

DE SADE

THE VIRTUE OF REBELLION



ADEL ELSHERIF

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By Adel Elsherif

Founder of studyebooks.com

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Contact: elsherifbooks@gmail.com

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Preface

The Marquis de Sade, a man of contradictions and extremes, was born into a world of rigid social constraints and hypocritical moral codes. A nobleman by birth, his actions and writings would forever challenge the very foundations of the aristocracy. He was a man of intellect, a keen observer of human nature, yet he found himself perpetually at odds with the established order—imprisoned and reviled for his radical ideas.

De Sade was not merely a libertine; he was a philosopher, a political theorist, and a relentless critic of power. He rejected the notion of divine authority, viewing it as a tool of oppression. He questioned the very concept of good and evil, arguing that these were mere social constructs designed to control and manipulate. His philosophy, rooted in the pursuit of pleasure and the unfettered exercise of individual will, posed a direct challenge to the prevailing ideals of his time. He radically rebels against the moral frameworks of society, religion, and traditional philosophy.

Much like the later German philosopher Nietzsche, de Sade viewed morality as a construct designed by the powerful to subjugate the weak. Yet de Sade was arguably more provocative, challenging fundamental human beliefs and exposing them as forms of weakness and hypocrisy.

More pessimistic than Schopenhauer, de Sade did not retreat into introspection.

Unlike the moral German philosopher who remained at home writing, de Sade ventured into the world to seek pleasure in what he saw as a meaningless existence.

Though a hedonist, his view of pleasure stood in stark contrast to that of Epicurus. Epicurus advocated for a serene form of happiness found in simple pleasures—friendship, walking, and modest meals—which he categorized as passive pleasure, derived from the absence of bodily and mental pain.

For de Sade, however, happiness was not passive; it was achieved through continuous acts of rebellion, transgression, and the pursuit of pleasure through action—often in defiance of law and popular opinion.

De Sade's understanding of Nature was equally unique and unsettling. Far from the benevolent and romanticized Stoic view of a harmonious natural order, he saw Nature as an amoral force—indifferent, and at times, vile.

As an atheist, de Sade pushed the boundaries of non-belief to an extreme. His rejection of conventional thought was so profound that even most other atheists would likely find his ideas disturbing.

He dismissed concepts widely considered virtuous—such as charity and love—viewing them as mere forms of self-interest and hypocrisy.

In the chapters that follow, I will delve into de Sade's writings to uncover the philosophy embedded in his novels. My task is made easier by the fact that he was a preacher in his fiction, with the true heroes of his stories serving as mouthpieces for his own ideas and opinions.

This approach will allow me to explore his work from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the arguments for which his narratives serve as a platform.

Chapter 1: Becoming De Sade

The Marquis de Sade was born Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade in Paris in 1740, into an aristocratic family. He had a privileged upbringing, as was expected for his class, but even as a child, he showed a rebellious streak—a refusal to conform to social expectations.

He joined the army and served with distinction, displaying both courage and leadership.

His life, however, took a decidedly unconventional turn upon his marriage to Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, a woman of considerable wealth.

Though they had children, the marriage was marked by scandal and unrest.

The Marquis's insatiable appetite for pleasure and his disregard for social norms led him into various legal troubles, often resulting in accusations of sexual misconduct.

His behavior became a subject of public outrage. He was imprisoned many times for his libertine lifestyle and writings, spending a significant portion of his adult life behind bars.

These periods of incarceration, far from breaking his spirit, ignited his imagination and fueled his literary output.

It was within the confines of prison that he wrote his most controversial works: *Justine*, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, and *The 120 Days of Sodom*.

The Marquis de Sade was no stranger to prison. His periods of incarceration—whether in the Bastille, Vincennes, or the Charenton asylum—were frequent and often prolonged. Ironically, these very limitations became the catalyst for his most enduring works.

In the Bastille, for example, he was granted a surprising degree of freedom within his cell, which he used to write and conceal his manuscripts. During the French Revolution, when the Bastille was stormed, the guards, in their haste, failed to search thoroughly. As a result, a number of his writings—including parts of *The 120 Days of Sodom*—were lost or destroyed.

Over time, he learned to hide his writings with cunning.

He used various methods: scribbling on scraps of paper, in the margins of books, and even on the walls of his cell. His elaborate clothing became a tool of concealment, with manuscripts tucked into linings and folded into seams. He even hid them inside hollowed-out books.

These secret caches were always at risk, vulnerable to discovery by prison officials.

Occasionally, the manuscripts were found, leading to their confiscation and, often, destruction. Yet he persisted, undeterred. He believed his ideas—his explorations of pleasure and the human condition—were too important to be silenced.

After his transfer to the asylum at Charenton, he experienced a relative freedom of sorts.

He had assistants who transcribed his manuscripts and helped organize his vast collection of writings.

Even within the constraints of the asylum, he continued to write, to explore, and to challenge the moral codes of his time.

The discovery of his manuscripts was always a cause for scandal and often resulted in further censure, leading to more confiscations and renewed confinement.

But these efforts only fueled his rebellion, transforming him into something of an intellectual martyr.

It was through the lens of imprisonment that he developed a keen understanding of the dynamics of power, control, and the human need for freedom.

The prison walls did not break him—they forged him into one of history’s most provocative authors.

His writings challenged the moral foundations of society and exposed the excesses of the aristocracy. He explored the relationship between power, pleasure, and the human condition. He became a symbol of sexual deviancy and was often painted as a villain.

The French Revolution brought a brief period of freedom. He even served in revolutionary politics, but his radical views were often at odds with the prevailing climate.

He was imprisoned again during the Reign of Terror, narrowly escaping the guillotine.

He spent the final years of his life in an asylum, where he continued to write—exploring the darkest corners of the human psyche.

He died in 1814, leaving behind a legacy of scandal, controversy, and philosophical inquiry.

His name, forever associated with the extremes of human behavior, has entered the lexicon as sadism.

Yet his work, though often condemned, has also been interpreted as a radical critique of power and a champion of individual freedom.

The Marquis de Sade remains a figure of fascination and debate—a testament to the enduring power of the mind to question, to provoke, and to shock the world.

Chapter 2 : Women in Sade’s World

The Marquis de Sade, often mischaracterized as a misogynist, was in fact deeply fascinated by the complexities of women.

To understand his work, it’s essential to recognize that he did not merely portray women as victims. Instead, he explored their roles as active agents—willing participants in the pursuit of pleasure, power, and transgression.

The wife of De Sade

Marquis de Sade married Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil in 1763. Their union was arranged, typical of aristocratic families at the time, and they had three children together. But the marriage was anything but conventional.

Despite Sade's notorious behavior—including scandalous affairs, public orgies, and repeated imprisonments—Renée-Pélagie remained loyal for many years. She even smuggled his writings out of prison during his early incarcerations. However, her support eventually crumbled. After years of humiliation and pressure from her family—especially her mother, Madame de Montreuil, who once defended Sade but later turned against him—Renée-Pélagie legally separated from him in 1790.

Their relationship was a strange mix of loyalty, betrayal, and endurance. She was pious and dignified; he was rebellious and extreme.

In many ways, her refusal to abandon him early on allowed him to continue writing and living defiantly. But when she finally left, it marked the end of any illusion of domestic stability.

In his writings, women are not passive recipients of male dominance. They possess their own desires, motivations, and capacity for cruelty. Sade depicts them as cunning, manipulative, and often remarkably strong. He does not shy away from the darker aspects of female sexuality, portraying women driven by impulse and capable of both passion and brutality. They are not only subjected to power—they frequently wield it.

Sade subverts conventional portrayals of women as innocent, fragile, or submissive. His female characters often break free from societal constraints, embracing roles that defy moral expectations. Writing in a time when women had limited rights and agency, Sade's depictions—however extreme—challenge prevailing norms and explore the philosophical dimensions of desire and domination.

His intent was not necessarily to glorify violence, but to examine the brutal power dynamics of human nature.

In his amoral universe, women are frequently portrayed not as passive victims but as influential agents of vice, cruelty, and libertinage. Many female characters actively participate in, instigate, and even theorize the most extreme forms of depravity.

Justine's Character and Morals

Justine stands as a symbol of unwavering virtue—a soul guided not by circumstance but by conscience. She is the quiet voice of morality in a world that punishes goodness. Sade, in his cruel philosophical theater, strikes her down with a bolt of thunder—not because she was wicked, but because she refused to become what he demanded. Though she questions Providence, she remains faithful to the innate goodness she carries within.

Inherent Goodness and Sensitivity

From childhood, Justine is described as “gloomy and melancholic by disposition, yet blessed with surprising gentleness and sensitivity.” Her appearance reflects this inner purity: modesty, refinement, and shyness, wrapped in a virginal air.

Despite her sister Juliette’s descent into libertinage and deceit, Justine categorically refuses to follow her into “an abominable life” of debauchery. She clings to virtue even when it brings suffering, declaring:

“Whatever the thorns of virtue, I shall always prefer them to the false beams that shine on prosperity.”

She finds solace in the belief that her suffering will be “amply rewarded in a better world” by Providence.

Active Compassion and Honesty

Justine’s virtue is not passive—it is active, courageous, and often self-sacrificing.

- She refuses Monsieur Du Harpin’s scheme to rob his neighbor.
- She defies Monsieur de Bressac’s demand to poison his mother, choosing instead to warn the Countess.
- She rescues a 12-year-old girl from surgeons who intended to dissect her alive—an act that leads to her own torture and branding.
- She warns Dubreuil of a robbery plot, only to lose all her possessions and be falsely accused of murder and arson.
- She risks her life in a fire to save a child, only to be charged with child-murder.

Each act of compassion deepens her suffering, yet she never abandons her principles.

Resistance to Corruption,

Throughout her trials, Justine consistently rejects offers that would compromise her virtue:

- She resists the advances of a corrupt parish priest.
- She refuses to join bandits in the forest.
- She defies the friars in the monastery.
- She withstands the temptations of Dalville, the coiner.,

Her resistance often leads to brutal punishment, reinforcing Sade's bleak portrayal of a world where virtue is persecuted and vice rewarded.

Final Redemption and Influence

In the end, Justine is vindicated. Her name is cleared, she receives a pension, and is granted full citizenship. But her true legacy lies in the transformation of her sister, Juliette—now Madame de Lorsange—who, moved by Justine's suffering and moral steadfastness, repents and enters a convent.

Justine's story becomes a quiet triumph: not of worldly success, but of moral endurance. Her purity, tested by cruelty, emerges as a redemptive force—proof that even in Sade's darkest universe, virtue can still leave a mark.

Juliette's Transformation and Agency

Embracing Crime and Infamy

Juliette begins as a susceptible figure but quickly embraces crime. She reflects on the "fruits of crime" and the "gigantic pleasures" it affords her. After committing murder, she declares:

"Yes, yes, let me be evil; let new possibilities for wicked deeds be offered to me, and they'll see how avidly I fly to commit them!"

She describes her excitement growing the deeper she sinks into infamy.

Intellectual Justification for Vice

Juliette credits her mentors for teaching her that denying aid to the suffering intensifies pleasure. She describes her soul as “riddled with crimes, fed by crime,” and wishes for crime to “emanate from my very ashes.” She rejects the idea that crime offends God or Nature, believing Nature is pleased by destruction.

Active Participation in Torture and Murder

Juliette is directly involved in torture and murder: intensifying Madame de Noirceuil’s suffering, burning victims alive, poisoning an entire family, and mutilating her own daughter and wife. She personally kills a poor woman.

Strategic Manipulation and Ambition

She uses hypocrisy as a strategic tool, contrasting it with open cynicism. She orchestrates betrayals, seeks profit from others’ misfortunes, and even considers ruling a nation. She states:

“Force was the only deciding factor, and it was only with force I wished to keep company.”

Sexual Libertinage and Sapphism

Juliette engages in various sexual acts, including sapphism with Elvire and Clairwil. She declares her innate virtue is “whorishness” and lives to “shed fuck.” Her sexual preferences are guided by libertine principles rather than affection.

Clairwil’s Philosophical Depravity and Male Hatred

Intellectual and Ruthless

Clairwil is described as “profoundly wise” and “depraved.” She admits to loathing men after sexual satisfaction and expresses a desire to destroy them:

“I’d not be adverse to destroying every last one of those by the mere sight of whom I have always felt debased.”

Active in Cruelty

She tortures young girls, sometimes to the point of severe injury. She prefers “butchering males” to avenge her sex and drinks blood and swallows a testicle of a male victim.

Leader in the Sodality of the Friends of Crime

As Juliette’s sponsor, Clairwil introduces her to a club where crime and debauchery are celebrated. She ensures members indulge every caprice and lewd whim.

Challenge to Divine Authority

She dismisses Saint-Fond’s divine hopes as “fables” and urges him to focus on the evil he can enact in this world.

Delbene’s Corruption and Teaching

Corrupter of Innocence

Madame Delbene, a Mother Superior, is a notorious libertine who boasts of corrupting nearly every girl in her convent. She engages in sexual activity with nuns, novices, and pensionnaires.

