat moderately and it *must* be wholesome" (xvii)
- He knew the young Benjamin Franklin, Franklin spoke positively about him (xxix)

The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits (1705)

THE
F A B L E
OF THE
B E E S:
OR,
Private Vices, Publick Benefits.
By
BERNARD MANDEVILLE.

With a Commentary
Critical, Historical, and Explanatory by
F. B. KAYE

The FIRST VOLUME

OXFORD:
At the Clarendon Press
MDCCLXXIV

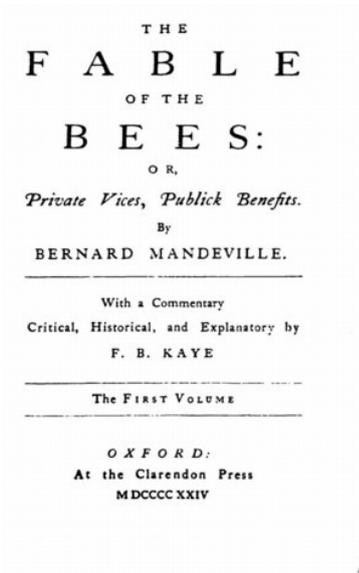
- Took Mandeville twenty-four years (xxxiii)
- First published anonymously as *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* (that's the poem)
- In 1714, "the original poem was followed by a prose commentary" (xxxiii)
- Some further amendments and editions in the 1720s
- The book was immediately considered scandalous and became a "public nuisance" (xxxiv)
- Became well known in the US in the early 1800s (xxxvi)

Mandeville's Thought



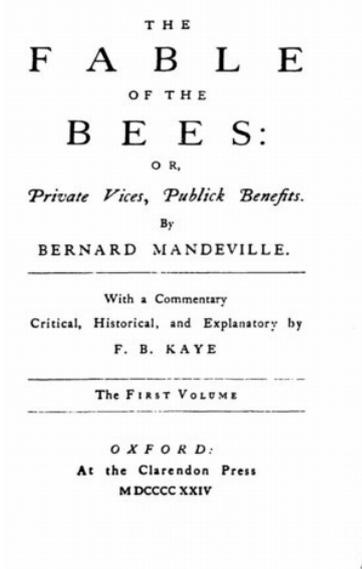
- Deeply influenced by Scepticism (as championed by Michel de Montaigne, Pico della Mirandola, and Pierre Bayle)
- Champions "Rigorism" (a mixture of asceticism and rationalism)
 - "Thus he combined an ascetic with a rationalistic creed. No contradiction was involved, for to Mandeville, in accord with much contemporary thought, purely rational conduct was action in no wise dictated by emotion or natural impulse; and, therefore, both aspects of Mandeville's definition equally proclaimed all conduct vicious which was not the result of a complete denial of one's emotional nature – true virtue being unselfish and dispassionate" (xlvi-xlviii)
- Mandeville's critique: nowhere is any semblance of this rigor to be found: "He discovered, search as he would, no actions – even the most beneficial – dictated entirely by reason and quite free from selfishness" (xlviii)
- Mandeville sought to cleave the moral value of human conduct in two parts (that usually are wedded): "Private Actions" are judged *deontologically* (and there is always a kernel of selfishness), but they give rise to "Public Benefits" (which are judged by the scheme of *utilitarianism*)

The Grumbling Hive; or Knaves Turn'd Honest



- Mandeville starts with an allegory of a luxurious and thriving bee-hive, in which every bee is a "King" (17)
- But to "supply / Each other's Lust and Vanity" (18) the hive grows more and more complex; division of labor ensues
- Some are doomed, then, to operate as "Parasites, Pimps, Players" (19), the *Knaves*, that leech off of their neighbor's honest toil
- Mandeville's interesting move is, however, to show how "Lawyers," "Physicians," "Priests," etc. do also evince comparable character traits of selfishness as the *Knaves*;
- Mandeville's poem points to how the "Dirt" of these dark schemes and vices does not spoil, but rather "enrich the Ground" (23); virtue also symbiotically becomes sturdier by learning from vice a "Thousand Cunning Tricks" (24)
- "Thus every part was full of Vice / yet the whole Mass a Paradise" (24)
- But had they not experienced such vice, all luxuriousness and collaboration would have likewise vanished.

