The Enigma of the Will: Sade's Psychology of Evil

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Scholars have traditionally taken the Marquis de Sade to be a straightforward advocate of immoral hedonism. Without rejecting outright this view, I argue that Sade also presents a theory of the psychology of pleasure, placing him amongst the more insightful psychological thinkers of the late 18th century. This paper outlines Sade's description of the immoral will, in particular his account of how an agent can come to enjoy the humiliation, torture and murder of others. I argue for the following claims: firstly, that Sade, perhaps despite himself, suggests that the sadistic will is pathological; secondly, that Sade's work gives a far less flattering view of the sadistic will than is commonly supposed.

> Moralists, by a clearer insight into the evil, will naturally acquire a greater skill in the cure.
>
> —Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) [1]

Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) frequently insisted that his fictions will "help toward the development of the human spirit," and lambasted the "stupid restraint of those who venture to write upon such matters [—] Inhibited by absurd fears, they only discuss the puerilities with which every fool is familiar, and dare not, by addressing themselves boldly to the investigation of the human heart, offer its gigantic idiosyncrasies to our view" (*Justine* [1791], in *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, hereafter *PB*, p. 671; similar, *The 120 Days of Sodom* [1785], hereafter *120*, p. 106, *Juliette* [1797-1801], hereafter *J*, p. 175n). Sade's investigations focus on the malignant will, in particular the human capacity for willful destruction and cruelty. As such, Sade contributes to moral psychology in discussing the *appeal* of immoral conduct, indeed in asserting that it is possible at all to commit evil without also being irrational. In so doing, Sade makes a significant, if now somewhat obvious, advance over those philosophers (Thomas Hobbes, for example) who had claimed that a desire for cruelty in the human soul simply does not exist. [2] This paper will give an account of Sade's description of the immoral will. I will conclude that Sade sheds some light on how one could come to enjoy cruelty, but that his description of the immoral will is far less flattering than is traditionally supposed by Sade scholars and popular culture alike.

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I. Theory of Pleasure: Materialist model

Sade's ontology is based on the materialism of Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751), who held that pleasure is to be understood entirely in terms of physical processes within the brain. Likewise, Sade holds that the experience of pleasure is due to the movement of 'animal spirits' or 'molecules' within the brain, and that the intensity of pleasure is proportional to the 'violence' of the movement of these objects (as such, both La Mettrie and Sade can be classified as *eliminative materialists*).[3] Hence, Sade associates extremes of experience with extremes of pleasure, the more horrific, hideous and nauseating the better, for such experiences are held to exert the greatest force on the nervous system (*120*, p. 233, *J*, pp. 286-287, *La Nouvelle Justine* [1797-1801], hereafter *LNJ*, Vol. 2, p.109).[4] The following passage from *The 120 Days of Sodom* is a typical explanation of this view: "a violent commotion inflicted upon any kind of an adversary is answered by a violent thrill in our own nervous system; the effect of this vibration, arousing the animal spirits which flow within these nerves' concavities, obliges them to exert pressure on the erector nerves and to produce in accordance with this perturbation what is termed a lubricious sensation" (*120*, p. 200). Yet Sade does not hold that there is a *direct* correlation between bodily sensation and pleasure. He also rejects the assumption, made by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), that pleasure and pain are opposite poles of a single continuum. Like Gilbert Ryle (1958), Sade notes that one's mood determines whether a particular sensation is experienced as pleasurable or unpleasant, and that neither pleasure nor pain can be defined in terms of a localized bodily sensation. Like Friedrich Nietzsche (1967), Sade occasionally describes pleasure and pain in terms of gradients of the same physical processes (p.371).[5]

As noted above, Sade holds that the imagination of the subject will dictate whether a stimulus is experienced as pleasurable or painful. Each person, he argues, experiences pleasure in their own unique way, and painful sensations become pleasurable to very blasé people.[6] Observes Sade, "[i]s there anything commoner than to see, on the one hand, people who have accustomed their palates to a pleasurable irritation, and next to them, others who couldn't put up with that irritation for an instant?" (*J*, p.267). The short story *Eugenie de Franval* (1800) expresses this idea more explicitly:

> happiness is an abstraction, it is a product of the imagination; it is a way of being moved, which depends entirely on our way of seeing and

> feeling; apart from the satisfaction of our needs, there is no one way of making all men feel equally happy; every day we see one individual become happy through something which is totally displeasing to another; there is therefore no certain happiness, no other can exist for us except that which we make for ourselves as a result of our constitutions and our principles! (*Gothic Tales of the Marquis de Sade*, p. 46).

Hence, for Sade's characters, the imagination is thought to modify and transform bodily sensation.[7] Many pleasures described in Sade's work are entirely 'imaginary' in nature, for example the pleasure of blasphemy, or that of speculating on the possibility of a crime that perpetuates itself decades after one's death (*J*, pp.294, 369, 525). Indeed, some characters assert that the imagination is the *only* source of pleasure.[8] The character Durand, speaking of sex, states that "the imagination is the only cradle where pleasures are born, it alone creates, fashions, orients them; where the imagination is still, when it does not contribute inspiration or embellishment, all that remains is the physical act, dull, gross and brutish" (*J*, p.1127).[9] As this quote suggests, Sade's mental model holds that the imagination is itself an entirely physical process. Yet Sade also assumes, without argumentation, that the imagination is subject to the will. Sade's characters only reject the doctrine of free will when it suits them, that is, when rejecting the concept of moral responsibility. On the subject of the imagination, by contrast, Sade implies that one can directly introspect and influence one's own mental processes. That is, he assumes that one is free to choose one's mental states and attitudes—a free will that, as it were, goes 'all the way down' to the physical events upon which cognition is causally grounded. From *Juliette*: "enable [your philosophy] to forge, to weave, to create new fantasies which, injecting energies into the voluptuous atoms, cause them to collide at greater speed and more potently with the molecules they are to make vibrate; these vibrations are your delight" (*J*, p. 341). An implication of this model is that, with sufficient training, one could learn to enjoy any sensation.

The materialist model cannot, however, account for more complex pleasures, in particular that of overcoming the 'chimerical ties' that prevent one from doing terrible things to others, or of the pleasure of cruelty (*LNJ* Vol. 2, p.190). Accordingly, Sade discusses intellectual pleasures, in particular the sense of liberation afforded by intellectual analysis, and the pleasure of reflection and analysis for their own sakes.

II. Theory of Pleasure: Intellectual aspect.

Sade makes a distinction between *physical happiness*, explicable (Sade thinks) according to the materialistic model, and *intellectual happiness*. Saint-Fond, in advising Juliette on the pleasures of torturing a girl, explains:

> The felicity I recommend to you will be infinitely keener; beyond the physical happiness acquired from enjoyment, there will be the intellectual happiness born of the comparison between her fate and yours; for happiness consists more in comparisons of this sort than in actual physical enjoyments. It is a thousand times sweeter to say to oneself, casting an eye upon unhappy souls, *I am not such as they, and therefore I am their better,* than merely to say, *Joy is unto me, but my joy is mine amidst people who are just as happy as I.* It is others' hardships which cause us to experience our enjoyments to the full; surrounded by persons whose happiness is equal to ours, we would never know contentment or ease [...] (Sade's italics; *J*, p. 1161).

Sade applies this principle to socio-economic relations, and as such notes that the principle of the 'intellectual pleasure' of sadism extends to the pleasure of accumulating wealth. Whether through simple sadism or acquisition, one is happy because one knows that *others are not*: "happiness is not found in this or that state of the soul: it consists [...] in the comparison of one's own state with that of others" (*LNJ* Vol. 2, p.109, also *J*, p.411).[10] This observation has apparently been vindicated by recent sociological research: people are indeed happier if they perceive themselves as wealthier than others in the same age group.[11] Consequently, according to this view, any attempt to achieve happiness for all through economic equality will fail. As the pleasure of wealth is not due to the luxurious bodily sensations that it affords, but the perception of one's own station as being above that of others, it is a psychological impossibility (or at least very difficult) to make everyone equally happy.