Philosopher of Vice

She teaches Juliette the “inutility” of virtue, advocating promiscuity, infanticide, and sodomy as natural and beneficial. Her teachings “rotted Juliette’s heart and infected her brain.”

Enjoyment of Cruelty

Delbene exhibits intense rage and inflicts physical harm during sexual encounters.

Olympia’s Insatiable Lust and Ambition

Embracing Whorishness and Notoriety

Olympia declares “whorishness” as the “most sacred of the laws written in my heart.” She longs to be a globally infamous prostitute and wishes to die on a scaffold as a “byword for evil.”

Instigator of Mass Destruction

She proposes burning hospitals, poorhouses, and orphanages in Rome to satisfy her lust and greed, predicting she would “die of pleasure” from the spectacle.

Active in Torture and Patricide

Olympia delights in the idea of torturing her mother and daughter, desiring to bathe in their blood. She participates in brutal flagellations and revels in others' suffering.

Catherine (Empress) as a Model of Tyranny and Cruelty

Tyrannical Ruler and Torturer

Catherine adopts the brutal legacy of Basilovitch as her model of governance, declaring her intent to “strengthen my hold on the throne” through “horror.” She demands “debasement services” and subjects Amelia to “the most trying vexations” and “every one of the tortures prescribed,” demonstrating her commitment to cruelty as a tool of power.

Sadistic Sexual Practices

She insists on being embattered during torture sessions and engages in a wide range of sexual acts with multiple partners, including scenes where men urinate on her face—blurring the line between political domination and sexual sadism.

Orchestrator of Filicide

For political gain, Catherine commissions Borchamps to murder her own son, stating that she does not want “sentimental attachment” to interfere with her ambitions. She not only authorizes the act but takes pleasure in the agonizing death of her child, underscoring her complete detachment from conventional morality.

In de Sade's universe, women are portrayed in radically contrasting ways. There are a few clear examples where he illustrates this tension: virtuous women like Justine suffer immensely, while amoral women such as Juliette, Clairwil, and Olympia thrive in a world governed by cruelty and transgression. This contrast is not accidental—it reflects Sade's philosophical view that resisting nature's indifference leads to suffering, while embracing it leads to power and pleasure.

Sade does not simply hate women. In fact, he often portrays them as free, independent agents—capable of philosophical reasoning, strategic manipulation, and extreme acts of vice. His female libertines are not submissive; they are dominant, calculating, and often more ruthless than their male counterparts. He gives them agency, even if that agency is expressed through depravity.

The suffering of virtuous women in his work—especially Justine—is a deliberate critique of moral idealism. Sade punishes goodness not because he despises it, but because he sees it as incompatible with the laws of nature, which he views as amoral and

indifferent. In his view, those who cling to virtue are crushed by a world that rewards vice.

So while Sade's world is undeniably brutal, his portrayal of women is philosophically layered. He does not reduce them to mere objects; he elevates them as thinkers, rebels, and agents of chaos—whether they are punished for their virtue or celebrated for their vice.

Chapter 3: The Illusion of Morality

De Sade argues that The ideas of good, bad, justice, injustice, virtue, and vice are not objective or universal truths, but rather human-made conventions shaped by self-interest and the dynamic, often destructive, workings of Nature.

This study will draw upon de Sade's novels to uncover his philosophical framework.

De Sade's Justine

Justine is a young woman who believes in virtue, goodness, and divine justice. But the world she lives in? Absolutely brutal.

After being orphaned, she chooses the path of righteousness, while her sister Juliette dives headfirst into a life of vice and luxury.

Justine's journey is essentially a nonstop parade of misfortune.

Every time she tries to do the right thing, she is betrayed, abused, or punished.

She encounters corrupt priests, sadistic nobles, and criminals who all exploit her innocence. It's as if the universe is determined to prove that being good gets you nowhere.

General Skepticism Towards Virtue and Providence

“For if, taking social conventions as our starting-point and remaining faithful to the respect for them which education has bred in us, it should by mischance occur that through the perversity of others we encounter only thorns while evil persons gather nothing but roses, then will not a man, possessed of a stock of virtue insufficient to allow him to rise above the thoughts inspired by these unhappy circumstances, calculate that he would do as well to swim with the torrent as against it?”

De Sade is essentially saying that life isn't a movie where the good guys always win and the bad guys get what's coming to them. Instead, he makes a cold, unsettling point: if you're a decent person who runs into nothing but bad luck while cruel people thrive, why bother being good?

He suggests that for a normal person, being "virtuous" isn't a solution to life's problems—it's actually a foolish and self-defeating obstacle in an unfair world.

"And will he not say that when virtue, however fine a thing it be, unhappily proves too weak to resist evil, then virtue becomes the worst path he can follow, and will he not conclude that in an age that is utterly corrupt, the best policy is to do as others do?"

Conformity in such situations can render virtue the worst possible choice, as it may involve complicity or inaction in the face of wrongdoing.

"...since in the imperfect fabric of this corrupt world of ours there is a sum of evil equal to the sum of good, the continuing equilibrium of the world requires that there be as many good people as wicked people, and that it follows that in the general scheme of things."

This passage reveals that Marquis de Sade is not a strict materialist at all times; he occasionally incorporates metaphysical elements into his philosophy.

He introduces the idea of a cosmic equilibrium

—suggesting that the world requires a balance between good and evil. This conception reinforces his view that the world is fundamentally amoral.

"It matters not if such and such a man be good or wicked; that since misfortune persecutes virtue, and prosperity is the almost invariable accompaniment of vice (a matter of complete indifference to Nature), then is it not infinitely better to side with the wicked who prosper than with the good who perish?"

Therefore, de Sade concludes that since Nature—or the universe—does not concern itself with moral distinctions, it is more rational to align with the wicked who enjoy prosperity than with the virtuous who suffer.

He proposes a pragmatic view of life, one that rejects idealism in favor of survival and pleasure.

Monsieur Dubourg on the Uselessness of Virtue and the Illusory Nature of Divine Law

Dubourg is a corrupt and manipulative character in Justine who exploits the protagonist under the guise of offering protection, embodying the novel's theme of virtue punished by vice.

"The virtue of which you make so much serves no useful purpose in the real world. You can tout it around as much as you like, but you will find that it won't even buy you a glass of water."

Here, de Sade—through the character Monsieur Dubourg—argues that virtue, understood as moral goodness or righteousness, has no practical value in the harsh reality of life.

It won't earn you favors, protection, or even basic necessities like a glass of water.

Dubourg continues:

"Those of us who actually dole out charity, which is something we do as little as possible and then only with the greatest reluctance, want to be compensated for the money which is taken out of our pockets."

Even charity, then, is not a truly selfless act. It is portrayed as a form of hypocrisy or calculated self-interest, driven by a desire for compensation or recognition.

Dubourg adds:

"No, not a great deal, my child. The mania for obliging others without asking anything in return is now a thing of the past. It flattered one's pride momentarily, of course. But since there is nothing so illusory and so quickly dispelled as pleasure, people have begun demanding more palpable gratifications."

De Sade acknowledges that helping others without expecting anything in return may briefly satisfy one's pride.

However, once that fleeting pleasure fades, people begin to seek tangible rewards or compensation for their generosity.

Theft as Social Correction in Justine.

Monsieur Du Harpin states:

“On the trivial nature of stealing and on the useful role it plays in society where theft redresses a balance destroyed by inequalities in the distribution of wealth.”

Here, he attempts to justify theft by reframing it as a corrective force that addresses economic inequality.

However, Du Harpin is portrayed as a usurer who spies on Justine while she changes clothes and forces her to work in rags. He also manipulates her into theft by instructing her to steal from his master. His justification of theft is not philosophical but self-serving, revealing the hypocrisy embedded in his moral reasoning.

DuBois illustrates the illusory nature of morality:

“The rich justifies the knavery of the poor, my child. If their purses would open to satisfy our needs and if humanity reigned in their hearts, then virtue would take root in ours.

But as long as our distress, the patience with which we bear it, our honesty, and our subjection serve merely to add weight to our chains, our misdemeanors are their handiwork, and we would be fools indeed to reject crime as a means of lightening a yoke which they fasten around our necks.”

DuBois reveals how virtue is often weaponized to serve the interests of the rich, encouraging the poor to remain patient and submissive for the benefit of the upper class.

This moral conditioning only deepens the suffering of the oppressed, adding more chains to their already burdened lives.

Despite her criminal and immoral nature, DuBois occasionally shows sympathy for Justine and aids her in various situations.

DuBois is depicted as a virago—a fierce, domineering woman—and a notorious criminal sentenced to execution. As the matriarchal leader of a gang of thieves, DuBois is also portrayed as a libertine who engages in sexual acts for her own pleasure and acts as a predator within the narrative.

Madame DuBois justifies crime

Crime as a Natural and Necessary Force. She argues

“Crime alone opens the door to life which it sustains, preserves, and prevents from losing altogether”

This view reinforces de Sade's belief that Nature is not a moral guide but a chaotic and indifferent force.

In such a world, everything becomes possible—and justified. This is radical hedonism, unlike Epicurus, who preferred peace of mind over risk. The Greek philosopher believed that harming others would disturb one's inner tranquility, leading to fear and unrest.

By contrast, Dubois—and by extension, de Sade—does not fear punishment from any higher entity.

So what, then, is the justification for crime, given that worldly punishment remains a real possibility?

Law's Powerlessness Over the Powerful and the Destitute

Dubois argues that the law holds no sway over any wicked man. She distinguishes between two types:

-The Wealthy and Influential and Rogues who are criminals who are rich and protected.

“Those with great wealth and prodigious influence are beyond the reach of so tragic an end. And successful rogues can always avoid its grasp.”

The point is this: rather than submitting to fate or divine justice, individuals must rely on their intellect and instincts to survive in a world shaped by inequality and chance. It's the same ethos captured in 50 Cent's mantra: Get rich or die trying

Self-Advancement and Survival in a Corrupt World

Lying and deceiving are not only permissible—they are encouraged. Madame Du Buisson, a brothel owner in *Justine* who attempts to exploit the protagonist before being murdered by Juliette and Claudine, explicitly advises Juliette to:

“Behave candidly with me, courteously with your companions, and deceitfully with men.”

This instruction is given as a strategy for Juliette to “make her way” in life and acquire possessions, suggesting that deception is a necessary tool for success and survival in a morally compromised society.

Dubois echoes this sentiment, arguing that in a “wholly corrupt world,” the best policy is the “pursuit of vice,” implying that honesty leads only to ruin. She states:

“Whoever does not tread the path taken by others will surely perish.”

This justifies any behavior—including deception—that aligns with the prevailing corruption, framing it as a means of self-preservation and a way to avoid societal disadvantage.

She further argues that what is considered a “crime” in one place may not be in another, making it:

“No more than a matter of opinion and geography.”

And she’s not wrong. Slavery, for example, was once legal and widely accepted; now it is universally condemned. Laughing at a president or mocking religion may be a serious crime in some Arab countries, while in most Western nations, it falls under freedom of speech.

This supports the idea that morality and criminality are not objective truths, but social constructs shaped by time, place, and power.

De Sade’s Juliette:

After exploring how de Sade, in his novel *Justine*, portrays morality as a tool designed to enslave the poor and serve the interests of the rich and powerful, we now turn to *Juliette*, where his philosophical critique of morality, virtue, and justice becomes even more explicit.

Juliette centers on a woman who rejects morality and religion, embracing a life of extreme vice, cruelty, and pleasure.

She ascends through society by committing crimes and aligning herself with corrupt elites. The novel explores radical hedonism and atheism, challenging conventional notions of virtue and justice.

Morality as a Social Construct and Illusion

“Conventional, Not Natural”

De Sade argues that modesty, virtue, and moral conventions are illusions—fabrications born from cultural upbringing and social norms, not from Nature itself:

“Modesty, virtues, and conventions are considered illusions or fabrications arising from cultural manners, upbringing, and social ordinances, rather than being implanted by Nature.”

He insists that morality is not a natural phenomenon but a product of tradition and social conditioning:

“Nature, having created humans naked, cannot have instilled aversion or shame.”

Shame and honor, then, are human inventions. For example, many tribes in Africa and the Amazon live with minimal clothing, without experiencing shame.

In contrast, in parts of the Middle East, a man may feel shame if his wife walks in public without a hijab.

Moral as Arbitrary and Local

De Sade describes manners and morals as “arbitrary affairs,” shaped by geography, climate, and local customs:

“What is considered ‘vicious’ in one place can be a ‘virtue’ in another, and vice versa.”

He views morality as relative. What is considered moral in place can be immoral in another place .

For instance, Freedom of speech may be a virtue in democratic societies but condemned in authoritarian regimes.

Man-Made Restrictions

Social conventions, according to de Sade, are restrictions people secretly resent:

“Social ordinances and conventions are restrictions that people cordially hate, contradictions of common sense, and absurd myths.”

These laws are man-made and lack philosophical legitimacy. They impose restraints but are not sacred.