Remark on Poem



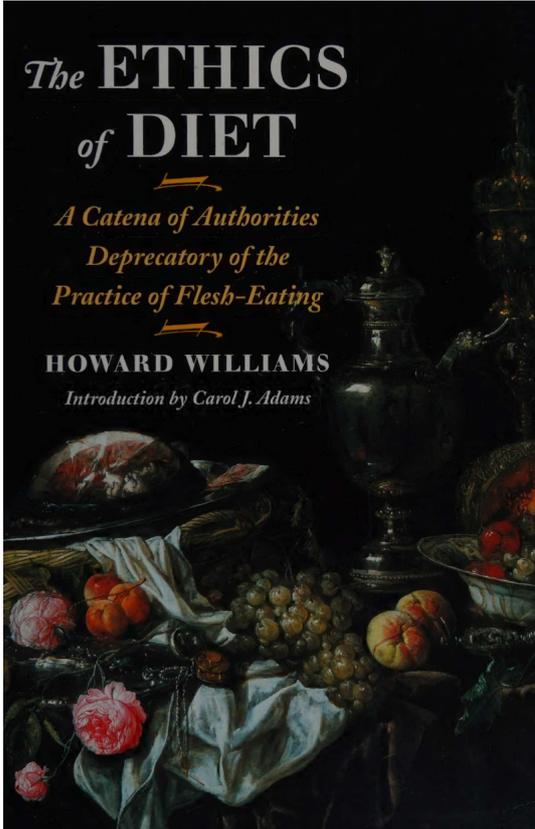
- “Another Piece of Luxury the Poor enjoy, that is not look’d upon as such, and which there is no doubt but the Wealthiest in a Golden Age would abstain from, is their making use of the Flesh of Animals to eat” (172)
- “And if the Gods have given you a Superiority over all Creatures, then beg you of an Inferior?” (177)

The ETHICS of DIET

*A Catena of Authorities
Deprecatory of the
Practice of Flesh-Eating*

HOWARD WILLIAMS

Introduction by Carol J. Adams



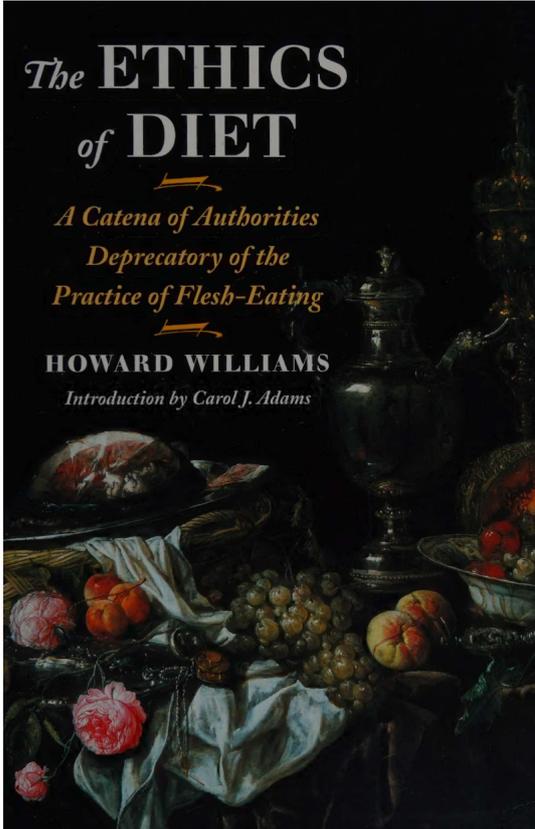
"I have often if it was not for the tyranny which Custom usurps over us, that men of any tolerable good nature could never be reconciled to the killing of so many animals for their daily food, so long as the bountiful Earth so plentifully provides them with varieties of vegetable dainties. I know that Reason excites our compassion but faintly, and therefore I do not wonder how men should so little commiserate such imperfect creatures as cray-fish, oysters, cockles, and, indeed, all fish in general, as they are mute, and their inward formation, as well as outward figure, vastly different from ours: they express themselves unintelligibly to us, and therefore 'tis not strange that their grief should not affect our understanding which it cannot reach ; for nothing stirs us to pity so effectually as when the symptoms of misery strike immediately upon our senses, and I have seen people moved at the noise a live lobster makes upon the spit who could have killed half a dozen fowls with pleasure. [David Foster Wallace] But in such perfect animals as Sheep and Oxen, in whom the heart, the brain, and the nerves differ so little from ours, and in whom the separation of the spirits from the blood, the organs of sense, and, consequently, feeling itself, are the same as they are in human creatures, I cannot imagine how a man not hardened in blood and massacre, is able to see a violent death, and the pangs of it, without concern.