More problematically, Sade's characters associate sadism with their "delicate" imaginations and their profound sensitivity (*J:* 1179).[12] Elsewhere, this very sensitivity is described as, not refinement, but receptiveness to brute physical processes—the destructive Will: "the more sensitive an individual, the more sharply this atrocious Nature will bend him into conformance with evil's irresistible laws" (*J*, p. 991n).

Sadeian criminality does call for a certain intellectual curiosity, and a rigorous investigative phenomenology: the author encourages in his readers exposure to and analysis of the most intense experiences, whether sexual or criminal, in order to investigate the linkage between physical acts and mental events. Delbène explains: "There's more to it than just experiencing sensations, they must also be analyzed. Sometimes it is as pleasant to discuss as to undergo them; and when one has reached the limit of one's physical means, one may then exploit one's intellect"(*J*, p. 60). Were Juliette of our epoch, she would discuss the sensations of sex in terms of endorphins and serotonin uptake. After being simultaneously penetrated vaginally and anally, Juliette is asked by Madame Delbène which is the more pleasurable sensation. She replies:

> "...each gave me such pleasure I cannot decide which gave me the more. Reverberations are yet going through me of sensations at once so confused and so voluptuous that I would be hard put to assign them their proper origins."
>
> "Then we'd best try it again," Télème observed; "The Abbot and I will vary our attacks, the lovely Juliette will have the goodness to interrogate her sentiments and to favor us with a more exact account thereof" (*J*, p. 56).

Yet Sade's attempts to give intellectual respectability to criminality only go so far, even within the terms of his own philosophy. Sade's association of sadism with sensitivity and intellect conflicts with another central Sadeian premise —that a taste for cruelty is a universal trait (*PB,* p. 255). This conflict could be rhetorically resolved (through a romantic mythology of supremacy to be sure)[13] by asserting that the libertines are simply more 'authentic,' and that most people lack the opportunity or the strength to assert their natures (Le Brun, 1990, p. 68). The assertion that the *rarity* (of being "unique in one's species" [*J*, p. 218]) of the taste for cruelty is an indication of 'refinement' or 'delicacy,' however, is questionable, even if we were to accept (against Sade's own reasoning) that the trait is so rare (Sade notes anthropological and historical sources, and numerous traveler's accounts, including his own, to support the claim that people have an innate taste for cruelty).[14] Furthermore, what the pleasure of cruelty amounts to in Sade is limited to 'active *schadenfreude*': that is, the infliction of pain on another in order to enjoy the spectacle of their misfortune, the enjoyment of seeing *that another*

person is suffering (rather than the aesthetic or 'intellectual' appeal of such a spectacle). From the pleasures of giving an especially traumatic lecture on nihilism, through to the most elaborate mechanized tortures, the motive of Sade's sadistic characters is essentially the same (*120*, p. 589; *LNJ* Vol. 1, p. 140).

Regardless of the question of how 'sophisticated' a taste for cruelty is, there is some question as to whether Sade is even entitled to a concept of sensitivity or sophistication, given his crude materialist reductionism. Sade does not recognize a dichotomy between pleasure and the workings of the intellect, or philosophy proper: philosophy, for the libertines, meaning little more (and is often scarcely more ambitious) than exposing 'religious idiocies' (*J*, pp. 52, 53, 88). *All* phenomena for Sade, including philosophical thoughts, are essentially physical. Philosophy is described as the matrix within which pleasures are structured and arranged, and thoughts are described as a blazing fire, or as explosives. Thought itself is passionate and subordinate to desire, all expression of the passions, for Sade, is pleasurable; and all pleasure is associated with sex. In short, philosophy is simply sublimated Will, in Schopenhauer's sense. From *La Nouvelle Justine*: "the element of the torch of philosophy is fuck. All of the principles of morality and religion are soon annihilated by the passions" (*LNJ* Vol.1 p. 95; similar: *The Misfortunes of Virtue* [1787], hereafter *MV*, p. 42; *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman philosophique* [Aline and Valcour, or, The Philosophical Novel, 1795] hereafter *AV*, p.243).

III. Theory of Pleasure: Aesthetics

> A criminal's lawyers are seldom artists enough to turn the beautiful terribleness of the deed to the advantage of him who did it.
> —Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1999, p.97).

In his seminal work *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade* (1995), Timo Airaksinen notes the extent to which Sade attempts to aestheticize evil. For Airaksinen, Sade's aesthetics is universalized to validate a mode of life: Sade "paints wickedness as a strong and grand phenomenon which provides glory and spectacle, and entails all the opportunities for enjoyment, creativity and satisfaction [...] To him, the banality of evil would simply mean that evil without enjoyment is indeed boring" (14). Airaksinen correctly identifies the importance of the aestheticizing of evil in Sade's works, but more can

be said on how this immoralism maps onto Sade's ontological assumptions. In the remainder of this section, I will attempt to articulate Sade's aesthetics and how it merges with his materialist account of pleasure.

In keeping with his general view of human nature (and in making a significant split with his contemporaries Hume, Kant and Rousseau), Sade notes that his aesthetics of the ghastly (his 'malaesthetics') is scarcely atypical. Executions, tortures and gladiatorial combat have long been popular events, as Sade's characters, and Helvétius, note (*PB*, p. 334; Helvétius, 1970, p.179). In noting the extremely grisly nature of Christian iconography, Sade observes that accurate and compelling portrayal in oils of the Passion of the Christ often required study of death and dying (*LNJ* Vol.1, p. 213).[15] The taste for fantastical, violent sexual (or sexualized) spectacle is also common enough, and is scarcely confined to the purely pornographic; one only has to consider the works of Eugène Delacroix (1798- 1863).[16] Nietzsche (1999) formulates this insight in *Beyond Good and Evil*: that almost "everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization and intensification of *cruelty*—that is my proposition; the 'wild beast' has not been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become—deified" (p.159).

Artists in our own age have made a similar association of mass murder and aesthetics, which is perhaps symptomatic of a fashionable nihilism within the art establishment. Like the Crucifixion, the imagery of the 2001 attack on New York acquired instant and enduring iconic power, so it is unsurprising that people would comment on the aesthetic force of the resulting imagery. What is not so easily accounted for are those cultural figures who applauded the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York *on purely aesthetic grounds.*[17] Where Sade's libertines differ from the aestheticians of the September 2001 attacks is their desire to actually *cause* such spectacular acts of destruction for purely aesthetic purposes (note that, despite Sade's talk of 'refinements' and 'style,' the pleasure is still to be found primarily in the *infliction of pain*). From *Juliette*:

> Refinements enter into the thing, as happens with all pleasures; from the moment this personal stamp is added, all limits are abolished, atrocity is wound to its topmost pitch, for the sentiment that produces it exhales it in keeping with the increase or worsening of the torture; all one's achievements now lie short of one's intentions. The agonies leading to death must now be slow and abominable if they are to quicken the soul at all, and one wishes that the same life could revive a thousand

> times over, in order to have the pleasure of murdering it that often, and that thoroughly.
>
> *Each murder is a commentary and critique of the others, each demands improvement in the next; it is shortly discovered that killing is not enough, one must kill in hideous style;* and though one may be unaware of the fact, lewdness almost always has the direction of these matters (italics mine; *J,* p. 791). [18]

Sade's libertines soon tire of torturing and murdering individuals; eventually even city-wide arson with sophisticated incendiary munitions, or even genocide, cannot sate them (*LNJ* Vol. 1, 297, 366; *LNJ* Vol. 2 p. 243; *J,* p. 501). The prospect of a planetary holocaust becomes the object of their wish- fulfillment. States Curval (in *The 120 Days of Sodom*):

> There are [...] but two or three crimes to perform in this world, and they, once done, there's no more to be said; all the rest is inferior, you cease any longer to feel. Ah, how many times, by God, have I not longed to be able to assail the sun, snatch it out of the universe, make a general darkness, or use that star to burn the world! Oh, that would be a crime, oh yes, and not a little misdemeanor such as are all the ones we perform who are limited in a whole year's time to metamorphosing a dozen creatures into lumps of clay (*120,* p. 364).