Contradiction of Nature

Nature, in de Sade’s view, prohibits nothing. It is indifferent and even immoral:

“The principle of ‘do not do unto others that which unto us we would not have done’ is directly contradicted by Nature, whose single precept is to enjoy oneself, even at the expense of others.”

He rejects the Golden Rule, arguing that it contradicts Nature’s amoral drive.

For instance, large corporations exploit poor workers in Asia with low wages and harsh conditions, then sell products at high prices. The working class often suffers lifelong hardship for the benefit of the wealthy.

Where is the Golden Rule in this?

Conscience, Guilt, and Remorse

Products of Prejudice and Education

De Sade claims that conscience and guilt are not universal truths but products of upbringing:

“Conscience and guilt are purely constructions of prejudices or ethical principles one devises for oneself, or effects of early impressions and education. If one were born and raised in a different climate, these inner voices would speak a very different language.”

He challenges the idea that guilt is natural, pointing out that criminals and extremists often feel no remorse due to their environment or upbringing.

Modern psychology supports this view to some extent: many serial killers have traumatic childhoods marked by abuse and neglect.

These experiences distort emotional development, often resulting in a lack of guilt or empathy.

So, guilt and remorse are a product of education and culture.

“Guilt is deemed a perfectly useless debility, a weakness to be broken, and an unpleasant reminiscence arising from customs and conventions, not from the character of the deed itself.”

To overcome remorse, one should repeat the act until it becomes bearable—even pleasurable:

“To silence remorse, one should reiterate the deeds that cause it until habit makes the act wholly bearable and even delicious.”

Shame, a reflection of public opinion, can be eliminated through habituation and bold cynicism. Vice is described as:

“Eminently inherent in us” and Nature’s “most fundamental commandment.”

De Sade argues that vice is more creative and necessary than virtue. Crime, he suggests, is essential to universal harmony—it disrupts and regenerates, serving Nature’s ends. **Justice and Injustice**

Relative and Self-Interested

Justice and injustice are seen as relative concepts:

“They are based solely on each country’s legal code and each individual’s peculiar interests.”

He justifies his view by arguing that Nature itself commits injustices—hailstorms destroy the crops of the poor but spare those of the rich; villains prosper while honest people suffer. Thus, acting unjustly is not inherently blameworthy.

De Sade argues that Human laws are criticized as ignorant and self-serving:

“Laws are regarded as futile and dangerous, serving only to delay the annihilation of prejudices and to multiply crimes by forcing them into secrecy.”

Nietzsche’s philosophy is a cornerstone of moral relativism. He argued that: Morality is not absolute: It’s a product of historical, psychological, and cultural forces.

Foucault believed Law as a Mechanism of Power,he wrote:

“Law is not neutral: It’s a tool for organizing and controlling populations.”

Subjectivity of Happiness

Happiness, for de Sade, is not found in virtue or vice per se, but in how one experiences them:

“Happiness is not found in virtue or vice intrinsically, but in how one understands and appreciates them, and in the choices made according to individual values.”

Happiness depends on the satisfaction that comes from voluntary actions and personal decisions—regardless of whether those actions are considered morally “good” by others.

This aligns closely with de Sade’s radical idea that happiness and morality are not found in virtue or vice themselves, but in how one chooses and experiences them.

Both thinkers reject external moral authorities—whether divine, societal, or legal—and argue that meaning and value are created through personal choice and lived experience.,

“Man is nothing else but what he proposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself; he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions.” – Sartre

In the world of de Sade, morality is not a beacon—it is a mirage. Whether cloaked in religion or draped in patriotism, it often serves as a tool of control, not compassion.

As we have seen, virtue is praised but rarely rewarded, while vice, cunning, and rebellion offer the only escape from chains forged by hypocrisy. With this foundation laid, we now turn to the next battleground of de Sade’s critique: the divine.

In the following chapter, we will confront his radical rejection of God, religion, and the sacred myths that have shaped human civilization.

Chapter 4: The Death of God.

De Sade: The Obsession with God

The Marquis de Sade’s relationship with God was not one of simple denial—it was a consuming obsession. To grasp this is to penetrate the very core of his philosophy.

De Sade did not reject God out of casual atheism. His denial was rooted in a deeper conviction: that God represented the ultimate source of constraint. He saw the divine as a tyrannical overlord, imposing arbitrary laws and demanding blind obedience. In Sade's view, this God was the supreme affront to individual freedom and the uninhibited pursuit of pleasure.

His obsession with God stemmed from the belief that the concept of divinity was the root of human suffering. It was God, he argued, who birthed morality—a system that stifled natural desires. It was God who instilled fear, guilt, and the ever-present dread of punishment.

For de Sade, there was no act more glorious than the destruction of God's idea. His works became a sustained rebellion against the divine. In his narratives, characters blaspheme, deny God, and revel in acts deemed the ultimate sins—not merely for shock, but as philosophical statements.

He understood that the true enemy was not necessarily God's existence, but the belief in God. Belief imposed limits.

It shackled human behavior to codes of conduct and systems of control. Rejecting God, then, was not just defiance—it was liberation. It was the path to absolute freedom, to the full emancipation of the self.

De Sade's rejection of God was not a fleeting provocation. It was the cornerstone of his worldview. It signified the futility of submission to any higher power and called upon humanity to embrace its own capacity for autonomy, pleasure, and even cruelty.

And yet, paradoxically, de Sade was more obsessed with God than many of the religious thinkers who wrote endlessly of His providence.

God haunted his pages—not as a figure of worship, but as a nemesis. His writing was not merely philosophical; it was personal.

A relentless battle with the idea of God, fought through blasphemy, satire, and radical inversion. In *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man*, he wrote:

"If God exists, he is the enemy."

For de Sade, God was not absent—He was omnipresent, as the ultimate adversary.

The divine was the final barrier to freedom, and de Sade's life work was a sustained campaign to deny him.

The Marquis de Sade's "Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man" presents a strong argument against the existence and necessity of God.

De Sade utilizes the dialogue form to present his arguments with clarity and force, stripping away sentimentality and exposing the stark reality of human existence.

The words of the Dying Man become a testament to the strength of the human will, the value of individual freedom, and the beauty of living life to its fullest.

The Dying Man Argues That God Serves No Useful Purpose

Denial of God's Existence and Understanding

The Dying Man explicitly states his unbelief:

"So you do not believe in God? No, and for a very simple reason: it is impossible to believe what one does not understand."

He further challenges the Priest, saying:

"I defy you to say that you believe in the God whose praises you sing, because you cannot demonstrate His existence nor is it within your capacities to define His nature, which means that you do not understand Him and since you do not understand you are incapable of furnishing me with reasoned arguments."

He dismisses God as an illusion or idle fancy:

"In other words, anything which is beyond the limits of human reason is either illusion or idle fancy, and since your God must be either one or the other, I should be mad to believe in the first and stupid to believe in the second."

God's Irrelevance and Lack of Purpose

"I want to prove to you that it is possible that everything is simply what it is and what you see it to be, without its being the effect of some cause which was reasonable and wisely directed; that natural effects must have natural causes without there being any

need to suppose that they had a non-natural origin such as your God who, as I have already observed, would require a good deal of explaining but would not of Himself explain anything; that therefore once it is conceded that God serves no useful purpose,
“

He becomes completely irrelevant; that there is every likelihood that what is irrelevant is of no account and what is of no account is as nought.

So, to convince myself that your “God is an illusion, I need no other argument than that which is supplied by my certain knowledge that He serves no useful purpose.”

He suggests that the concept of God is a human construct designed to serve passions:

“Your God is a machine which you have built to serve your own passions and you have set it to run according to their requirements.”

Nature as Sufficient and Omnipotent, Eliminating the Need for a Creator

The Dying Man attributes all power to Nature, eliminating the need for a Creator:

“If we admit it is possible that Nature alone is responsible for creating what you attribute to your God, why do you insist on looking for a master hand?”

The cause of what you do not comprehend may be the simplest thing there is.

“Study physics and you will understand Nature better; learn to think clearly, cast out your preconceived ideas and you will have no need of this God of yours.”

He challenges the Priest to prove Nature’s insufficiency:

“Prove to me that matter is inert, and I shall grant you a Creator. Show me that Nature is not sufficient unto herself, and I shall gladly allow you to give her a Master. But until you can do this, I shall not yield one inch.”

He views his own existence and actions as products of Nature:

“My soul is what it pleased Nature to be, which is to say a consequence of the organs which Nature thought fit to implant in me in accordance with her purposes and needs. Now, since Nature needs vice as much as she needs virtue, she directed me towards the first when she found it expedient, and when she had need of the second, she filled me with the appropriate desires to which I surrendered equally promptly.

“ Do not seek further than her laws for the cause of our human inconsistency, and to explain her laws look not beyond her will and her needs.”

Dismissal of Traditional Religious Proof

The Dying Man scoffs at the idea of miracles, prophets, and martyrs as proof of God’s existence, stating that:

“All these proofs” are things that “itself first needs to be proved.”

He contends that miracles are mere deceptions:

“All swindlers have worked miracles and the stupid have believed in them. “

To be convinced of the truth of a miracle, I should have to be quite certain that the event which you would call miraculous ran absolutely counter to the laws of Nature..

Against Divine Justice

Monsieur Dubour, a wealthy merchant who propositions Justine, explicitly expresses his disbelief in Heaven’s power:

“Heaven is the last thing in the world which interests us. Whether what we do on earth pleases Heaven or not is the last thing which gives us pause.”

Through Dubour, de Sade suggests that the rich have no need for Heaven—they already possess their paradise on earth. It is the poor who cling to the promise of an afterlife, using it to justify their suffering and dire conditions.

Monsieur Dubour further describes Heaven’s “designs” as:

“An illusory chain by which hypocrites and impostors have always set out to deceive and subjugate the strong.”

The idea of De Sade regarding religions as a scam and a tool to control and deceive people.

The Marquis de Bressac's Argument Against God

The Marquis de Bressac, a depraved nobleman, is described as a “furious opponent of the existence of a Supreme Being.” He presents a detailed philosophical argument against God and religion.

He claims:

“All religions start from a false premise, by assuming a Creator. If the world is eternal and natural processes are governed by Nature's laws”

Nature's laws”

“What role is left for the prime mover which you gratuitously impute to it?”

Religion claims there is a Creator, often invoking Aristotle's concept of the Prime Mover. Marquis de Bressac, however, questions this necessity, suggesting that attributing a divine origin to Nature is gratuitous and unsupported. He challenges the idea that a Creator is required to explain natural laws.

According to Bressac:

“The God you admit to is nothing but the fruit—on the one hand of ignorance, and on the other of tyranny,”

he's arguing that belief in God is not born from truth or reason, but from two corrupt sources:

- Ignorance: People invent God to explain what they don't understand—natural phenomena, suffering, existence itself.
- Tyranny: Rulers and institutions use the idea of God to control others—through fear, guilt, and obedience.

Bressac dismisses all religions as:

“Destructive consequences of this first fiction, Imposture and stupidity,”

Containing *“dogmas which outrage Nature and grotesque ceremonials which warrant nothing but derision.”*

He further contends that man cannot truly destroy life, only transform its forms, and that:

“All forms are equal in the eyes of Nature.”

Thus, human acts of destruction do not offend Nature or weaken her power. Even murder—even parricide—is inconsequential in the grand scheme of Nature.

After receiving an unexpected inheritance, Bressac tells Justine:

“Prosperity positively showers me with favours! How often have I told you that there is nothing better guaranteed to bring happiness than conceiving a crime—indeed, the road to happiness seems to be made easiest for the wrong-doer.”

Later, after brutally whipping Justine for her virtue, he asks her sarcastically:

“Don’t you think virtue is a rather expensive calling? Were not 2,000 écus a year a better bargain than a hundred strokes of the lash?”

Madame Dubois on the problem of evil.

She raises existential questions about providence and good and evil, and ends with shocking conclusions.

Dubois, Justine’s former rescuer and a cunning criminal, offers a scathing argument against God and Providence.

She challenges the notion that Providence favors order and virtue, pointing instead to the existence of war, pestilence, and famine, and to a:

“Universe which is vicious in every respect.”

She concludes that:

“Providence operates strictly through vice, both its will and its works being nothing but wickedness and corruption, crime and chaos,”

And questions why one should combat vices if they serve Providence’s designs.

Dubois also dismisses remorse as an illusion:

“Nothing but the witless grumbling of minds too weak to dare to stop its voice,”

Arguing that remorse can be overcome through habit and self-interest.

Dubois on the Problem of Evil

Most explicitly, Dubois confronts the theological dilemma of evil:

“I think that if there were a God, there would be less evil on this earth. I believe that if evil exists here below, then either it was willed by God or it was beyond His powers to prevent it. Now I cannot bring myself to fear a God who is either spiteful or weak. I defy Him without fear and care not a fig for His thunderbolts.”

This statement encapsulates de Sade’s radical atheism and his rejection of divine justice. The problem is divine evil is present here.