The ETHICS of DIET

*A Catena of Authorities
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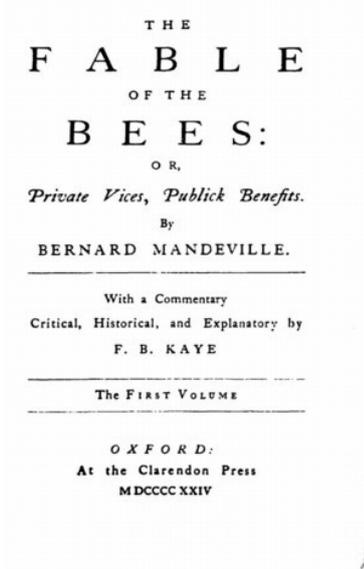
HOWARD WILLIAMS

Introduction by Carol J. Adams

The book cover features a detailed still life illustration. In the foreground, a white cloth is draped over a table, holding a variety of fresh produce including red and yellow apples, a bunch of purple and green grapes, and several red roses. To the left, a platter holds a roasted bird, possibly a chicken or turkey. In the background, a silver chalice or goblet stands on a small stand, and other plates of food are visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the food and the folds of the cloth against a dark, shadowy background.

In answer to this, most people will think it sufficient to say that things being allowed to be made for the service of man, there can be no cruelty in putting creatures to the use they were designed for, but I have heard men make this reply, while the nature within them has reproached them with the falsehood of the assertion. There is of all the multitude not one man in ten but will own (if he has not been brought up in a slaughter-house) that of all trades he could never have been a butcher; and I question whether ever anybody so much as killed a chicken without reluctancy the first time. Some people are not to be persuaded to taste of any creatures they have daily seen and been acquainted with while they were alive; others extend their scruples no further than to their own poultry, and refuse to eat what they fed and took care of themselves; yet all of them feed heartily and without remorse on beef, mutton, and fowls when they are bought in the market. In this behaviour, methinks, there appears something like a consciousness of guilt ; it looks as if they endeavoured to save themselves from the imputation of a crime (which they know sticks somewhere) by removing the cause of it as far as they can from themselves ; and I discover in it some strong marks of primitive pity and innocence, which all the arbitrary power of Custom, and the violence of Luxury, have not yet been able to conquer

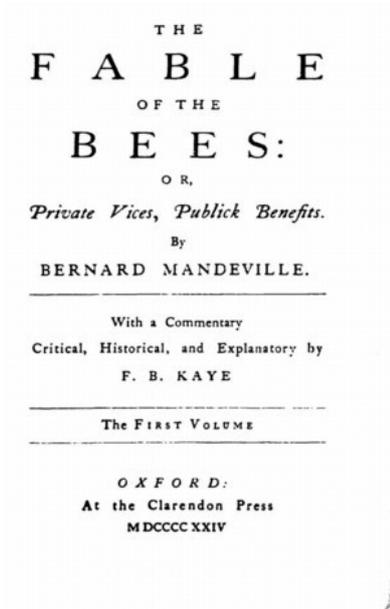
Vegan Potentials of the Poem *The Grumbling Hive; or Knaves Turn'd Honest*



“Yet we’ve no Engines, Labourers,
Ships, Castles, arms, Artificers,
Craft, Science, Shop, or Instrument,
But they had an Equivalent” (18) – bees are like humans!

Get away from purism! (even if it is spoiled by a smidgeon of selfishness, Mandeville is antitode to anyone who seeks to exploit that to discredit the entire movement; example: streets of London)

The Usefulness of Mandeville for Veganism



- His **paradox-loving, custom-shattering** attitude is perhaps an effective conceit to critique the ossified position of carnism;
- Get away from “**purism**”! (even if it is spoiled by a tad of selfishness, Mandeville is useful to argue against anyone who seeks to exploit the fact of **the flawedness of a 100% pure veganism** to discredit the entire movement; *example: streets of London*)



Franklin said: Mandeville is a “most facetious and entertaining companion”

Mandeville is perhaps an interesting figure to trace the vegan movement in America (perhaps relevant for our panel in Bologna, useful to keep in mind)

Richard Watson, *Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishing, 2007): the following lengthy quote is provided (and considering that Richard Watson was one of the most authoritative figures in Cartesian scholarship, I do think that source is quite reliable). However, Watson says nothing about how he retrieved the words of Malebranche

"While Père Malebranche and his friends were walking along, a pregnant dog came fawning up to them. Père Malebranche knelt down to fondle her. Then, making sure his friends had their eyes upon him, he stood up, pulled back his cassock, and kicked the poor animal in the stomach as hard as he could. The dog ran yelping down the street, and Père Malebranche's companions exclaimed in horror. Then Père Malebranche hardened his voice, and this is the essence of what he said: Fie on ye! Restrain yourselves. That dog is nothing but a machine. Rub it there, it scratches. Whistle, it comes. Kick it, it yelps and runs away. There is a button to push and a mechanism for each of its actions. It is nothing but a machine. Save your compassion for human souls" (11-12). It is further remarkable that La Fontaine was walking with Malebranche in exactly that scene ("Père Malebranche was strolling down the rue St. Jacques chatting with a group of his friends that included La Fontaine, the writer of those great animal fables" (p. 11).