An entire malaesthetics of the sublime is implied here and in similar passages. Sade's thought here is compatible with two possible schemas. The passage above, and others like it, expresses the wish to participate in the cosmic processes of destruction, in the manner of Hindu gods: "we devastate the planet...and repeople it with new objects, and immolate these in their turn" (*J,* p. 522). Implicit here is the notion of the attainment of oneness with the cosmos through direct involvement with its processes. Cosmic unity, the Sadeian imperative to maximize destruction, and the aestheticizing of crime, are fused. In what resembles a diabolical fusion of the principles of Sartre and Nietzsche, Sade proposes a lifestyle infused with full knowledge of the horrors of the world, and *also* the acceptance that oneself is *responsible* for its horrors, through actively participating in them. This is the *external* aspect of a Sadeian aesthetics of mass destruction. An *internal* aesthetics of the sublime, implicit in Sade's work, is also compatible with Sade's account.

For Immanuel Kant (2001), the aesthetic experience of the sublime discloses knowledge of one's rational nature (p. 307). The sublime experience involves a spectacle of awe-inspiring grandeur: the starry stars above, or some spectacle of Nature's awesome power, such as (Sade's preferred example) a volcanic eruption. Either one feels that one is physically overwhelmed, or one senses one's utter insignificance. Yet this very experience reveals to ourselves the metaphysical truth of our intellectual freedom, in particular if the spectacle in question is a mortal threat. Sade's description of the sublime resembles this account, but in an inverted way. For Kant, the moral reality disclosed is our capacity to shape the world as a *moral* world. Sade, like Kant, claims to be disclosing an important feature of human psychology, but in a sense that brings to mind J. Robert Oppenheimer rather than the Moral Law Within. Sade's characters see in volcanic eruptions a confirmation that the world is characterized by endless, meaningless destruction — it is nature that is the primary object of sublime contemplation, rather than, for Kant, the moral self. Yet the aesthetics of the libertines is even more direct than romantic contemplation—they also *cause* disasters (volcanic eruptions, mass arson and so on) through the application of scientific knowledge—that is, their rational faculties, and hence their power to manipulate the natural order of things, and to destroy its inhabitants (*LNJ*, Vol. 2, p. 42). Sade's characters, hence, feel a sense of awe of their own intellectual capacity for destruction. In discovering in themselves the capacity for such destruction, the libertines disclose to themselves the capacity for *absolute moral disregard.* In their narcissism and their moral autism, this realization is a pleasing one. Sade sees, in the interior of man, only an endless abyss, or the *Rausch* of Godhead.

IV. Apathy

The pleasure of mass destruction, or of murder, does not come automatically. Sade, in prescriptive mode, proposes a 'doctrine of apathy,' an eclectic merging of hedonistic and stoical principles, in order to encourage the reader to overcome innate resistance to such pleasures. The reasoning is as follows: the greatest pleasures are criminal; the sense of guilt prevents one from enjoying committing criminal acts; hence, one must overcome the feeling of guilt. This is achieved through repetition of the act until the discomfort is overcome, and the act becomes pleasurable. Many everyday pleasures require a certain amount of adjustment and of overcoming some-

times considerable discomfort (the terror of one's first bicycle ride, the nausea of one's first cigar)—often followed by the euphoria of accomplishment. Sade's scheme is comparable, differing only in that a total psychic transformation is proposed, rather than simple taste acquisition. Call this the *doctrine of apathy*. Two distinct types of apathy are discussed in Sade's work, although Sade, confusingly, treats them as being continuous. Call these *organic* apathy and *moral* apathy.

Organic apathy, the result of simple hedonism, is the consequence of over-stimulus of pleasurable sensation. Overindulgence in sex, food and alcohol, Juliette explains, has "a gradual degenerating effect and tend[s] before long to render excesses indispensable [...] it is in excess [that] pleasure exists"(*J*, p. 709). This state is described as stoicism, rather than simple burnout: "stoical training enervates the soul; and from this state, wherein its native activity does not permit it to remain long, it passes into one of apathy which soon metamorphoses into pleasures a thousand times diviner than those which frailties could procure it [— stoicism has given me] delights infinitely more trenchant than the ones which would have resulted from excitement or the dreary heats of love" (*J*, p. 484). More piquant pleasures must be pursued, more bizarre tastes need to be cultivated if the libertine is to enjoy anything at all: "one grows tired of the commonplace, the imagination becomes vexed, and the slenderness of our means, the weakness of our faculties, and the corruption of our souls lead us to these abominations" (*120*, p. 329).[19] This principle is summarized in Sade's one good aphorism: "great pleasures are only born from surmounted repugnances" (*J*: 1051). (Sade himself refers to the analogy of acquiring new food tastes in this context).[20] A heterodox aesthetics of the hideous and disgusting is proposed for the attainment of "the greatest possible upheaval in the nervous system": "ugliness, degradation deal a far stouter blow, the commotion they create is much stronger, the resultant agitation must hence be more lively" (*J*, p. 340; *120*, p. 233 also *J*, p. 744).[21]

Moral apathy involves a different process and rationale. Its attainment is the excision of normal emotional response, in particular the moral sentiments, principally guilt and pity.[22] A key assumption here is that one's moral disposition is malleable.[23] Sade, as noted above, confuses this with organic apathy, and on one occasion proposes that organic apathy *causes* moral apathy: that it "is regrettably only too commonly observed that sensual excess drives out pity in man [...] Whether this is because most carnal excesses require a kind of apathy of soul or whether the violent effect they

produce on the nervous system weakens the sensitivity by which it operates, it nevertheless remains a fact that a professional libertine is rarely a compassionate man" (*MV*, p. 30, 263fn). The two types of apathy are quite distinct, however. Despite his insistence that moral sentiments are due entirely to "prejudice," Sade's characters clearly regard the attainment of moral apathy as a considerable achievement (*J*, pp. 450, 548-549, 845).[24] *Organic* apathy, on the other hand, is merely the outcome of simple debauchery.

Sade's reasoning is as follows. As the voice of conscience prevents one from committing terrible crimes, and it is terrible crimes that afford the most shocking —therefore the most pleasurable — sensations, it is necessary to overcome one's conscience. Various means are proposed as to how this is accomplished. Clairwil advises Juliette that this voice is silenced through the application of "strength, discipline, and a certain ruthlessness with oneself" (*J*, p. 450). A more concrete piece of advice is that repeated performance of a particular forbidden act will lead to an overcoming of nausea, fear, or pangs of conscience. Eventually, the student will cross the 'morality barrier' and learn to enjoy the specified pleasure or task, leading eventually to the experience of pleasure, or even ecstasy (*MV*, p. 124; *The Crimes of Love*, hereafter *CL*, p. 35). [25] Explains the character Tergowitz: "accustom yourself awhile to the idea that frightens you, you'll soon come to cherish it: that's the method I have followed to familiarize myself with all known crimes: I yearned to commit them, but they scared me; fixing my mind upon them, I'd masturbate, and I perform them today as effortlessly as I blow my nose" (*J*, p. 888). Sade also notes that moral reorientation is easier for children than adults, suggesting that such psychological malleability is a child-like trait. [26] Clairwil gives the following comment on libertine training:

> the necessary procedure for a young person one was endeavoring to train up for life would be to blunt [their] sensibility; blunting it, you will perhaps lose a few weak virtues, but you will eliminate a great many vices,[27] and under a form of government which severely castigates all vices and which never rewards virtues, it is infinitely better to learn not to do evil than to strive to do good (*J*, p. 278).