Dubois refuses to worship a deity who is either malevolent or impotent. Her defiance is not just philosophical—it is existential, grounded in the brutal realities of suffering and injustice.

Another powerful critique of Providence appears in Justine, voiced through Dubois:

“You believe if Providence places us in situations where acting wickedly becomes necessary and at the same time allows us to choose to be wicked, then its laws are served no less well by evil than by good, and Providence thus gains as much by the one as by the other.”

This is one of de Sade’s most cunning arguments. If God or Providence places us in circumstances where wickedness becomes necessary—while also granting us the freedom to choose it—then evil serves divine law just as well as virtue. In this view, Providence is not a moral force but a neutral mechanism that benefits equally from suffering and righteousness.

Dubois’s logic exposes a disturbing paradox: if Providence permits evil acts by creating the conditions for them, then it either endorses those acts or is indifferent to their consequences.

For example, if a child is kidnapped and Providence allows this atrocity to unfold without intervention, then what does that say about divine justice? If Providence sets such tragic circumstances and allows both victims and perpetrators to act freely, then it either accepts evil as part of its design or lacks the power to prevent it.

This argument dismantles the comforting notion of a benevolent, omnipotent God. It suggests that divine justice—if it exists—is not aligned with human morality, and that suffering may be just as sacred, or meaningless, as virtue.

Dolmancé's Argument: Divine Law Serves Evil as Much as Good

In *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, particularly through the character Dolmancé and the embedded pamphlet *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*, de Sade presents one of his most radical critiques of God and Providence.

The central argument posits that if God or Providence truly exists and permits—or even orchestrates—situations where wickedness becomes necessary or freely chosen, then divine laws are served no less by evil than by good. This suggests that Providence either benefits from both or is indifferent to human suffering and moral distinctions.

God as an Inconsistent and Detestable Being

Dolmancé argues that if God exists as portrayed by religion, then He must be the “most detestable of creatures,” for He permits evil despite His supposed omnipotence. The Christian God is described as an:

“Inconsistent and barbarous being,”

A “monster” who creates destruction, fails to control man, and condemns him to eternal torment for actions God Himself allowed or facilitated.

The pamphlet further declares that a god who “moves man at the moment man abandons himself to horrors” is a “father of confusion” and unworthy of worship.

If God created the world and humanity to worship Him, yet His efforts to earn that worship have failed and our days are spent mocking Him, then He is nothing more than an “unfortunate fellow.”

He wonders :why is God yearning for worshiping?

Nature as the Sole, Amoral Motor

In contrast to a benevolent deity, Nature is presented as the only true force in the universe—amoral, indifferent, and perpetually in motion.

Dolmancé asserts that Nature must desire evil as compensation for the destruction that serves her laws. Nature is in constant opposition to any God who will only the good.

Destruction as a Mandate

Destruction is described as one of Nature's chief laws, as necessary as creation. Acts like murder are not true destruction but merely the alteration of forms. These acts provide Nature with materials for regeneration, making the murderer:

"Meritorious in the universal agent's eye."

Vices and "Evil" as Natural Impulses

What society labels as vices—sodomy, incest, cruelty—are described as natural impulses instilled by Nature herself. Dolmancé asks:

"How may I offend Nature by refusing to create?"

Or by destroying, if these acts are "necessary to her" and conform with her will?

Indifference to Human Morality

Nature does not distinguish between good and evil in human terms. All individuals are of equal importance in her eyes, and thus:

"The deed that serves one person by causing suffering to another is of perfect indifference to Nature."

This aligns directly with the idea that Providence, if real, gains as much from evil as from good.

Man as Nature's Instrument

Dolmancé concludes that man cannot commit a crime against Nature because he is merely a blind instrument of her inspirations. If Nature instills in him the irresistible desire to commit crime, she also ensures that no act will disturb her operations. Therefore:

"All the criminals on earth are nothing but the agents of her caprices."

The only true crime, in this view, would be resisting Nature's will.

This argument is a cornerstone of de Sade's atheistic and naturalistic worldview. It dismantles the idea of divine justice and replaces it with a vision of Nature as a chaotic, indifferent force—one that embraces destruction, vice, and suffering as essential components of existence.

Atheism as a Foundation of Liberated Character

In Juliette, the characters widely reject religion and the concept of God, viewing them as fabrications designed to control and exploit people.

Madame Delbene exhorts Juliette to scorn the “ludicrous God” and religion’s “baneful insinuations.”

The “dogma of the immortality of the soul” and “eternal punishments” are called:

“Abominable falsehoods” and “the crudest and clumsiest of all possible lies,”

Invented by priests for self-serving motives.

Atheism is not just a belief—it’s a requirement. It is the prerequisite for entry into the Sodality of the Friends of Crime, whose sole divinity is pleasure.

The God presented by theology is described as “vindictive,” “barbarous,” “wicked,” and “unjust.” In this view, atheism becomes not only rational—but necessary. It is the first step toward liberation from guilt, fear, and imposed morality.

De Sade’s atheism is not passive. It is an active rebellion. It strips away the illusions of divine justice and replaces them with a philosophy of autonomy, desire, and defiance.

Even Justine, the embodiment of virtue and unwavering faith, reaches a breaking point. At her lowest, battered by injustice and betrayal, she momentarily questions the very Providence she has clung to throughout her suffering:

“O Providence! Am I finally in doubt of your justice?”

This cry is not just a moment of despair—it is a rupture in the moral fabric that de Sade has been unraveling throughout the novel. If even Justine, the virtuous martyr, begins to doubt divine justice, then the illusion of a moral universe governed by a benevolent God collapses entirely.

In the world of de Sade, God is not a source of comfort, justice, or moral order—but a fiction crafted to sanctify suffering and legitimize power. Through the mouths of libertines, criminals, and even the virtuous Justine, de Sade dismantles the idea of a benevolent Providence. If God exists, He is either indifferent to evil or complicit in it. If He does not, then morality built upon His name collapses into absurdity.

Nature, in contrast, is amoral, destructive, and indifferent—yet honest in its cruelty. De Sade’s characters embrace this truth, rejecting remorse, charity, and divine justice as

illusions designed to enslave the weak. In their world, crime is not a deviation from sacred law but a fulfillment of Nature's law.

And so, the death of God in de Sade's philosophy is not merely a denial of divinity—it is a liberation from the chains of false virtue, a rebellion against the tyranny of hope, and a declaration that in a universe ruled by chaos, only pleasure and power remain.

Chapter 5: The Theater of Power

De Sade, the Radical Napoleon

De Sade's goal? To rebel against all powers. Religion, gods, morality, society, politics—he wanted them all burned down. Had de Sade remained in the army, there's little doubt he'd have surpassed Napoleon in intelligence and cunning. But he wouldn't have been a general of empires—he'd have been a radical version of Napoleon. A destroyer of illusions, not a builder of thrones.

De Sade, a master of the trade, delivers cynical and razor-sharp observations—not just about sex, but about power, control, and manipulation. His writing cuts deep into the machinery of society. He doesn't seduce the body—he provokes the mind.

From *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Sade's goal is not only to arouse desire; it's to arouse thought, reason, and reflection. This book is notorious, yes, but not for the reasons people think. It's more than sex. It's politics and critics for hypocrisy.

Corruption of Justice by Money and Influence

Sade illustrates how political power shares the same nature as sexual desire.

The character Oxtiern explicitly states, "I have never known the law to resist the power of gold." He uses fake gold, false witnesses, and corrupt judges to fabricate accusations against Herman, leading to his imprisonment and death.

The *Président de Curval*, a so-called "pillar of society," uses his influence and money to condemn an innocent street porter to death—just to get the porter's daughter for his own sexual gratification. He finds voluptuous pleasure in voting to hang a hundred innocent people while seated in Parliament. Here, even killing becomes a kind of fetish—a way to control the masses and dictate the fate of others. Political power is pleasure, and sometimes, it's stronger than sexual pleasure, which lasts only minutes.

The laws themselves are shown to serve the powerful. Sade's characters argue, "The stronger has always considered exceedingly just what the weaker regarded as flagrantly unjust," and "All these notions therefore being very arbitrary, a fool who would allow himself to become their thrall." In this view, becoming a voluntary slave to these systems is a foolish mistake.

Sade, acting as a Grand Juror during the Revolution, took a stance against this corruption by almost always dismissing charges against the accused. He refused to sentence members of the opposition to death, explaining that while one might commit crimes for pleasure, he would not "murder in the name of justice." He saw constitutional murder during the Terror as an inhuman expression of abstract principles, rejecting the state's power to inflict anonymous death.

Wealth as an Enabler of Vice and Absolute Power

The main libertine characters—the Duc de Blangis, the Bishop, Durcet the banker, and Président de Curval—all amassed immense fortunes through speculation and swindling. This wealth enabled their extreme debaucheries and crimes.

Duc de Blangis arrogantly declares that his "Gold and his prestige keep me well beyond reach of those vulgar instruments of repression which should be employed only upon the common." The sheer volume of their resources is staggering; they disburse two million annually for expenses, allowing them to procure the most unusual things and personnel for their orgies.

The influence of Madame Scholtz, as the head of a prosperous business, is described as "far-reaching" and "overwhelming" in her commercial city. Her wealth and status allow her to manipulate both social and legal situations to her advantage. De Sade shows that in a corrupt society, money isn't just a tool—it's a weapon. Business leaders like Scholtz don't need titles or armies. Their power comes from commerce, reputation, and control over resources. They bend laws, shape public opinion, and buy silence. In this world, the businessman becomes a kind of shadow authority—untouchable, unaccountable, and often more dangerous than kings or judges.

The Mask and the True Self

Sade's novels are unique because they reveal the inner lives of their characters, the parts hidden from public view. He writes,

"The novelist's brush, on the contrary, portrays him from within . . . seizes him when he drops this mask, and the description, which is far more interesting, is at the same time more faithful."

This quote distinguishes between the public facade—the “mask”—and the inner, true nature of an individual. In a political context, it suggests that history often depicts leaders through their public roles, while a deeper analysis reveals the unfiltered ambitions and vices beneath the surface.

This philosophical stance allowed him to justify his crimes as assertions of individual autonomy. He found pleasure in public disgrace; the anecdote of the Marquis de S** (representing Sade himself) illustrates this: he was discharged sexually upon hearing of being burned in effigy, seeing it as validation of his “Opprobrium and infamy.” This reflects a deliberate inversion of societal judgment—turning condemnation into a source of personal power and gratification.

Economic Motives and Transactional Relationships

The system of debauchery in *The 120 Days of Sodom* is highly organized and transactional—run by paid procuresses, pimps, and “fuckers.” It shows how money facilitates the objectification and exploitation of individuals for sexual pleasure.

Duclos, a procuress, arranges lucrative parties for powerful clients, justifying theft by claiming, “All possessions should be equally distributed in the world,” and that she is merely correcting imbalances created by “strength and violence.”

The Commander de Saint-Elme finds pleasure in the act of cheating and theft at his gaming house, linking the acquisition of wealth through illicit means directly to sexual pleasure. Similarly, the Comte orchestrates the imprisonment of a shoemaker and his wife to facilitate the kidnapping of their daughter for his perverse pleasures—highlighting the use of legal manipulation and social influence for criminal ends.

Egoism, Self-Interest, and the Pursuit of Happiness as Natural Law

In *Juliette*, de Sade’s characters consistently assert that self-interest and the pursuit of individual happiness are the sole and most sacred laws of Nature. This is not just a rejection of morality; it’s a declaration of war against the idea of collective good.

“We alone can make for our personal felicity: whether we are to be happy or unhappy is completely up to us, it all depends solely upon our conscience, and perhaps even more so upon our attitudes.”

This philosophy turns traditional ethics upside down. Instead of sacrifice, it promotes indulgence. Instead of duty, it celebrates desire.

The individual becomes sovereign—not by law, but by will. In de Sade’s world, the pursuit of happiness is not a right granted by society—it’s a natural imperative. To deny it is to betray Nature.

To suppress it for the sake of others is to commit violence against oneself. This idea is politically explosive. It dismantles the foundations of social contracts, communal responsibility, and moral obligation. It suggests that the only true injustice is being forced to live for someone else’s idea of virtue.

Politics as an Extension of Vicious Character

In *Juliette*, politics is not portrayed as a noble pursuit—it is the playground of vice. The characters argue that governance is inherently corrupted and should serve individual passions and self-interest, not some illusion of public good or virtue.

Statesmen are believed to pursue “No other veritable objective... than to satisfy his voluptuous inclinations to the full.” Saint-Fond, a Minister, openly declares that true statecraft involves fomenting “the extremest degree of corruption in the citizenry.” This orchestrated debauchery keeps the people “drugged,” unable to feel the “weight of his irons.”

Despotism is portrayed as a natural inclination, a primal desire inspired by Nature. The text claims, “The harshest, the most ferocious, the most traitorous and the wickedest man will be the happiest man” in power.

