

Kant with Sade

JACQUES LACAN

TRANSLATED BY JAMES B. SWENSON, JR.

*This text should have served as a preface to Philosophy in the Bedroom. It appeared in the journal Critique (no. 191, April 1963) as a review of the edition of the works of Sade for which it was destined.**

That the work of Sade anticipates Freud, be it in respect of the catalogue of perversions, is a stupid thing to say, which gets repeated endlessly among literary types; the fault, as always, belongs to the specialists.

Against this we hold that the Sadian bedroom is equal to those places from which the schools of ancient philosophy took their name: Academy, Lyceum, Stoa. Here as there, the way for science is prepared by rectifying the position of ethics. In this, yes, a ground-clearing occurs which will have to make its way through the depths of taste for a hundred years for Freud's path to be passable. Count sixty more for someone to say the reason for all of that.

If Freud was able to enunciate *his* pleasure principle without even having to worry about marking what distinguishes it from its function in traditional ethics, even without risking that it should be heard as an echo of the uncontested prejudice of two millenia, to recall the attraction which preordains the creature to its good, along with the psychology inscribed in various myths of goodwill, we can only credit this to the insinuating rise across the nineteenth century of the theme of "happiness in evil."

Here Sade is the inaugural step of a subversion, of which, however amusing it might seem with respect to the coldness of the man, Kant is the turning point, and never noted, to our knowledge, as such.

Philosophy in the Bedroom comes eight years after the *Critique of Practical Reason*. If, after having seen that the one accords with the other, we show that it completes it, we will say that it gives the truth of the *Critique*.

For this reason, the postulates in which the latter culminates: the alibi of

* For which it was destined on commission. I add here, because it's droll, that they put themselves in the position of having to re-commission it from me when the success of *Ecru* rendered it plausible (. . . to the person who replaced me?)

immortality where it represses progress, holiness, and even love, anything satisfying which might come of the law, the guarantee which it requires from a will for which the object to which the law refers would be intelligible, losing even the flat prop of the function of utility to which Kant had confined them, restore the work to its diamondlike subversion. Which explains the unbelievable exaltation which any reader not forewarned by academic piety receives from it. Nothing which might have been explained about it will ruin this effect.

That one is well in evil, or if one prefers, that the eternal feminine does not draw one upward, one could say that this turn was taken upon a philological remark: namely that what had theretofore been admitted, that one is well in the good [*qu'on est bien dans le bien*], rests on a homonym which the German language does not allow: *Man fühlt sich wohl im Guten*. This is how Kant introduces us to his *Practical Reason*.

The pleasure principle is the law of the good which is the *wohl*, let us say well-being [*bien-être*]. In practice, it would submit the subject to the same phenomenal succession which determines its objects. The objection that Kant poses to it is, true to his rigorous style, intrinsic. No phenomenon can claim for itself a constant relation to pleasure. Thus no law of such a good can be enunciated which would define as will the subject who would introduce it into his practice.

The pursuit of the good would thus be an impasse if it were not reborn as *das Gute*, the good which is the object of the moral law. It is indicated to us by our experience of listening within ourselves to commandments, whose imperative presents itself as categorical, that is, unconditional.

Let us note that this good is only supposed as the Good by proposing itself, as has just been said, over and against any object which would set a condition to it, by opposing itself to whatever uncertain good these objects might provide, in an a priori equivalence, in order to impose itself as superior by virtue of its universal value. Thus its weight only appears by excluding anything — drive or sentiment — which the subject might suffer in his interest for an object, what Kant therefore qualifies as "pathological."

It would thus be by induction from this effect that one would recover the Sovereign Good of the Ancients, if Kant, as is his custom, did not further specify that this Good acts not as a counterweight, but, so to speak, as an antiweight, that is to say by the subtraction of weight which it produces in the effect of self-love (*Selbstsucht*) which the subject feels as contentment (*arrogantia*) of his pleasures, insofar as a glance at this Good renders these pleasures less respectable.¹ His very words, as much as they are suggestive.

Let us retain the paradox that it should be at the moment when the subject is no longer faced with any object that he encounters a law, one which has no other phenomenon than something already significant, which is obtained from a

1. We refer to the quite acceptable translation by Barni, which dates to 1848, here pp. 247ff., and to Vorländer's edition (published by Meiner) for the German text, here p. 86.

voice in the conscience, and which, in articulating itself as a maxim, proposes the order of a purely practical reason or of a will.

For this maxim to become law, it is necessary and it is sufficient that, when tested by such a reason, it can be retained as universal by right of logic. Let us recall that this does not mean that this right imposes itself upon everyone, but that it is valid for all cases, or better, that it is not valid in any case [*en aucun cas*], if it is not valid in every case [*en tout cas*].