Sade's characters also hold the apathetic state to be *epistemically privileged*; that is, its attainment is taken to be necessary for deeper insights into the nature of the world.[28] This is partly because the libertines find that the attainment of "new perspectives" is itself pleasurable (*J*, p. 18). Numbness

in some senses is said to enhance others: "by numbing two or three of the faculties of sensation one may extract astonishing things from the others; [...it is] when we have achieved depravation, insensibility, that Nature begins to yield us the key to her secret workings" (*J*, p. 710). Sade associates *moral* apathy with reason, and interior sensations with morality, hence, falsity or error. To become apathetic, for Sade, is to encounter the 'truth' that moral precepts are lies and that the moral conscience is not an intrinsic feature of human existence. Yet Sade's characters do not apply this principle consistently. They value the interior sensations associated with pleasure, including the 'delicious vibrations' made by their moral sense as it is being overridden. Sade associates only moral feelings with 'error'; *pleasurable* feelings are invariably described as grounded on truth.

Sade is vulnerable to some obvious counterarguments here, addressed neither by his minor characters nor by the secondary literature. Firstly, the claim that the libertines have returned to a more natural state of moral innocence is highly questionable, in particular in the light of the libertines' own experiences and strategies. The libertines go to extraordinary lengths to morally reorientate themselves, indicating just how far down the moral instincts go. There is no doubt that real people can commit the same horrific crimes that Sade's libertines commit—but Sade does little to demonstrate that the libertines are not merely psychotic, or have simply succeeded in driving themselves insane, rather than revealing an occult truth of the human condition. The libertines also commit their crimes in absolute secrecy, in castles in the mountains or deep in remote forests, and in so doing they acknowledge that they are in fact significantly abnormal. Whatever their metaethics may tell them, the libertines acknowledge the social reality of morality in their every move.[29]

Two further problems arise from the attainment of apathy. Throughout *Juliette,* Sade's characters indicate that the Libertine lifestyle leads to the acquisition of tastes and manias that cannot be satisfied. Towards the end of the novel, Juliette states that, despite her "delightful life," "I do not cease to want; *I consider myself poor*; my desires are infinitely in excess of my possibilities; I would spend twice as much, if I had it; and I leave no stone unturned to increase my wealth, criminal or not, there is nothing I am unwilling to do for money" (my italics; *J*, p. 1168). Secondly, the libertines find that, due to over- stimulus, they are eventually incapable of any physical pleasures at all. Only intellectual pleasures, if any, are left. [30] Yet, instead of taking up any intellectually challenging activities, Sade's characters propose to imaginatively

reconstruct the notion of crime, hence, morality, despite the fact that they consider it an "arbitrary and meaningless word" (*J*, pp. 170-171). In some cases, notes Chantal Thomas (2002), Sade's characters hold that prejudices should remain where their violation can become pleasurable (p.72). This is, on their own terms, an escape into self deception. Clairwil explains that it is "illusion which invests crime with its attractiveness, and a weak spirit encounters greatest difficulty committing it when, totally self-possessed, illusion there is none" (*J*, p. 450). A deeply impoverished conception of pleasure seems to be at play here. Sade appears to hold that *only* crime can be pleasurable, even if crime *does not exist*. An obvious analogy would be the assertion that to truly enjoy eating pork requires that one is an observant Jew or Muslim, hence has a moral sense that such an act is sinful, yet perversely eats it anyway. This seems to require that to enjoy certain things —in particular those things that Sade's characters make a point of enjoying —requires that one is neurotic.

Sade also makes a curious association of the 'failure' of libertinage as a purely hedonistic project, the sense of emptiness its failure imparts, and the 'cheapening' of human life. Utilizing the 'rhetoric of authenticity,' Sade declares that this sense of emptiness (what we might perhaps call 'existential despair') is a *proof* of the non-divine origin of humanity.

> there's the effect of irregular desires: the greater the height they arouse us to, the greater the emptiness we feel afterward. From this cretins derive proof of God's existence; whereas for my part I find here only the most certain proofs in support of a materialistic attitude: the more you cheapen your existence, the less I'll be inclined to believe it is the handiwork of a deity (*J*, p. 312).

This objective of 'cheapening human existence' in Sade is in keeping with a pattern of ritualistic torture and murder found in *The 120 Days of Sodom* in particular: in order to demonstrate the absence of God and the meaninglessness of morality, Sade's libertine characters routinely force their victims into total subservience, forcing them to go naked, smeared with or forced to eat excrement, to torture and kill each other (*120*, p.579-621).

Again, an obvious counterargument can be made here. The libertines assert that sheer force of will is all that is required to strip human existence of anything worthy of the concept of dignity. This may well be true of those particular libertines who ritualistically prove their *own* capacity for brutality

(such as Juliette, who, in a ritual demonstration of her own immoralism, allows her young daughter Marianne to be raped and then burnt alive; *J*, p.1187). It cannot be said to strip the rest of humanity of dignity, least of all those victims who refuse to participate in their own murder. It cannot even be said of the victims that *are* forced, through sheer determination to live, to participate in each other's destruction, given that the options forced upon them (kill or be killed) are not true options at all.

This apparent failure of libertinage is also due to a misunderstanding of the relationship between 'criminal pleasure' and morality. Just as the libertines overcome the discomfort of illegal activities, they eventually overcome the pleasure associated with those same activities. Their formulation of the relationship between crime and pleasure is misconstrued; or at least, their theory of pleasure is not sufficiently well grounded in good science to avoid running aground. The pleasures they aim for are frequently based more on an inversion of Christian morality than on an independent study of what actually leads to pleasure (to understand Sade at all frequently requires that one mentally reconstruct the 18th Century Catholicism that he is reacting against). As such, the rules they break (the rules against blasphemy, or masturbation) do not impede pleasure as such—it is the *existence* of these culturally specific rules that allows for the pleasure of breaking them to be obtained. Once the rule has been successfully transgressed, pleasure specifically associated with breaking that rule is impossible. More extreme activities are sought in order to obtain the same thrill, which inevitably leads to the breaking of rules that are perfectly legitimate (the prohibition on rape or homicide, for example). Where this is not possible, the libertines find that they cannot satisfy their desires; their criminal ambitions are frustrated. Assessed by the standards of hedonism, Sade's proposal is apparently a failure, based as it is on an infantile rebellion. Less negatively, Sade appears to have provided us with a psychologically informed thought experiment that exposes the risks of an immoral, hedonistic life bereft of balance or goals.

V. Triumph of the Will.

Although it would appear that Sade's libertine doctrine is a failure, the trajectory of Sade's characters suggests that a different motive is at play. In Sade, there are two views suggested—one implied, the other explicit —concerning the relationship between pleasure and power. The more overtly stated view is that power is a means to pleasure. The alternate view is that

power itself is pleasurable, or constitutes a different order of pleasure.[31] If this is the case, it is possible that Sade's characters are not motivated by simple hedonism at all.

All of Sade's accounts of pleasure can be construed in terms of power; either power over oneself or power over others. At some point, the materialist model of pleasure is abandoned completely (unless one takes the libertine project of self mastery to be an attempt to bring one's psychology into line with one's ontology). As the character Dorval explains, happiness depends on, more than anything else, "exercising the power to appease our avid little whimsies" (*J*, p. 124-125). There are no *purely* intellectual pleasures discussed in Sade's work; those pleasures which are described in terms of aesthetics (such as murder or mass destruction) are in fact primarily concerned with power.