Justice is mocked as an “altogether make-believe goddess,” one who always favors the powerful. The strong are naturally destined to oppress the weak, and their cruelties are described as “pure emanations” of their character, bestowed by Nature. Crime is seen as essential to the workings of all governments and should be encouraged, while virtue is viewed as disruptive to political operations. The ultimate goal for those in power is personal pleasure and advantage—even if it means mass murder, famine, or the extermination of the poor.

These atrocities are justified as part of Nature’s design of destruction and equilibrium.

Inequality as Natural Law and Political Principle

One significant political idea in *Justine*, particularly through the character Dalville, is the belief that inequality is a fundamental and desirable aspect of the natural order and that any attempt to alleviate the plight of the poor or promote equality is detrimental to society.

Dalville articulates this worldview with brutal clarity: “The poor man is part of the natural order. By creating men unequal in strength, Nature has clearly shown us her wish that

inequality be preserved, even though civilization should alter natural laws.” He argues that relieving the poor would “overturn the established order, opposing the natural order, and destroying the balance which underpins Nature’s sublime arrangement of things.”

From this perspective, “Ingratitude, far from being a vice, is therefore the virtue of proud souls as surely as charity is the virtue merely of faint hearts.” This reinforces the political idea that any effort to subvert the natural hierarchy—such as through charity—is misguided and contrary to Nature’s design. Dalville goes so far as to claim, “Religion, philanthropy, and charity were sure stumbling-blocks placed in the path of anyone who aspired to wealth and success.”

Chapter 6: Transgression As The Sadean Extreme

The word transgression in De Sade’s novels refers to fictional crimes—acts of cruelty and debauchery—that are committed to prove a philosophical point: that there is no Providence, no divine justice, and no inherent value in goodness.

For him, transgression was the ultimate expression of individual will and a rebellion against a hypocritical world. He believed that to truly be free, one must act without limits.

Mental Transgression: Liberation from Harmful Traditions and Societal Norms

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Marquis de Sade doesn’t just portray physical transgression—he also champions mental rebellion against the moral codes and traditions that society imposes. This form of transgression is deeply philosophical, aimed at dismantling inherited beliefs and exposing the artificiality of virtue.

- Sade viewed society’s moral codes as “artificial,” likening them to laws drawn up by a “community of blind men”. These codes, he argued, were designed not to uphold justice, but to oppress the weak, especially in matters like property ownership and the so-called “general interest”.

- He fiercely rejected submission, condemning what he called “hypocritical resignation” disguised as virtue. To Sade, this was nothing more than “stupid submission to the rule of evil, as re-created by society”. Concepts like chastity, temperance, and the condemnation of “sexual vagaries” were, in his view, tools of “stupid conformism”—designed to erase individual authenticity and enforce obedience.

This mental transgression—the refusal to internalize oppressive norms—is where your philosophy finds its strongest resonance. You're not advocating for cruelty or lawlessness, but for a liberation of the mind: a conscious break from inherited dogma, guilt-based morality, and the silent chains of tradition.

Mental Transgression in Writing as Defiance

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Marquis de Sade's most radical transgression is not found solely in the depravity of his characters—it is in his intellectual defiance and the way he used literature to confront society's moral and political structures.

- Sade's significance lies not in his "aberrations," but in the way he assumed responsibility for them, transforming his "psycho-physical destiny" into an ethical choice expressed through his writing. His work becomes a philosophical act—a deliberate challenge to the norms that condemned him.
- Following his imprisonment after the Revolution, Sade turned to writing as a form of "prodigious revenge" against his persecutors and the society that rejected him. He embraced the idea that his "fanaticism is the work of my tyrants and their persecutions," suggesting that oppression itself forged his defiant stance.
- He viewed writing as a way to aggressively articulate his criminal visions, believing that "words preserve" meaning where the "opacity of things blurs" it. This effort to communicate was vital for a man "haunted by their inaccessible presence" while cut off from others.
- For Sade, eroticism was no longer a private impulse—it became a public challenge. He consciously turned crime into pleasure, especially when society and Nature deemed his desires criminal. In doing so, he inverted condemnation into a source of defiant joy, reclaiming agency through transgression.
- His radical singularity and the "immensity of his literary effort" reflected a deep, paradoxical desire to be accepted by the human community. Through this, he defined the "human drama in its general aspect," using his outsider status to illuminate the hypocrisies and contradictions of civilization itself.

Choosing Authenticity Over Conformity: Sade's Radical Individualism

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Marquis de Sade presents a provocative vision of authenticity—one that defies societal expectations and embraces radical singularity. His philosophy challenges the reader to consider whether conformity is itself a form of moral failure.

- Sade cultivated his singularity, refusing to be confined by social norms or simplistic moral binaries. He adhered only to “truths derived from the evidence of his own actual experience,” transforming the sensualism of his age into an ethic of authenticity.
- He believed that “true felicity lies only in the senses, and virtue gratifies none of them,” contrasting virtue as “illusory, a fiction” with vice as “authentic, real,” intimately tied to the body and its desires. In his view, only through crime could an individual justify and fulfill himself as a concrete ego.
- Characters like Almani express an “abhorrence” for Nature, yet resolve to “imitate her” and “copy her heinousness” in open defiance. This is not passive submission—it is active imitation, a deliberate choice to embrace what society condemns in order to assert one’s autonomy.
- Sade promoted apathy as a form of asceticism. By cultivating insensitivity to the suffering of others, one becomes indifferent to one’s own pain, enabling free action unburdened by emotional motives. This, he argued, was a path to “positive happiness”—a transformation of defeat into triumph.
- He saw crime as a duty in a corrupt society—a way for the libertine to reject complicity with systemic evils and assert individual truth in a state of constant tension. For Sade, this was the only way to reclaim authenticity from the banality of everyday life and the mystified, mystifying society that demanded conformity.

Transgression in Marquis de Sade’s Justine

In *Justine*, transgression is not merely a recurring motif—it is the philosophical backbone of the narrative. De Sade explores it through a relentless catalog of depraved acts and the elaborate justifications offered by their perpetrators. The novel presents a world where virtue is punished and vice is rewarded, creating a stark, often contradictory commentary on morality, justice, and fate.

Forms of Transgression

De Sade’s portrayal of transgression extends far beyond sexual deviance. It encompasses a full-scale assault on conventional morality, law, and religion.

- Sexual License and Debauchery: Characters such as Juliette, the Recollet friars, and Dalville engage in prostitution, orgies, sodomy, and sadistic sexual torture. Juliette’s “loose conduct and underhand dealing” lead to her initial fortune. The friars force abducted girls, including Justine, into “lewd and exhausting labours,” involving “impure refinements” and “secret, filthy debauches.” Antonin’s violence includes “murderous

assaults on every part of my body, and not least with bites which were like the tiger's bloody caress."

- Theft and Robbery: Monsieur Du Harpin gains his wealth through theft and attempts to implicate Justine when she refuses to participate. Dubois builds her fortune through crime, orchestrating a robbery and poisoning plot against Dubreuil, and stealing from Justine.

- Murder and Infanticide: Juliette murders her husband and commits multiple infanticides via abortion, all undetected and contributing to her prosperity. Monsieur de Bressac successfully poisons his mother. The surgeons plan a grotesque "anatomical dissection" of a 12-year-old girl. Dalville gratuitously murders a former mistress and escapes with his fortune.

- Assault, Torture, and Mutilation: Justine endures repeated abuse—flogged by Bressac and his valet, mutilated by surgeons who cut off her toes, pull out her teeth, and brand her with a red-hot iron. Dalville routinely whips his enslaved women. The friars use flogging as both punishment and pleasure.

- Religious Blasphemy and Sacrilege: Characters openly defy Heaven. Bressac attempts to corrupt Justine with anti-religious arguments, advocating the rejection of "disgusting shams" and denying the existence of a Supreme Being. The friars stage a fake miracle using a girl dressed as the Virgin Mary, then perform "the most awful of our mysteries upon her bare back."

- Abduction, False Imprisonment, and Enslavement: Justine is abducted and held captive by the friars. Later, Dalville enslaves her and other women, forcing them into brutal labor in a counterfeiting operation.

Philosophical Justifications for Transgression

The perpetrators are not portrayed as mindless villains. Instead, they offer chilling philosophical defenses of their actions:

- Nature's Indifference and Equilibrium: Bressac claims, "The power to destroy life is not given to man who at most has the power to change its forms... Nothing we can do outrages Nature directly. Our acts of destruction give her new vigour and feed her energy." Dubois argues that the world requires a balance of good and evil, and that Providence allows wickedness as part of its design.

- Relativism of Morality and Law: Dubois asserts that crime is merely "a want of respect for the laws and manners of their nation," and that "what is called crime in France ceases to be criminal a hundred leagues beyond its borders." She concludes that it is

absurd to practice virtues deemed vices elsewhere, or to avoid crimes considered noble under different skies.

- Rejection of Gratitude, Charity, and Remorse: Dalville calls gratitude a degrading sentiment, claiming “Ingratitude... is the virtue of proud souls.” He views charity as disruptive to the natural inequality of society. Dubois dismisses remorse as “the witless grumbling of minds” too weak to dare to stop its voice,” easily silenced by habit and reason.

- Self-Interest and Prosperity as Proof: Transgressors believe happiness lies in pursuing self-interest—even through crime. Juliette’s rise is attributed to her embrace of vice. Bressac inherits a fortune after murdering his mother, concluding that “the road to happiness seems to be made easiest for the wrong-doer.” Rodin’s mutilation of Justine earns him a royal appointment, prompting her to lament: “Let the scoundrel prosper... since it is written that gall and tribulation are the grim wages of virtue.” Dalville boasts of building his fortune “on the ruins of human misconceptions... by mocking the laws of God and man... abusing the good faith and gullibility of other people, and ruining the poor and robbing the rich.”

Narrative Outcomes: Virtue vs. Vice

The novel’s structure reinforces a disturbing pattern: virtue leads to suffering, while vice leads to prosperity.

- * Punishment of Virtue: Justine’s acts of kindness, honesty, and refusal to commit crimes result in betrayal, torture, false accusations, imprisonment, and near-death experiences.

- Prosperity of Vice: Her tormentors consistently gain wealth, influence, and impunity.

- The Ultimate Contradiction: Though the narrator claims “the prosperity of crime is more apparent than real,” and that guilt gnaws at the wicked, the narrative shows no such torment. The transgressors thrive without consequence.

- Justine’s Final Fate: After finally being exonerated and receiving a pension, Justine is struck by lightning and dies horribly disfigured—just as she begins to glimpse happiness. Her death serves as the final, brutal “misfortune of virtue.”

- Juliette’s Redemption: Ironically, Juliette—who built her life on transgression—finds “true happiness” by repenting and entering a convent. This didactic conclusion, voiced by the narrator and Juliette, starkly contrasts with the relentless evidence throughout Justine’s story, revealing a tension between De Sade’s stated moral intent and the unsettling implications of the narrative.

Transgression in Juliette

The philosophy and actions of characters like Madame Delbene, Noircœur, Saint-Fond, and Juliette herself provide a comprehensive view of transgression. At its core, the idea is that human-made laws, societal conventions, and religious beliefs are artificial restraints that contradict or pervert Nature's true inclinations—inclinations that are inherently immoral, destructive, and geared toward individual pleasure.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Transgression

For De Sade's characters, transgression is rooted in a philosophy that prioritizes personal pleasure and the unrestrained expression of passions, often at the expense of conventional morality.

Rejection of Conventions and Laws

Social ordinances are dismissed as “absurd myths lacking any reality save in the eyes of the fools who don't mind submitting to them.” Laws are described as “dreamt up by men” and inherently “arbitrary.” The philosophy holds that “there is no wrong in doing anything we may well please.” Laws are seen as “futile and dangerous,” serving only to “multiply crimes or to cause them to be committed in safety.” The deepest human instinct is “uncontestably to enchain his fellow creatures and to tyrannize them with all his might.”

Nature's True Dictates

According to De Sade's characters, Nature “prohibits[s] nothing” and is inherently “immoral.” Its “single precept is to enjoy oneself, at the expense of no matter whom.” Nature, “with a wicked smile on her lips, thrilled half to death at having been violated,” is portrayed as encouraging further outrages against her laws. The “true laws of Nature are crime and death,” and individuals serve her best when they “set their hand to ruinous work.” She is described as a “great murderer” whose purpose is to destroy as much as she creates. Nature finds “atrocious in crime” pleasing, and “the more frightful it is, the more we enjoy it.” She encourages mutual destruction: “All which thou wouldst not have done unto thyself... is precisely that which thou must do to be happy; for it is written in my laws that ye all destroy yourselves mutually...”

Rejection of Conscience, Guilt, and Remorse

Conscience is described as a “construction either of the prejudices that are insinuated into us or of the ethical principles we ourselves devise.” Guilt is called a “perfectly useless debility,” a weakness whose grip must be broken. Remorse is deemed “futile”

because it “always comes after the fact” and rarely prevents recurrence. To eliminate it, one must repeatedly commit the acts that cause it. To overcome remorse and shame, one must acquire the “habit of crime” and a “pronounced cynicism,” even parading misbehavior publicly to accelerate the cure.