The first expression of this Will is complete self mastery; mastery over the fear of death, over instinctual nausea associated with excrement, and over one's reluctance to harm others, that is, the social instincts (although, of course, Sade would not describe them as such). [32] Organic and moral apathy are to be understood in terms of such mastery, but the overcoming of the instinct of *nausea*, central to the Libertine project, is distinct from both. It is a ritual intended to prove absolute self control.[33] This accounts for Juliette's claim that eating excrement is "one of the culminating episodes of the libertine experience" (*J*, p. 163). Robert F. O'Reilly's (1983) suggestion that coprophagy and cannibalism in Sade represents a Nietzschean practice of reshaping the world may be off the mark, but not by much. Katherine Landolt (1980), more accurately, suggests that the cultivation of exotic pleasures is a means of overcoming nature, and bestows upon the libertine the sign of uniqueness, in being able to overcome an unspeakable nausea.[34]

Sade's characters attain mastery over the fear of death, whether for the sake of self- mastery or for the pursuit of physical pleasure. They treat death as utterly trivial; a last cheap thrill, possibly accompanied by a final arc of ejaculate. Having no truck with either God or the good of the community, they have no problem with suicide or death through misadventure. On this point, Airaksinen reads Sade as essentially an advocate of a profound perversion. He associates the libertines' death wish with the conceptual failure of Sade's entire a-morality. Airaksinen defines "genuine good" as "what is desirable in the long run: safety and pleasure." Accordingly, he characterizes Sade's perversity as being essentially weak and irrational: "evil is damage —but never injury—and appears to be a decisional error that is

brought about by some kind of ignorance, mistake, or weakness. [...] One cannot aim at evil, because logically speaking one's aims are the good of the person. All evil seems, therefore, to collapse back into *akrasia*, self-deception, and negligence" (p.36, italics added). Deliberately putting oneself in harm's way with no higher goal or end in view than one's own pleasure (given that, presumably, death will end one's own pleasure) is considered here to be perverse.

Against Airaksinen, I do not think that Sade's libertines are really so perverse in *this* sense. The libertines, whilst engaged in masochistic practices, typically do not run the risk of death or even serious injury to themselves (*J*, p.885; also 292, 301,439; *120,* p. 478). Yet even where their activities are intensely pleasurable but rather dangerous, it can still be argued that there is nothing particularly perverse in their decision making, regardless of the specifics. People frequently die through misadventure whilst doing intensely pleasurable things (flying light aircraft, climbing mountains), yet we typically do not consider them perverse. One may ask if there really is such an essential relationship between the 'good' and personal safety, and whether Sade's account of pleasure is perhaps more sympathetic to the human condition than the view (implicit, I think, in Airaksinen's account) that one should best try to die in one's bed, and *not* whilst having sex; and that everyone else would agree, if only they could think it through. If life is unbearable, further, it has been argued that seeking out an especially exciting death may be eminently rational (Williams, 1967). [35]

VI. Power over Others

In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* O'Brien asks Winston, his torture victim, how one man asserts his power over another (Orwell, 1989). Winston answers: "[b]y making him suffer." O'Brien agrees: "[o]bedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation" (p. 279). In a similar way, Sade's torturers experience the ecstasy of having total power over another person. [36] Clairwil, commenting on the rush she obtains from poisoning people, remarks that "it is exquisite to have the lives of others arbitrarily in one's power" (*J*, p. 523). Likewise, states Princess Borghese, "[s]tripping people of their liberty amuses me, I like holding captives; I know that while they are incarcerated my victims suffer: this perfidious idea excites me, I should love to be able to maintain entire nations in this cruel

situation" (*J*, p. 712). Sade also assumes that that all powerful politicians, in fact anyone with any authority at all, whether judges, teachers, employers, surgeons, or priests—will eventually abuse their positions.[37] He portrays all political figures as being equally cynical, and equally in the thrall of the pleasures of total power. Where destructive people cannot confront the inner emptiness that drives them, a *moral kitsch*—a worthless pretension of morality, lacking any sense of individual moral rights—will suffice to legitimate mass murder. The novel *Juliette* features a number of such examples, all of which being apparent parodies of the homicidal morality of the French Revolution.[38] In the name of a global revolution and a universal republic, the Northern Lodge of Stockholm plans on exterminating all the kings of the world, the extermination of Catholicism, and establishing the 'liberty of the world.' Yet the means to be employed include poisoning water supplies and causing epidemics in order to weaken 'despotic' governments, and the elimination of individual freedom (*J*, pp. 864-870).

Whether Sade thought that power corrupts or simply attracts the already immoral is unclear, as his characters assume that desire for power over others is a universal trait (*J*, p. 317; also pp. 861, 966n; *AV*, p. 461). Sade also suggests that the character traits of the despot are the *requirements* of political ascendancy rather than purely its negative effects on the personality (*AV*, p. 462; *J*, p. 757).

Sade also sees economics exclusively in terms of abusive power relationships. As Fauskevåg (2001) notes, Sade, echoing both Voltaire (1937, pp.160-165) and Helvétius (1969, Vol. 2, p.282n), treats money as a key tool of control: a source of power, and a means of evading the restrictions of civilized society (p.70). It is the means of acquiring assistants and middlemen in capturing and imprisoning victims, and for paying off corrupt police and judges (*J*, p. 624). The promise of money (as demonstrated in sadistic pornography and the more sadistic game shows alike) is used to reduce people to humiliated playthings or wild animals (*J*, p. 995; *120*, p. 194).[39] Accordingly, money is described as potential crime: inevitably, Sade's characters fetishize it and incorporate it into their masturbatory rituals (*120*, p. 197; *J*, pp. 286, 315, 410). Essentially feudal economic relationships are maintained, just as the architecture of feudalism endures in Sade's work (which itself calls for great wealth): private castles, compounds and dungeons far from prying eyes, echoed in various real- world Sillings to this day.

Finally, as discussed above, Sade's characters assert their power over the world of things, or over people that they have reduced (that is, from their point of view) to the level of inanimate objects. Every prominent libertine character in Sade is preoccupied with power over the environment, of proving themselves equals of God, invariably through destruction (Camus, 1983, p.273; Fauskevåg 2001, p.27). In contrast with the optimistic conception of science traditionally associated with the 18th Century, Sade's characters conceive of science as the power to destroy in spectacular fashion. [40] The chemist Almani declares that he has spent his life studying nature's secrets simply because he wants to cause a volcano to erupt at his prompting (*LNJ*, Vol. 2, pp. 42-43); Count Bracciani uses advanced incendiary weapons to set fire to all Rome, and so on (*J*, p. 729). This marks the zenith of the Libertine vision: money is pure power in a purely Capitalist system, and such power is enjoyable as it allows the libertine (specifically, the corrupt judge, police chief or financier) to crush or reduce others to the status of mere means of pleasure, whether vicariously and at a distance; or by their own hands, with the complicity of other powerful entities or individuals. Further, the development of science, technology and economics in Sade's fictions merely enhances and strengthens the imbalance of power that enables such abuse. In Sade's works, the messianic hopes of the Age of Enlightenment are crushed. On this point, Albert Camus (1984), [41] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1997) were correct to see in Sade a prophet of horrors to come, of the Nazi atrocities in particular, but the scope of this prophecy is applicable to the psychology of atrocity in general.

VII. Sade Syndrome.

Sade is well known for extolling the pleasures of cruelty, and for associating this pleasure with both strength and sophistication. Yet, as noted above, his affirmation of the pleasure of cruelty runs aground; not only does it fail to convince on its own hedonistic terms, it amounts to the assertion that it is pleasurable to see someone more unfortunate than oneself. This insight fits poorly with the libertines' self-image of gloating, resplendent evil.

A cluster of Sade's comments, isolated and scattered throughout his works, suggest a penetrating, if brief, psychological portrait of the sadistic will. Such insight into this area is rare. Contemporary sadistic sex- killers, such as Marc Dutroux, Robert Pickton and Michel Fourniret, are largely silent on their motives (Fourniret merely stating that he was "a bad being

and devoid of all human sentiment"; Sage, 2008b). Although sadistic killers do on occasion write of their crimes (Krystian Bala's 2003 novel *Amok*, for example), there is often little insight on view into what actually drives them (Purvis, 2007).[42]

Philosophy and literature offer little more insight; indeed, much of what serial killers do would seem utterly unintelligible were one to base one's understanding of humanity on that of Kant or Rousseau. The fictional villains that typically feature in philosophical discussions of evil (Iago, Milton's Satan, Thrasymachus) appear two-dimensional; their malignancy is merely the will to do bad, to do the opposite of that which is good (which would merely acknowledge the primacy of the good).[43] Philosophers do not typically show an understanding of sadism in any personal way, which is certainly no criticism. Sade, by contrast, was clearly a sexual sadist, finding pleasure in physically and psychologically tormenting non-consenting victims (Bongie, 1998, pp.108- 120). This intimacy with his subject informs his writing: his characters are not cruel out of some mysterious, atavistic capacity for enjoying torture, and even go as far as to suggest reasons as to their taste for torturing and killing. They even ponder the problem when there is no obvious answer (Borchamps, commenting on his rape and torture of a girl: "[c]an you tell me what it was [that] bred such feelings in me? I myself do not know; I simply describe to you what I experienced"; *J*, p. 901; Similar; *120*, pp. 492, 495).

As noted above, it is the thirst for the sensation of power that Sade's characters crave, which itself suggests an inner weakness. This weakness, given the lucidity, vigor and thoroughness of the libertines, cannot be reduced to *akrasia* alone. A naturally strong person, assumedly, is not preoccupied with acquiring a sense of power, or would even know what such a sense would be like, given that this is for them a continuous state. A different type of strength is the ability to confront stronger adversaries face to face. Sade's characters are, on this view, weak, typically attacking, with overwhelming force, the defenseless and unsuspecting (a large number of their victims are children, a fact seldom mentioned by the specialists). The libertines are essentially bullies. They very rarely destroy or even challenge their equals, and when they kill their peers they do it by stealth and deceit, typically using poison, or a quick shove over a precipice. It is not the vanquishing of a worthy adversary, and the possibility of defeat, that gives the libertine pleasure, but the sense of total power, often cheaply acquired: the "more atrocious the hurt he inflicts upon the helpless, the greater shall be the voluptuous vibrations in him" (*J*, p. 119).

Sade makes a number of specific observations concerning the nature of sadism. Saint-Fond, Prime Minister of France, enjoys humiliating, degrading and torturing his victims before, or whilst, killing them. When Juliette notes that he would be quite terrifying to his many victims, Saint- Fond gives the following reply: "the very essence of my enjoyment is in making those victims so suffer in the selfsame way from the thing which *plagues my existence* (my italics; *J*, p. 248). Saint-Fond is driven to torture through the wish to project his pain onto someone else, although he does not go into details as to what this pain is. Similarly, Omphale observes that those "who are wretched are consoled when they see those around them suffer" (*MV*, p. 77). The desire to inflict pain, then, is perhaps desire to project one's own psychic pain onto another person.[44]

Similarly, in *Aline et Valcour*, Sade observes that the cruelty of a person is proportional to their hardships, citing the explorer Captain James Cook (1728-1779). According to Sade, Cook found that the more his crew experienced misfortune, the crueler they became (*AV*, p. 608, fn). In the same novel, Sade notes that only the weak seek vengeance, as they lack the strength to endure their situation.

> ...it is almost none but the lowliest of spirits that give in to vengeance. Owing to their lack of endurance and their sensitivity, they cannot bear the sting of insults, and as these beings deserve so little, they always feel that they are not treated with due respect (*AV*, p. 624).

Although Sade does not take cruelty to be vengeful, the association is certainly implied. In particular, the Sadeian libertines mutilate and torture women, or infibulate the entrance to their wombs, for the 'crime' of being mothers (*PB*, p. 363). Hostility towards women is intelligible as a generalized vengeance against womankind for having borne them.

Further drawing sadism and inner pain together, Sade advises indifference towards the suffering of others in order to better cope with one's own misfortune, again suggesting a relationship between sadism and an inability to tolerate suffering. Sadeian apathy is akin to armor, or perhaps scar tissue. Delbène gives Juliette the following advice: "the less one is sensitive, the less one is affected, and the nearer one draws to veritable autonomy; we are never prey save to two things: the evil which befalls others, or that which befalls us: toughen ourselves in the face of the first, and the second will touch us no more, and from then on nothing will have the power to disturb our peace" (*J*, p. 99).

Cruelty is also associated with sexual performance problems, which is consistent with the central place Sade grants sexuality. Male sadists in Sade's works are often described as having problems with maintaining erections, discharge or orgasm, the latter described as more violent and painful than pleasurable (*J*, p. 1097; *120*, pp.274, 292, 313).[45] In *The 120 Days of Sodom,* Durcet, one of the four chief killers, becomes frustrated that he cannot get an erection. In frustration, he furiously whips the children that the 'four friends' have imprisoned, on the pretext (as is typical with Sade's characters) that he is punishing them. Sade writes: "as impotence always provokes that kind of mood called a teasing [sadistic] one in the idiom of libertinage, his inspections were astonishingly severe" (*120*:313).

Finally, Sade associates 'infamy' with simple boredom. This point concerns 'infamous' (Sade's term) behavior in general, not specifically sadism. In *The 120 Days of Sodom,* Madame Duclos recounts a client she once had in her brothel, whose pleasure was to clean the anus of a prostitute with champagne (she was asked not to have washed or wiped herself for six weeks) and then drink the compound whilst masturbating across her buttocks. "I understand perfectly," states Durcet: "[o]ne grows tired of the commonplace, the imagination becomes vexed, and the slenderness of our means, the weakness of our faculties, the corruption of our souls lead us to these abominations" (*120*, p. 329). The apathy of the libertines is described here as weakness and *lack* of imagination, in contrast to other accounts in Sade's works.

These observations are not associated with an articulated theoretical position. They could simply be 'orphaned' thoughts, which arguably cannot be said to represent Sade's thought overall. Nevertheless, a theoretical position emerges from within Sade's work that runs counter to the advocacy of the *jouissance* of torturing people. The passages in *Aline et Valcour* in particular are placed in such a way that suggests that Sade took them seriously. The reference to Cook is in a footnote; as such, it is either representative of the author's own views, or presumably is meant to *appear* to be representative of the author's own thoughts. The second observation, concerning vengeance, is made by Bersac, an actor and a minor character. Though not a sadistic and homicidal libertine, he shares with them the view that crime is natural, and holds that wars and tyranny are necessary to the order of things (*AV*, pp. 624- 626). His point of view, therefore, is not opposed to that of Sade's dominant voice. It is also significant that Sade makes these comments in *Aline et Valcour*, the only full length novel which he desired

to be publicly associated with, being published (unlike *Juliette* and *Justine,* which he strenuously disavowed) in his own name.

Several other suggestions have been made concerning Sade's work and the psychological dynamics of sadism. Bourbon Busset (1963) reads Sade's sadism as symptomatic of a spiritual weakness, stating that "nobody is further from the eroticism of sadism than a strong man, who finds in sexuality the normal expression [*épanouissement*] of his vitality" (p.111). The will to inflict suffering, according to Geoffrey Gorer (1963), is related to the desire to alter one's environment and its inhabitants—that is, the *creative* desire in man (this could be aligned with Busset's interpretation, insofar as weakness can be taken to be, or is analogous to, a lack of creativity). In its positive mode, for Gorer, this desire takes the form of creativity (p.156). The sadist lacks the talent to enjoy the power of pleasing or impressing others with his art, and so is limited to torturing people for his egoistic gratification. A healthier person who feels the satisfaction of having an impact on others, of a less malignant sort (Rousseau's [1996] feeling of satisfaction of seeing others enjoying his opera, for example), does not require that others are crushed or reduced to a subhuman state (p.368).