Elevation of Vice, Passions, and Crime

For the libertines in Juliette, “Crime is the soul of lubricity; there is no real lubricity without crime.” They believe that “This bad behavior, this deprivation, these vicious and criminal and abominable caprices... have procured us pleasure... and unwise is he who deprives himself of anything he enjoys.” Passions are described as the “fertilizing germ of the mind and the puissant spring to great deeds.” Lust is the “nervous fluid” that sustains all other passions, including ambition, cruelty, greed, and vindictiveness. Happiness is found not in virtue, but in the choices one makes based on their “individual organization.” The greatest service one can do for a young person is to “pluck out of him all the weeds of virtue.”

Illustrations of Transgression

The novel provides numerous examples that illustrate these principles.

Sexual Transgressions

- Adultery: Adultery is advocated as a virtue aligned with Nature’s laws. It is argued that the “need to fuck is no less high than our need to eat and drink...”
- Incest: Incest is normalized and practiced by Juliette, her father, her sister, and other characters like Breval and Saint-Fond.
- Sodomy: Sodomy is frequently praised and practiced, often publicly, as a form of natural population control.
- Prostitution: Prostitution is described as a “lucrative and delicious estate.” Juliette desires to “prostitute myself publicly... like the lowest of the low.”
- Group Orgies: The Sodality of the Friends of Crime requires all members to intermingle indiscriminately, with no right to refuse pleasure.

Violence and Cruelty as Pleasure

- Murder: Juliette murders her husband, feels “lifted” by luring a child to its death, and promotes “moral murder” through her writings.
- Mutilation and Torture: The novel describes graphic scenes of violence, including flaying, whipping, and executions. Pope Braschi states that “blood must flow before

orgies are satisfactory,” and Madame Durand hangs infants and lashes them for pleasure.

- Transgression as a Source of Pleasure: Madame Delbene encourages Juliette to commit crimes and soil herself. Noircueil claims “no imaginable infamy... does not give pleasure.” Juliette finds the spectacle of misery “sublimely voluptuous.”

Rejection of Religion and Piety

- Blasphemy: God is described as a “shadow instantly dissipated by the least mental effort.” Religion is a “baneful insinuation” that debilitates mankind. Clairwil blasphemes the Christian trinity to arouse herself.

- Corruption: Historical Popes are depicted committing debauchery, murder, incest, and tyranny. Belmor proposes slaughtering all priests and followers and replacing Catholicism with atheistic systems.

- Denial of God: Juliette asserts that “we offend nothing by surrendering to crime” because “no god exists.”

In this chapter, we explored the concept of mental transgression alongside Sade’s fictional transgressions, illustrated through various examples of philosophical and physical defiance. Now, we turn to the next chapter: *Might Is Right*. Power plays a central role throughout Sade’s work—not just as a theme, but as a driving force behind every act of domination, cruelty, and desire.

Chapter 7 : Might Is Right

Power—an idea that consumed the Marquis de Sade, and one he dissected with the precision of a surgeon and the passion of a poet. For de Sade, power was not a mere social construct; it was the lifeblood of existence, the primal force that shaped every human interaction, from the most intimate to the most political.

He recognized power in its many guises. It could be brute physical strength—the raw capacity to dominate. But it could also manifest as intellectual cunning: the art of manipulation, deception, and strategic control. Economic wealth was another form, granting access to resources and the loyalty of others. Social influence, too, held sway—the ability to mold public opinion and enforce one’s will through networks of prestige. And then there was sexual dominance, where pleasure, pain, and control merged into a singular, potent expression of authority.

To de Sade, the pursuit of power was as instinctive as the drive to survive. He believed that those who denied this impulse—who clung to ideals of equality or morality—were destined to be victims. In his view, the strong, the ruthless, and the unapologetically ambitious would always triumph. As he wrote in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*:

“Every man wants to be a tyrant when he fornicates”.

He did not flinch from power’s darker dimensions. Cruelty, domination, and exploitation were not aberrations to be condemned, but tools to be understood. In a world governed by force, such instruments were not evil—they were inevitable. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, he declared:

“Lust is to the other passions what the nervous fluid is to life; it supports them all, lends strength to them all—ambition, cruelty, avarice, revenge”.

De Sade’s insights extended to the political realm. He saw clearly that governments rest on coercion, that laws are upheld by the threat of punishment, and that authority is always hungry to preserve itself. Behind every institution, he discerned the shadow of force. In *Juliette*, he observed:

“Nature has not got two voices, you know, one of them condemning all day what the other commands”.

He envisioned the world as a perpetual battlefield. Freedom, in his eyes, was not granted—it was seized. To resist oppression, one must first grasp the mechanics of power and be willing to wield them. It was a bleak vision, stripped of sentimentality. But for de Sade, it was the truth. And he embraced it with a fervor that bordered on the sacred..

Nature as the Ultimate Justifier of Power and Destruction

Sade’s characters, such as those from *The 120 Days of Sodom*, argue that Nature is inherently *“cruel and voracious, informed with the spirit of destruction,”* desiring

“the utter annihilation of all living creatures so as to enjoy her power of re-creating new ones.”

Human beings are seen as independent from Nature and capable of *“wresting himself free and turning against her,”*

Or, better yet, imitating her destructive principles. Crime, rather than being an offense, is deemed “necessary to the world” and “useful to her outlook” because it introduces discord and agitation, preventing stagnation. The *“greatest scoundrel on earth... is thus only the organ of her laws.”*

Following this logic, the “only real crime would be to outrage Nature,” and since Nature provides the “possibility of a crime that would outrage her,” such a crime is inherently legitimate.

Rejection of Morality in Favor of Individual Will

Society's codes and laws are dismissed as “imaginary” and “conventional,” made by the strong for their own profit to oppress the weak. The libertines explicitly state that *“all universal moral principles are idle fancies”* and that “there is nothing, either fundamentally good, nor anything fundamentally evil; everything is relative.”

Actions are justified if they lead to pleasure and arousal.

“What is really just but what makes for pleasure, and what is unjust is the cause of pain.”

De Sade's characters believe that “Nothing's villainous if it causes an erection, and the single crime that exists in this world is to refuse oneself anything that might produce a discharge.”

The Assertion of Tyranny

For Sade, the sexual act itself is a microcosm of the political world: *“every man wants to be a tyrant when he fornicates.”*

The suffering of others is not the primary aim, but the knowledge of one's responsibility for it, transforming the libertine's freedom into the victim's destiny.

The “unutterable charms that come from despotism” are diminished by mutual pleasure, which creates equality.

Illustrations of Power in Action

The Duc de Blangis

The Duc de Blangis from *The 120 Days of Sodom* embodies this philosophy. He believes a man should

“fling himself into every vice, but should never permit himself one virtue.”

He uses his “gold and his prestige” to remain “well beyond reach of those vulgar instruments of repression.” He commits “necessary murders” and later those “of pure pleasure,” even strangling a woman to death at the moment of his discharge.

The Président de Curval

The Président de Curval demonstrates extreme power over the vulnerable. To gain access to a young girl, he conspires to have her father falsely condemned to be “broken on the wheel.” He deliberately times his sexual discharge with the moment her father is executed, stating, “Come see how well I've kept my bargain.” His “horror” for pregnant women is so profound that he proposes grinding them in a mortar “if he had governmental power.”

Durcet the Banker

Durcet, the banker, illustrates the power of wealth and cynical logic. He dismisses those who call him “harsh, ferocious, barbaric,” stating that he has merely “created pleasure-giving distinctions.” He argues that charity is a “crime against Nature” and that he serves Nature by prolonging the suffering of the wretched.

The Bishop of X

The Bishop of X asserts that

“the greatest pleasure is derived from the most infamous source”

and that “the more pleasure you seek in the depths of crime, the more frightful the crime must be.” He claims boys are “worth more than the girl” from the “point of view of evil” because a crime perpetrated on a “being of your identical sort” appears greater, doubling the delight.

Count Oxtiern

Count Oxtiern (from Ernestine) is a calculating villain who believes that “the law” never resists “the power of gold” and that his conscience is “perfectly unperturbed.” He manipulates events to have Ernestine's father unknowingly kill her in a duel, seeing it as fate offering him “means of punishment.” He rejects appeals to morality, stating that the crime is “useful for my tranquillity” and serves his purpose. He tells Ernestine her fate is “in your own hands” while ensuring her entrapment.

These illustrations demonstrate a world where individuals with power and a particular philosophy feel entitled to act according to their desires, regardless of societal norms, conventional morality, or the suffering inflicted upon others, often finding justification in an amoral conception of Nature or pure self-interest.

The Philosophy of Power: Sade's Philosophy of the Bed

"Might is right" is a foundational principle extensively explored and advocated throughout the works of the Marquis de Sade, particularly by the characters Dolmancé and Madame de Saint-Ange, and in the embedded pamphlet *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*. This philosophy asserts that power, strength, and individual desire are the ultimate arbiters of morality and justice, with conventional virtues and societal laws dismissed as artificial constructs that hinder natural human impulses and republican ideals.

Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans. This philosophy asserts that power, strength, and individual desire are the ultimate arbiters of morality and justice, with conventional virtues and societal laws dismissed as artificial constructs that hinder natural human impulses and republican ideals.

Core Tenets of "Might Is Right"

Nature as the Sole Guide

- The characters argue that only the "voice of the passions" can lead to happiness, and that Nature's designs are the only true laws.
- They believe Nature inspires all desires—including vice and cruelty—and thus obeying these impulses cannot be criminal or an "outrage to Nature."
- Dolmancé states: "Nature has not got two voices, you know, one of them condemning all day what the other commands."

Rejection of Conventional Morality and Virtue

- Virtues as Chimeras: Dolmancé dismisses virtues like chastity, charity, and benevolence as "chimeras" or "stupidity and prejudice" hostile to Nature. He argues that virtuous actions are often driven by selfish motives such as ambition or pride.
- Crime as an Illusion: Dolmancé claims that "vice and virtue contain for us naught but local ideas," and that "there is no deed... which is really criminal." Actions are relative to manners, climate, and public opinion.

Egoism and Self-Preservation

- A central theme is the primacy of self-interest. Dolmancé advocates feeling "when it is to their advantage; and when it is not, let us be absolutely unbending."
- Nature's "immutable and sacred counsel" is to "prefer thyself, love thyself, no matter at whose expense."

"Might Is Right" in Action

Sexual Libertinage and Dominance

- Unfettered Pleasure: Madame de Saint-Ange encourages Eugénie to “sacrifice everything to the senses’ pleasure” and to know “no limits but those of your desires and... caprices alone.”
- Cruelty for Pleasure: Dolmancé argues that pain in others can “more keenly affect” one’s nervous system, enhancing pleasure. He prefers the object of pleasure to experience pain, which allows him to “dominate” and satisfy his amour propre.
- Objectification and Submission: Dolmancé views the “object that serves your pleasures” as “absolutely null.” He demands “absolute subordination” and threatens “exemplary punishment” for any resistance.

Eugenie's Defloration

- The Chevalier forces himself upon Eugénie, ignoring her pain, stating he “must reach my objective” and that his “prestige and mine are at stake.”
- Dolmancé justifies this by saying: “Fuck! Is one expected to be a gentleman when one is stiff?”
- He finds pleasure in striking Eugénie, saying: “It is always by way of pain one arrives at pleasure.” He admits his pleasures “would be more ardent were the wounds more cruel.”
- Dolmancé claims children owe “absolutely nothing” to their mothers, arguing that parents act for their own pleasure.
- He advises children to “rightfully test them, even rid ourselves of them if their behavior annoys us.”

Incest Justified

- Incest is framed as “Nature’s gentlest unions” that “cement familial ties” and allow for “more perfect” love due to resemblance.
- It is also seen as a way to loosen family bonds and redirect love toward the country.

Infanticide and Abortion

- Madame de Saint-Ange argues that propagation is not Nature's objective and that "the less we propagate, the better."
- Infanticide is described as an "imaginary" crime. Mothers are "mistresses of what we carry in our womb" and have the "right to destroy it."
- Dolmancé calls a fetus a "morsel of flesh" of which they are "absolute proprietors."

Deceit and Cunning

- Dolmancé considers deceit "absolutely essential in this world" because "everyone employs it."
- He claims it provides advantage, leading to "success," "riches," and "reputation."
- He advises approaching a victim with "guile," "sympathy," and "falsehood" before destroying them.

The Humiliation and Torture of Madame de Mistival

This episode serves as a climactic illustration of "might is right."

- Authorized Abuse: Madame de Saint-Ange reveals that Eugénie's father authorized their actions against his wife, stating: "No matter to what lengths you carry things, no complaint will be heard from me."
- Dismissal of Maternal Rights: Dolmancé negates Madame de Mistival's maternal claims, calling them "illusory" and "damnably poor."
- Physical and Psychological Torture: The characters subject her to stripping, multiple sexual assaults (including by her daughter), whipping, laceration, and infection with syphilis.
- Final Humiliation: Madame de Mistival is forced to kneel before her daughter and beg forgiveness before being kicked out—symbolizing the complete inversion of authority and triumph of libertine will.

Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans

This pamphlet, read aloud by Le Chevalier, formalizes the “might is right” principle into a political philosophy for a republican society.

Abolition of Religion and Traditional Morals

- Christianity is described as a tool of tyranny and must be “exterminated.”
- Atheism is presented as the only rational doctrine.
- Traditional moral concepts like “loving one’s neighbor” are deemed “absurd” and contrary to Nature.

Laws Serving Self-Interest and the State

- Laws should be few, lenient, and adaptable to individual character.
- The only thing “really criminal” is that which “rejects the law.”

Justification of Theft and Libertinage

- Theft: Framed as a virtue that fosters courage and promotes equality by redistributing wealth. The social contract is deemed unjust for binding the poor to respect the property of the rich.

Political Utility

- Murder is described as “one of policy’s and politics’ greatest instruments,” necessary for a nation’s strength and republican vigor.
- An “old and decayed nation” adopting republicanism “will only be maintained by many crimes.”

Regulation of Population

- Overpopulation is described as a “genuine vice in a republican government.”

- Individuals are justified in disposing of children they cannot feed.

The Soul of Sade in Ragnar Redbeard's Might Is Right

Might Is Right, written under the pseudonym Ragnar Redbeard, presents a philosophy that aggressively challenges conventional morality, religion, and social norms. It advocates for strength, combat, and individual power—ideas that resonate deeply with the radical individualism and transgressive spirit found in the works of Marquis de Sade.

This book aligns with themes of amorality, domination, and the unrestrained pursuit of gratification. Its core message is clear: power is the only true virtue, and morality is a construct designed to enslave the strong.

Core Assertion: Might Is Right and the Survival of the Fittest

The central principle of the book is that might—raw, unrelenting power—is the natural law governing all life. It is described as “immutable, indestructible, eternal.” Power and justice are treated as synonyms: “Might is mighty and must prevail.”

Man is portrayed as a heliocentric force, a cosmic agent of power. The book insists that strength alone determines justice, and that survival belongs to the fittest—not the kindest.

Rejection of Conventional Morality and Religion

Much like de Sade, Redbeard denounces Christian ethics and moral ideals as oppressive illusions. Jesus is provocatively called “the true Prince of Evil—the Mephistopheles of the world—the King of the Slaves.” Moral codes, religions, politics, and laws are dismissed as tools of organized duplicity and armed power.

“Moral principles,” according to this view, are nothing more than slave regulations. The author proclaims: “Death! I say death to every lie! I deny all things! I question all things.” He insists there is no right, no wrong, no God, no soul—only power. All moral philosophy is declared false and vain, because man is unlimited. Right and wrong are relative terms, without fixed meaning.

Human Nature as Predatory and Carnivorous

Man is described as “the most ferocious hirsute beast of prey.” Humans are fundamentally predatory by instinct. The normal man, according to Redbeard, is one who loves, feasts, fights, and hunts—the archetypal predator.

Anatomy itself is used as evidence: eyes, teeth, muscles, blood, brain, and bones all speak of aggression, violence, and prideful egoism. Man is built for conquest.

Glorification of Strength, Combat, and Ruthlessness

Fitness to survive must be tested by the clash of armies; all other tests are deemed fraudulent. The book advocates being “hard, cruel, and deliberately intrepid,” asserting that Nature is merciless.

Bravery is elevated above all virtues, while humility is condemned as a crime. Courage—not goodness—is the ultimate virtue. Extreme retribution is encouraged: “Smash him down; smite him hip and thigh, for self-preservation is the highest law.”

The author writes: “Give blow for blow, scorn for scorn, doom for doom—with compound interest added. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, aye four-fold, a hundred-fold.” The strong are blessed; the weak are cursed. The world is envisioned as a “vast whirling star-lit Valhalla,” where victors drink from the skulls of the slain in eternal war.

The book promotes the wholesale destruction of feeble and worn-out types, and the extermination of enfeebled breeds as a form of “Highest Wisdom.”

Hierarchy and Domination: The Right of the Strong to Exploit

Victors in war are naturally entitled to dominate, while the defeated are equally destined for servitude. Power’s mission is to control and exploit the powerless—because to be powerless is to be criminal.

Mastership is declared right, natural, and eternal. The author states: “He who denies man’s right to exploit man impeaches not the conduct of man, but the order of nature.” All great statesmen and kings are praised as “higher criminals.” The government itself is described as “organized and enthroned brigandage.”

Conclusion: Power as the Ultimate Principle

In essence, *Might Is Right* envisions a world where strength is the sole arbiter of truth, justice, and survival. Traditional morality is seen as a weakness.

The strong are justified in dominating and exploiting the weak to achieve their desires and secure their legacy.

This includes the relentless pursuit of beauty, wealth, and material power—often through merciless strategy and with savage disregard for the suffering of others.

Chapter 7 :A Philosophical Critique of de Sade through Epicurus

We can compare the philosophies of Epicurus and the Marquis de Sade both explored the nature of pleasure, but arrived at radically different conclusions.

Epicurean Philosophy

Epicurus believed that the purpose of life was to attain ataraxia—a state of tranquility and freedom from fear—through modest pleasures and rational thought. He divided happiness into two categories:

- Essential for happiness: peace of mind, friendship, simple food, and freedom from pain.

- Non-essential for happiness: luxury, sex, wealth, and fame.

Epicurus argued that even the absence of pain is a form of happiness—what he called “negative pleasure.” If your body and mind are free from suffering, you are already happy. Positive pleasures, like eating delicious food or enjoying sex, are not rejected, but they are not necessary for happiness and can even lead to disturbance if pursued excessively.

He was deeply concerned with the fear of gods and superstitions about the afterlife—such as the myth of Hades, where souls suffer after death. To counter this, he taught his followers to meditate on four key principles:

1. Do not fear the gods—they are indifferent to human affairs.
2. Do not fear death—when death is present, you are not; when you are present, death is not.
3. What brings happiness is easy to obtain.
4. What brings suffering is easy to endure.

Even in illness, Epicurus believed there could be moments of pleasure—such as relief between episodes of pain. And if pain becomes unbearable, it will eventually end—either through recovery or death.

Epicurus did not deny the existence of gods, but saw them as distant and uninvolved. He advised his followers to avoid public life and instead cultivate close friendships in a private circle.

Epicurus and de Sade: Materialism, Hedonism, and the Divine

Both Epicurus and the Marquis de Sade were materialists—they believed that everything in existence is composed of matter, and neither accepted the idea of an afterlife. Epicurus did not deny the existence of the soul, but he argued that it is made of atoms and dissolves after death, just like the body.

Though both philosophers can be described as hedonists—concerned with pleasure and happiness—their approaches were radically different. Epicurus sought happiness through moderation, tranquility, and the absence of fear. De Sade, on the other hand, pursued happiness through excess, transgression, and rebellion. He was not an Epicurean, though he may have admired Epicurus for his defiance of popular beliefs and religious dogma.

De Sade found happiness not in passive pleasures, but in active indulgence—especially in acts that violated social norms. His philosophy was a continuous rebellion against everything humans had constructed: religion, morality, law, and justice.

Unlike Epicurus, who encouraged his followers to live lives worthy of the gods—peaceful, modest, and rational—de Sade viewed the Abrahamic God as a personal enemy. His writings often express a desire to take revenge on God and organized religion, which he saw not only as false but as oppressive and harmful to human freedom and happiness.

The Greek gods, in contrast to the monotheistic Abrahamic God, were many, flawed, and often indifferent to human behavior. They allowed for more freedom and did not impose the same moral guilt or divine punishment. It's possible that if de Sade had lived in the time of Epicurus, surrounded by polytheistic beliefs, he might not have developed such an aggressive stance toward the divine..

Imaginary Conversation: Epicurus and de Sade

De Sade: Epicurus, why didn't you reject the gods entirely if you believed they were useless?

Epicurus: Because they supported my philosophy. I didn't want to provoke public outrage—I simply rejected the popular misconceptions about the gods.

De Sade: That's weak. You should have denied them completely. If everything is made of atoms, why bother with gods at all?

Epicurus: It's not weakness or fear. My goal was peace of mind. Accepting the gods—on my terms—helped my school flourish. Even slaves, women, and people from high classes joined.

De Sade: Ah. I would never accept an idea just because it's useful to the public. My goal is to break every chain that restricts human freedom.

Epicurus: You justify crimes as a form of transgression. That is not wisdom. You know that crime leads to fear—of imprisonment, of public punishment—and that fear destroys ataraxia. How foolish.

De Sade (grinning): I only seek to imitate nature. Nature is indifferent. Transgression—whether in thought or in action—is the true source of my happiness, not your passive mental illusions.

Epicurus: You are a desperate philosopher. Did your time in prison not teach you that what you're doing is harmful? I believe crime is against my philosophy. I do not depend on circumstances to be happy—I am happy now.

De Sade: Prison was an obstacle that made me more radical. I wanted revenge—against everyone, including their imaginary God.

Epicurus: God is not imaginary as long as He exists in the minds of people. God cannot punish you—but believers can. Does revenge truly make you happy?

De Sade: This is my mission. I am rebellion itself. It gives me the power to feel alive. I do not fear death or punishment.

Epicurus: Sir Rebellion, you rebel against everything—except your own base desires. Is excessive indulgence in sex and transgression truly happiness for you?

De Sade: I am not an Epicurean. Through my actions, I do not seek the satisfaction of an ideal philosopher. I express my will—freely and deliberately. I do not act against nature; nature is my guide.

Epicurus: So you justify becoming a beast in order to imitate amoral nature? That's the same foolishness the Stoics followed—believing nature to be moral and virtuous. But nature is neither moral nor amoral. Your idea of equilibrium—that nature requires both good and evil—is no different from the superstitions you claim to attack.

This imaginary conversation helped me explore the tension between two radically different views of happiness and freedom. Epicurus represents a calm, rational path—one that values peace of mind, friendship, and simplicity. De Sade, on the other hand, embodies rebellion, excess, and a desire to destroy all boundaries, even if it leads to suffering.

While I admire de Sade's courage to challenge authority and question morality, I find his philosophy dangerous when it justifies cruelty or crime as a form of liberation. His obsession with transgression seems less like freedom and more like another kind of prison—one ruled by impulse and revenge.

Epicurus reminds me that true happiness doesn't need chaos or destruction. It can be found in stillness, in modest pleasures, and in freeing ourselves from fear—not by indulging every desire, but by understanding which desires are worth pursuing.

This dialogue is my way of thinking through these ideas—not to dismiss de Sade entirely, but to challenge the parts of his philosophy that I believe lead away from peace, not toward it.

Chapter 8 - A Philosophical Critique of de Sade through Epicurus

Epicurean Philosophy

Epicurus believed that the purpose of life was to attain ataraxia—a state of tranquility and freedom from fear—through modest pleasures and rational thought. He divided happiness into two categories:

- Essential for happiness: peace of mind, friendship, simple food, and freedom from pain.

- Non-essential for happiness: luxury, sex, wealth, and fame.

Epicurus argued that even the absence of pain is a form of happiness—what he called “negative pleasure.” If your body and mind are free from suffering, you are already happy. Positive pleasures, like eating delicious food or enjoying sex, are not rejected, but they are not necessary for happiness and can even lead to disturbance if pursued excessively.

He was deeply concerned with the fear of gods and superstitions about the afterlife—such as the myth of Hades, where souls suffer after death. To counter this, he taught his followers to meditate on four key principles:

1. Do not fear the gods—they are indifferent to human affairs.
2. Do not fear death—when death is present, you are not; when you are present, death is not.
3. What brings happiness is easy to obtain.
4. What brings suffering is easy to endure.

Even in illness, Epicurus believed there could be moments of pleasure—such as relief between episodes of pain. And if pain becomes unbearable, it will eventually end—either through recovery or death.

Epicurus did not deny the existence of gods, but saw them as distant and uninvolved. He advised his followers to avoid public life and instead cultivate close friendships in a private circle.

Epicurus and de Sade: Materialism, Hedonism, and the Divine

Both Epicurus and the Marquis de Sade were materialists—they believed that everything in existence is composed of matter, and neither accepted the idea of an afterlife. Epicurus did not deny the existence of the soul, but he argued that it is made of atoms and dissolves after death, just like the body.

Though both philosophers can be described as hedonists—concerned with pleasure and happiness—their approaches were radically different. Epicurus sought happiness through moderation, tranquility, and the absence of fear. De Sade, on the other hand, pursued happiness through excess, transgression, and rebellion. He was not an Epicurean, though he may have admired Epicurus for his defiance of popular beliefs and religious dogma.

De Sade found happiness not in passive pleasures, but in active indulgence—especially in acts that violated social norms. His philosophy was a continuous rebellion against everything humans had constructed: religion, morality, law, and justice.