The observations of Gorer and Busset fit closely with the *Motive Psychology* of Hans Morgenthau (1904- 1980). Power and love, for Morgenthau (1962), spring from the same root of loneliness. Love seeks to unite people by dissolving the boundary between them; power involves the imposing of one will over the other. Power can be manifested, in a positive way, through creativity, or negatively, through control, which in an extreme form involves the inflicting of pain (p. 243). In this sense, it is significant that Sade's characters, even when they associate with each other, frequently express loneliness, whether because they are physically separated from others, or because they regard everyone else as mere tools or objects (*J*, p. 583; *LNJ* Vol. 1, pp. 152, 237, 299; Vol. 2, p. 42). Minski the Russian cannibal giant, the most isolated of Sade's characters, takes his despotism to the point of turning human beings into furniture, or food. He is cut off from his species to such an extent that he wishes he had not already raped and killed every member of his family "so that I might have the pleasure of butchering them anew." Yet he feels empty: "[w]hat's left for me these days?" he laments, surrounded by the bodies of his victims: "I have nothing but ordinary victims to sacrifice, my heart grows heavy, all pleasures fade, they pall, the enjoyment is gone" (*J*, p. 598). Sade's characters have no intimate relations with others and, as noted above, have no creative projects. They leave nothing but corpses and ash in their wake.

In short, aspects of Sade's work imply that his sadists are not sophisticated eroticists, but essentially weak people, in emotional pain, who lack meaningful contact with others, and have an overwhelming need to feel that they have power over others or their environment. Not only does this portrait undermine a straightforward reading of the Sadeian text as an advocacy of sadism; it also undermines Sade's (and Bataille's) claim that there is a common causal relationship between the sexual instinct and the will to inflict pain and death.[49] Yet it *strengthens* Sade's status as a psychologist of considerable insight: his association of sexualized sadism and murder with impotence, egocentricity, a lack of empathy, loneliness, and isolation is remarkably close to the profile of sadistic rapists and killers provided by forensic and medical literature (Ressler et al., 1993; Grubin, 1994; MacCulloch et al., 1983; Dietz, 1986).

A final word on the relationship between weakness and sadism is required. In all of Sade's observations, the sadistic will is associated with pain and misfortune, and the inability to passively accept one's inflictions. But weakness or *akrasia* alone does not account for the manifestation of cruelty. Further, not every libertine character goes through hardships—something else is necessary to 'enable' sadism. The difference between the two psychological types (the sadist, and the individual who merely endures hardships) is, in short, the difference between Sade's two principal protagonists, Justine and Juliette. Justine goes through trials that do not even harden her heart, let alone make her a sadist, yet she is not so different from her sibling. She is equally capable of irrational, risky behavior, and falling in with the 'wrong crowd,' as evidenced by her love for the bisexual matricide the Marquis de Brassac, despite his "depravity"(Sade's term; *MV*, p. 35). She is also as familiar with the doctrine of the libertines as is Juliette. Unlike Juliette, who for the most part merely agrees with and repeats what she has been told, Justine frequently engages in debate with her captors, at times with confidence and aggression. She is also, by the end of *La Nouvelle Justine,* suspiciously reluctant to adopt a more normal lifestyle. Although not a twin (Juliette is a year older), Justine and Juliette are psychically connected—when Juliette experiences a pang of remorse, she has a prophetic dream involving her sister (*J*, p. 549). There are two, crucial, differences between Justine and Juliette. Firstly, Justine adheres to absolute moral principles. Secondly, Justine has inner restraints that prevent her from following destructive or criminal impulses (or even to follow common sense, such as going to the police, or trusting monks, regardless of what they do to her). Juliette would

attribute her 'lack of restraint'—her freedom from the 'chimeras' of remorse and conscience—to her philosophical education; yet Justine has received essentially the same education (both women being the daughters of a ruined bourgeois merchant). This suggests that the crucial difference between the two sisters is not reducible to intelligence or education. It could be innate; on the other hand, it could be grounded in the fundamental freedom to choose between good and evil. Nothing in Sade's work compellingly challenges this possibility. Yet, despite everything, Sade's text enigmatically leaves this possibility open.

Sade's account of sadistic pleasure remains paradoxical, despite my attempts to clarify what this account entails. Out of a profound narcissism (specifically, a profound need to be perceived as powerful), Sade's characters require that their victims experience terror and pain, and that the sadists themselves are aware of the pain that their victims are subjected to. Yet these same characters are apparently unconcerned with knowing the experiences of others. States Dolmancé, in *Philosophy in the Bedroom,* "there is no possible comparison between what others experience and what we sense; the heaviest dose of agony in others ought, assuredly, to be as naught to us, and the faintest quickening of pleasure, registered in us, does touch us" (*PB*, p. 283). There is not a single word in Sade of what the *victims* are going through, or, in fact, who they are as people. Only superficial and external observations are made—victims merely sob in terror or pain. (Ironically, Sade, presenting himself as a navigator of the extremes of human experience, never attempts to describe *pain*). Secondly, there is a tension between the pleasure of having power over others (others *as* others) and the tendency to reduce people to objects. The need for the sensation of power, as a psychological dynamic, requires that one recognize the victims *as* people, so that they are seen to be acknowledging one's own power. One cannot be powerful *alone*, amongst objects. This paradox is perhaps not peculiar to Sade's literary creation, but an implicit feature of the phenomena of dehumanizing sadism.

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Notes

[1] Helvétius, 1970, p. 120.

[2] Hobbes writes: "*Contempt,* or little sense, of the calamity of others is that which men call CRUELTY, proceeding from security of their own fortune. For, that any man should take pleasure in other men's great harms without other end of his own I do not conceive it possible" (Hobbes, 1994, p. 32).

[3] Ramsey (2007).

[4] This idea is probably derived from Helvétius, who describes the sublime in materialist terms: "The more lively the sensation is, the more beautiful the verse appears, and when it makes the strongest impression possible it becomes sublime. It is therefore by the greater or less force that we distinguish the beautiful from the sublime." (Helvétius 1969, Vol. 2, p. 229).

[5] Writes Nietzsche (1967): "There are even cases in which a kind of pleasure is conditioned by a certain *rhythmic sequence* of little unpleasurable stimuli: in this way a very rapid increase of the feeling of power, the feeling of pleasure, is achieved. This is the case, e.g., in tickling, also the sexual tickling in the act of coitus; here we see displeasure at work as an ingredient of pleasure" (p. 371).

[6] This view coheres with recent findings in neurobiology. See Nau (2003).

[7] Fauskevåg notes a similarity here with the description of the imagination offered by Nicolas Bergasse (1750-1832). (Fauskevåg, 2002, p. 74).

[8] See La Mettrie (1996, p.125).

[9] Sade's account of the imagination is not entirely positive. In *Juliette,* Madame Delbène states that the imagination is the source of "delusion," in particular the idea of God (*J,* p. 36).

[10] Steven Pinker (2002) holds a similar view (p. 304).

[11] See for example Clark, Frijters and Shields (in press).

[12] This association is found in the work of Sade scholars. Béatrice Didier, for example, draws a distinction between "degenerate sadism" and "sadism properly so-called [....] this is an excitation of desire produced by a view or a mental or aesthetic representation created by the suffering of another person" (Didier, 1976, p. 129). Why the latter is not itself not 'degenerate' is not explained.

[13] For a critique of the Sadeian libertines' doctrine of supremacy, see Roche (2010).

[14] In *Voyage d'Italie,* Sade writes of a *cocagne* he witnessed in Naples: "the most barbarous spectacle in the world that one can possibly imagine." This involved a public festival in which food was displayed in a public square; at the shot of a cannon, people were permitted to grab what they could, resulting in a bloody riot (Sade, 1967, p.440; cited and translated by Berman 1971 p. 141). A very similar spectacle appears in *Juliette* (*J*, pp. 999-1000). Concerning Sade's anthropological sources, Lacombe notes the influence on Sade of abbé Banier and abbé Le Mascrier's *Histoire des Cérémonies religieuses de tous les peuples de la terre* [history of the religious ceremonies of all of the peoples of the world] (Paris, 1741), which detailed the variety and inventiveness of torture in history (Lacombe, 1974, p.215; also *J*, pp. 70n, 262n).

[15] Sade here asks whether Michelangelo would have felt pangs of conscience if, for the purposes of rendering the Crucifixion more accurately, he had crucified a young boy. He also states that "everyone knows" that a girl was killed in the production of a painting by Guide (perhaps Guido Reni, known also as Le Guide [1575-1642]), *Madeleine en pleurs.* Theodore Gericault (1791 - 1824), whilst working on his masterpiece *Le Radeau de la Méduse* [The Raft of the Medusa] (1819), kept corpses and severed limbs in his studio for reference.

[16] Eugène Delacroix's (1798-1863) *The Death of Sardanapalus*, depicting an indifferent king watching his men massacre his concubines in cold blood, is very similar to the brutality in Sade.

[17] The composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) and artist Damien Hirst have both described the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York as works of art. Gail Haffern, a New Zealand artist, in agreement, has produced a number of sculptures honoring the aesthetics of the attack. See Herrick (2002), Allison (2002).

[18] See de Quincey (2004) for a similar tract.

[19] This is similar to the 'opponent process theory,' proposed by Richard L. Solomon and John D. Corbit. In short, Solomon and Corbit hold that the overcoming of deep seated repugnances is followed by a rush of elation, in order to return the body to homeostasis. For more detail, see Solomon & Corbit (1974); Baumeister (1999, pp. 234-236).

[20] Concerning the attractiveness of ugly people, the character Severino remarks: "is it not obvious that people prefer gamey game to fresh meat?" (*LNJ*, Vol. 2, p. 83).

[21] Freud considered the capacity and pleasure of overcoming disgust (in particular the 'disgust' of seeing the genitals) an essential part of the sexual instinct. See Freud (1977, p.64) .

[22] Fauskevåg calls this process an 'artificial desocialisation'; Philippe Roger describes it as 'brainwashing.' See Roger (1976, p.55) and Fauskevåg (2001, p.184).

[23] This contradicts the libertines' insistence that they cannot help themselves from committing crimes, or become better people as, clearly, they think that they can become increasingly bad. The malleability of the moral sense is a recurring theme in *Aline et Valcour.* Léonore, in the course of her voyage around the world, loses the 'moral sentiments' of her youth, and Sainville, surrounded by captive slave-girls in Africa, realizes for an instant

that he no longer misses his beloved Léonore (*AV,* pp. 274, 639).

[24] This observation maps onto accounts of the experiences of people found guilty of mass murder: they will feel normal, 'animal' guilt, but will learn to overcome it. For more detail, see Baumeister (1999, pp.305-342).

[25] For discussion of the psychology of enjoying overcoming social instincts, and the pleasure of killing, see Alford (1997, p. 102) and Baumeister (1999, pp.203-249).

[26] This is consistent with what we know of the psychology of child-soldiers. For discussion on the recruitment and training methods used on child soldiers, see Wessells (1997).

[27] Typically, and anticipating Nietzsche, Sade here insists that virtue is 'weak' and vice is 'strong.'

[28] Michel Camus (1983) contrasts the apathy of Sade's characters with that of the Stoics, for whom apathy was required for receptivity to the Logos, conceived as cosmic harmony. For Sade, according to Camus, it is openness to Nature that leads to openness to the *Logos* (pp. 259-276, 270).

[29] For discussion of Sade's meta-ethics, see Roche (2010).

[30] Sade's account is partly continuous with the views of his contemporaries on the problems related to 'libertinage.' Firstly, Sade appears to be in agreement with d'Holbach's (1999) claim that endless hedonism leads to ennui and weariness (pp. 99, 256). Cusset (1999) notes that this was a common theme in libertine literature (p. 145).

[31] The first view is that of Helvétius (1969, Vol. 1, pp.130); the second is that of Nietzsche (1967, §751 p.397). The association of power and pleasure had also been considered by the *philosophes.* Rousseau (1979) notes within himself the potential for becoming a tyrant, observing that "if I were rich, [I would be] a disdainful spectator of the miseries of the rabble" (p. 344).

[32]For discussion, see Lacombe (1974, p.203).

[33] Coprophagy appeared in the initiation rites of the Chewa people of

East Africa, just as, for other African tribespeople, initiation into adulthood may require rituals involving flagellation, exposure to stinging ants, extensive tattooing or scarification (de Rachewiltz, 1963, p.191). Sade often associates coprophilia with sexuality, but this association is not straightforward. Significantly, Freud (1977) discusses the pleasure of defecation, and of the rituals involving faeces "typical of neurotics." For Freud, such pleasures are intelligible owing to the richness of nerve endings in the 'mucous membrane' of the anus, but he does not discuss actual coprophilia (p.104). Havelock Ellis (1934) repeats Freud's suggestion that an association of faeces and urine with eroticism is due to childish theories concerning sexuality. Ellis also takes the child's fascination for urination and defecation to be a "rudimentary form of the artistic impulse," and at the same time a "manifestation of power," albeit of a particularly infantile sort (p.139).

[34] For more speculations on the semiotics of eating excrement in Sade, see also Châtelet (1983, p.76). Note also that, curiously, Sade's libertines demonstrate their transcendence over merely human instinct in the manner of medieval penitents — by filling their mouths with filth. For discussion of this practice, see de Beauvoir (1988, p.685).

[35] Glanville Williams (1967) writes: "a study by E. Stengel and Nancy Cook indicated that the great majority of so-called attempted suicides were not on fact single-minded efforts at self destruction but had a hidden "appeal character;" in other words, the suicide seemed to gamble with his life, consciously or subconsciously hoping that either the attempt would succeed or, if it failed, his life would be improved as a consequence of the attempt" (p.44).

[36] For discussion of this phenomenon, see Baumeister (1999, pp.242-243), Staub (1989, pp.128, pp.133, 139,149, 226) and Ressler et al (1993, p. 128).

[37] Despite his political incertitude, Sade (1966-1973) presented himself as an acute observer of the abuse of power, commenting in an official pamphlet: "citizens [...] I know where the abuse of power leads

[...] I have studied men and know them; nothing is more difficult than to set limits on delegated authority" (Vol. 11, p.173; cited and translated by Spruell pp. 246-247).

[38] For discussion on the dangers of moral absolutist thinking, see Baumeister (Chapter 6, pp.169-203) and Staub (1989, pp.76, 88).

[39] In *Juliette,* Ferdinand, King of Naples, holds a public event each year in which the poorer townsfolk are allowed to fight each other in the rush to grab items from a huge pile of luxury goods and foodstuffs. Hundreds of people are crushed in the struggle (p. 1000-1001).

[40] For discussion see Baker (1995, p.258). Roger (1976) suggests that the increasingly sophisticated torture machines in Sade are a parody of scientific progress (p.60).

[41] Albert Camus discusses Sade as a prophet of the Nazis in *The Rebel* [*L'homme révolté*, 1951]. This interpretation is in stark contrast to Camus' 1942 work *The Myth of Sisyphus,* in which he describes Sade more neutrally as a philosophical novelist.

[42] Some sadistic killers are quite candid, however: see Ressler et al. (1993, p. 128).

[43] Sade (1967), in *Voyage d'Italie,* notes that the very rarity of the "bizarre mania of doing evil for the sole pleasure of doing it [...] spares me the trouble" of offering an analysis, although he suggests that it is due to a "disordering of the imagination" (p.356).

[44] This matches the observations of C. Fred Alford, who applies a similar model to the psychology of sadistic behavior, and Richard G. Rappaport with regards to serial killers. Alford (1997) interviewed working people, prisoners, and college students to discover how people understand evil. He concluded that 'evil' is experienced as an overwhelming feeling of emptiness or dread, and found that many people who had done violently sadistic things, by their own estimation, were motivated to transfer this feeling onto another (pp.100, 119,121). Similarly, Rappaport (1988) holds that the quest for relief of pain (the inner, unresolved turmoil) is the essential dynamic

which impels the serial killer.

[45] Restif (also spelled Rétif) de la Bretonne (1969) wrote that old men are especially sadistic, and that they derive pleasure in proportion to the youth and beauty of the victim, an observation that perhaps coheres with Sade's suggestion of a link of sadism and impotence (p.1).