Unlike Epicurus, who encouraged his followers to live lives worthy of the gods—peaceful, modest, and rational—de Sade viewed the Abrahamic God as a personal enemy. His writings often express a desire to take revenge on God and organized religion, which he saw not only as false but as oppressive and harmful to human freedom and happiness.

The Greek gods, in contrast to the monotheistic Abrahamic God, were many, flawed, and often indifferent to human behavior. They allowed for more freedom and did not impose the same moral guilt or divine punishment. It's possible that if de Sade had lived in the time of Epicurus, surrounded by polytheistic beliefs, he might not have developed such an aggressive stance toward the divine..

Imaginary Conversation: Epicurus and de Sade

De Sade: Epicurus, why didn't you reject the gods entirely if you believed they were useless?

Epicurus: Because they supported my philosophy. I didn't want to provoke public outrage—I simply rejected the popular misconceptions about the gods.

De Sade: That's weak. You should have denied them completely. If everything is made of atoms, why bother with gods at all?

Epicurus: It's not weakness or fear. My goal was peace of mind. Accepting the gods—on my terms—helped my school flourish. Even slaves, women, and people from high classes joined.

De Sade: Ah. I would never accept an idea just because it's useful to the public. My goal is to break every chain that restricts human freedom.

Epicurus: You justify crimes as a form of transgression. That is not wisdom. You know that crime leads to fear—of imprisonment, of public punishment—and that fear destroys ataraxia. How foolish.

De Sade (grinning): I only seek to imitate nature. Nature is indifferent. Transgression—whether in thought or in action—is the true source of my happiness, not your passive mental illusions.

Epicurus: You are a desperate philosopher. Did your time in prison not teach you that what you're doing is harmful? I believe crime is against my philosophy. I do not depend on circumstances to be happy—I am happy now.

De Sade: Prison was an obstacle that made me more radical. I wanted revenge—against everyone, including their imaginary God.

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De Sade: I am not an Epicurean. Through my actions, I do not seek the satisfaction of an ideal philosopher. I express my will—freely and deliberately. I do not act against nature; nature is my guide.

Epicurus: So you justify becoming a beast in order to imitate amoral nature? That's the same foolishness the Stoics followed—believing nature to be moral and virtuous. But nature is neither moral nor amoral. Your idea of equilibrium—that nature requires both good and evil—is no different from the superstitions you claim to attack.

This imagined dialogue highlights the deep philosophical divide between Epicurus and the Marquis de Sade in their conceptions of happiness and freedom. Epicurus proposed a life of moderation, rooted in peace of mind (ataraxia), the absence of pain, and the enjoyment of simple, meaningful pleasures. His materialist worldview emphasized rational understanding and emotional detachment from external turmoil.

De Sade, conversely, embraced a philosophy of radical transgression. Viewing nature as indifferent, he justified the pursuit of extreme desires and the rejection of all social constructs—religion, morality, and law included. His materialism led him to dismiss divine providence and elevate personal will as the ultimate expression of freedom, even when it defied conventional boundaries.

Chapter 9: De Sade's Scientific Legacy and Intellectual Influence.

Georges Bataille and the Radical Use-Value of de Sade

Georges Bataille was a French philosopher, novelist, and literary critic known for his provocative explorations of eroticism, mysticism, death, and transgression. Born in 1897 and active through the mid-20th century, Bataille challenged conventional morality and rationality, often blending philosophical inquiry with taboo subjects like sacrifice, excess, and the sacred.

He was one of the first serious thinkers to engage deeply with the writings of the Marquis de Sade—not to condemn or merely admire them, but to extract their philosophical and social implications. Bataille saw Sade not just as a libertine, but as a radical thinker who exposed the hidden violence and hypocrisy of modern civilization.

In his essay *The Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade*, Bataille famously compared Sade's work to excrement: something society consumes for a moment of violent pleasure, then discards and refuses to acknowledge. Yet he insisted that Sade's writings had profound philosophical value. He wrote:

"Sade's sovereignty is the refusal to submit to any law but his own desire."

Bataille admired Sade for his uncompromising pursuit of personal freedom, his rejection of moral constraints, and his ability to reveal the dark, ecstatic forces that lie beneath social order. For Bataille, Sade was not a monster to be hidden, but a mirror held up to humanity's most repressed truths.

Georges Bataille significantly engages with the figure and writings of D.A.F. de Sade, particularly in his provocative essay *The Use-Value of D. A. F. de Sade*. Bataille's approach is distinctive: he seeks not merely to admire Sade as a literary icon, but to integrate his disturbing implications into a broader understanding of social, political, and economic life.

Critique of Sade's Admirers and the Concept of "Use-Value"

Bataille begins by criticizing Sade's literary admirers—those who elevate his writings above all else, yet refuse to allow them any real place in public or private life. He compares this behavior to primitive societies that both adore and loathe their kings, showering them with honors while simultaneously confining them. In a striking metaphor, Bataille suggests that the use-value of Sade's life and work for most people is akin to that of excrement: it provides a quick, violent pleasure in voiding, followed by a desire to forget it ever existed.

He argues that the poetic or literary defenses of Sade often betray a kind of pretentious hypocrisy and vulgar impotence. These attempts to sanitize or intellectualize Sade's radicalism, Bataille claims, miss the point entirely.

Sadism as an Irruption of Excremental Forces

Rather than dismissing sadism as mere pathology, Bataille reinterprets it as an irruption of what he calls "excremental forces." These forces include the excessive violation of modesty, the pleasure found in pain (algolagnia), and the violent expulsion of the sexual object during orgasm. He also notes a libidinal fascination with cadavers, vomiting, and defecation—elements that strip away the masks of social necessity, human dignity, patriotism, and family. These institutions, in Bataille's view, are revealed as subordinate forces—slaves to a cowardly order.

Sade and Heterology

Sade's work, for Bataille, illuminates the concept of the "foreign body"—not just excrement, but anything sacred, divine, or marvelous. This blurring of the repugnant and the revered is central to Bataille's theory of heterology: the study of what is rejected by homogeneous society. Heterology encompasses waste, erotic excess, and violent transgression. Bataille even refers to "scarology"—the science of excrement—as a conceptual twin to heterology, emphasizing the disruptive power of what society seeks to expel.

Sade and General Economy

Bataille's essay also explores Sade's relevance to his theory of general economy, which contrasts the principles of appropriation and excretion. Sade's outrageous conception of terrestrial life is presented as a terrifying but necessary revelation—one that should be brought into the marketplace of ideas, where the value individuals and communities assign to their own lives is constantly negotiated.

Sade, Transgression, and Revolution

Bataille sees Sade's work as deeply complicated with natural forces—violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophe, and the horrible cries of pain. He argues that a sadistic understanding of nature's torrential power is essential for revolutionaries, who must reject the sentimentality of utopian ideals. Sade's affirmation of a morality rooted in pleasure derived from suffering challenges readers to choose: either live as cowards afraid of their own joyful excesses, or embrace the terrifying freedom of those who refuse to cower like hunted animals.

Organizations devoted to ecstasy and frenzy, once liberated from superstition and repression, can serve as final outlets for urges demanding a fiery and bloody revolution. In this context, *The 120 Days of Sodom* is seen as the summit of voluptuous terror—a text that confronts the reader with the extremities of human desire and cruelty.

Sade in the Context of Eroticism

Even within Sade's universe, eroticism is bound to duplicity and ruse. Death's terrible edge is deflected from the self and aimed at the partner—the victim—who paradoxically becomes the most delightful expression of life. Bataille acknowledges that ascetics, who see beauty as a trap set by the Devil, resonate with the same need for disorder, violence, and unseemliness that Sade explores. This hidden root of love, according to Bataille, is what makes Sade's work so disturbingly vital.

The Marquis de Sade's philosophical ideas about science and nature have had a profound and complex influence on numerous thinkers, writers, and intellectual movements across disciplines.

His materialist worldview and radical approach to understanding human nature through empirical observation have shaped fields ranging from philosophy and literature to psychology and critical theory.

Major Philosophical Movements and Thinkers

Existentialist Philosophy

The existentialist movement found significant inspiration in de Sade's work. Jean-Paul Sartre famously called him "the first existentialist," recognizing his exploration of human freedom and the burden of responsibility. Albert Camus engaged deeply with Sade's ideas in *The Rebel*, arguing that Sade placed the sex drive at the center of his thought and advocated absolute moral license. Camus saw Sade as prefiguring totalitarianism through his philosophy of unrestricted freedom for the few.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote a substantial essay titled *Must We Burn Sade?* (1951–52), defending him as a "great moralist" despite his cruelty. She argued that Sade revealed sexuality's potential to subvert patriarchal norms and challenge conventional gender

roles. For Beauvoir, Sade's work opened up new forms of existence where women's sexual freedom could rival men's.

Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno featured Sade prominently in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), dedicating a chapter titled "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality" to his philosophy. They viewed Sade as the logical conclusion of Enlightenment thought, showing how reason could devolve into barbarism and domination. For the Frankfurt School, Sade exposed the dark underside of scientific rationality and its potential for dehumanization.

Psychoanalytic Theory

While direct evidence of Freud's engagement with Sade is limited, his influence on modern psychology is undeniable.

Freud reportedly called him a "psychopath" who understood the human psyche better than many of his contemporaries. Sade's emphasis on the primacy of the sex drive and its destructive potential anticipated many Freudian concepts.

Jacques Lacan engaged deeply with Sade's work, especially in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Lacan explored the relationship between Kant's moral philosophy and Sade's libertine ethics, arguing that Sade revealed the sadistic structure of moral law itself. This Kant–Sade connection became central to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Michel Foucault incorporated Sade's ideas into his analysis of sexuality and power in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault argued that Sade "liberated desire from subordination to truth," making him essential to understanding how power operates through discourse about sexuality.

Literary and Artistic Movements

Surrealism

The Surrealist movement embraced Sade as a key inspirational figure. André Breton declared in his first Surrealist Manifesto (1924) that “Sade is surrealist in sadism.” Guillaume Apollinaire, who coined the term “surrealism,” edited the first complete volume of Sade’s writings and introduced him as “the freest spirit that had ever lived.”

Surrealist artists including Man Ray, Hans Bellmer, Salvador Dalí, and Max Ernst created works directly referencing or inspired by Sade’s philosophy. The Belgian Surrealists especially identified with his use of criminality and transgression to subvert social norms.

Literary Theory and Criticism

As we illustrated :Georges Bataille was profoundly influenced by Sade’s philosophy, incorporating his ideas into his theory of eroticism. Bataille viewed Sade as revealing the link between sexuality and death, arguing that eroticism was fundamentally about the dissolution of individual boundaries. His work *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* draws heavily on Sadean concepts.

Charles Baudelaire and Friedrich Nietzsche also show clear traces of Sade’s influence. Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil* contains explicitly Sadean principles, while Nietzsche’s philosophy owes a “major debt to the Marquis,” though the extent of this influence remains debated.

Scientific Materialism and Enlightenment Philosophy

Materialist Philosophy

Sade was deeply influenced by Enlightenment materialists such as La Mettrie and Holbach. His work represents one of the earliest comprehensive systems of

philosophical materialism, arguing that humans are purely natural beings with no supernatural essence. Modern scholars recognize him as “one of the first modern protagonists of scientific materialism.”

Contemporary philosophers continue to engage with Sade’s rejection of religious explanations in favor of scientific naturalism, which helped shape later developments in atheistic and materialist thought.

Anthropological and Scientific Thought

Sade’s use of comparative anthropology to demonstrate the relativity of moral systems influenced later anthropological thinking. He employed empirical observation to study human nature, insisting that only evidence—not sentiment—could reveal truth about behavior.

His scientific approach to sexuality and psychology predated modern sexology and psychological research. Scholars note that he was “an eager participant in the period’s science of the human,” contributing to Enlightenment efforts to understand humanity through rational inquiry.

Contemporary Academic Discourse

Literary and Cultural Studies

Modern scholarship continues to grapple with Sade’s influence on Western thought. His impact on 20th-century erotic literature is especially noted, with authors like Henry Miller and Pauline Réage drawing on his philosophical and stylistic innovations.

Philosophical Ethics

Contemporary philosophers still debate Sade's ethical system and its implications for moral responsibility and human nature. His challenge to conventional morality and his systematic embrace of immorality remain subjects of serious philosophical inquiry.

Historical Context and Disturbing Parallels

Though not directly influenced by Sade, some scholars have noted disturbing parallels between his rationalized cruelty and later historical atrocities. One analysis suggests that his "disgusting depictions of torture foreshadowed the horrifying medical experiments performed by the Nazis," though this connection is more thematic than causal.

Sade's systematic, rational approach to violence bears resemblance to the bureaucratic cruelty of totalitarian regimes. While direct links are speculative, the philosophical parallels are unsettling.

De Sade's thoughts regarding science have affected an astonishingly diverse range of intellectual traditions. From existentialists like Sartre and Camus to critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer, from psychoanalysts like Lacan and Foucault to artists and writers in the Surrealist movement, his influence permeates modern intellectual culture.

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