But this test, which must be one of reason, pure even if practical, can only succeed for maxims of a type which offers its deduction an analytic grasp.

This type is illustrated by the trust that is imposed in the restitution of a deposit:² the practice of a deposit being based on the two ears which, in order to constitute the depositary, must be plugged up against any condition that could be opposed to this trust. In other words, no deposit without a depositary equal to his charge.

The need for a more synthetic foundation will be felt, even in this obvious case. Let us illustrate in our turn its default, be it at the price of an irreverence, with a retouched maxim of père Ubu: "Long live Poland, for if there were no Poland, there would be no Poles."

Let no one by some slowness or even emotivity doubt our attachment here to a liberty without which the nations are in mourning. But its analytic motivation, while irrefutable, here allows the indefectible to be tempered with the observation that the Poles have always distinguished themselves by a remarkable resistance to the eclipses of Poland, and even to the deploration which followed.

One rediscovers what founds Kant's expression of the regret that, in the experience of the moral law, no intuition offers a phenomenal object.

We would agree that, throughout the *Critique*, this object slips away. But it can be divined by the trace which is left by the implacable pursuit which Kant brings to demonstrating its elusiveness and out of which the work draws this eroticism, doubtless innocent, but perceptible, whose well-foundedness we will show in the nature of the said object.

This is why we request that those of our readers who are still in a virginal relation to the *Critique*, not having read it, stop at this very point of our lines, to take them up again afterwards. They should check whether it indeed has the effect that we say it has; we promise them, in any case, the pleasure that the exploit communicates.

The others will now follow us into *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, into its reading at the very least.

It turns out to be a pamphlet, but a dramatic one in which a stage lighting permits both the dialogue and the action to continue to the limits of the imaginable: this lighting dims a moment to give way, pamphlet within the pamphlet.

2. Cf. the Remark to Theorem III of the first chapter of the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason*, Barni, p. 163; Vorländer, p. 31.

to a diatribe entitled: "Frenchmen, yet another effort if you want to be republicans . . ."

What is enunciated there is usually understood, if not appreciated, as a mystification. There is no need to be alerted by the recognized import of the dream within the dream, that of pointing to a closer relation to the real, in order to see in this derision of historical actuality an indication of the same sort. It is patent, and one would do better to look at it twice.

Let us say that the nerve of the diatribe is given in the maxim which proposes a rule for *jouissance*, bizarre in that it makes itself a right in the Kantian fashion, that of posing itself as a universal rule. Let us enunciate the maxim:

"I have the right of enjoyment over [*le droit de jouir de*] your body, anyone can say to me, and I will exercise this right, without any limit stopping me in the capriciousness of the exactions that I might have the taste to satiate."

Such is the rule to which it is claimed that the will of all could be submitted, if only a society's constraint were to make it effective.

Black humor at best, for any reasonable being, to be distributed between the maxim and the consent which it is presumed to have.

But beyond the fact that, if there is something to which the deduction of the *Critique* has accustomed us, it is to distinguish the rational from the sort of reasonable which is only a confused recourse to the pathological, we now know that humor is the betrayer [*transfuge*] in the comic of the very function of the "super-ego." Which, insofar as it animates this psychoanalytic instance with an avatar and uproots it from the return of obscurantism in which it is employed by our contemporaries, can also spice up the Kantian test of the universal rule with the grain of salt which it lacks.

Thenceforth are we not incited to take more seriously what presents itself to us as being not quite serious? We will not ask, to be sure, if it is necessary nor if it is sufficient that a society sanction a right to *jouissance* by permitting all to invoke it, for its maxim thenceforth to claim the authority of the imperative of the moral law.

No positive legality can decide if this maxim can assume the rank of a universal rule, since this rank can eventually just as well oppose it to all positive legalities.

This is not a question which can be settled just by imagining it, and the extension to everyone of the right invoked by the maxim is not the issue here.

One would at best demonstrate merely a possibility of generality, which is not universality; the latter takes things as they are founded and not as they work out.

And one would not want to miss this opportunity to denounce the exorbitance of the role which is conferred to the moment of reciprocity in structures, notably subjective ones, to which it is intrinsically repugnant.

Reciprocity, a reversible relation because it establishes itself upon a simple line uniting two subjects who, from their "reciprocal" position, hold this relation

to be equivalent, can only situate itself with difficulty as the logical time of any crossing-over of the subject in his relation to the signifier, and still less as a stage of any development, whether or not it is admissible as psychic (where it is always easy to pass the buck to the child when the pedagogical intention misses the mark).

Whatever it may be, it is already a point in favor of our maxim that it can serve as the paradigm of a statement which excludes as such reciprocity (reciprocity and not trading places).

Any judgment about the infamous order that would enthrone our maxim is thus indifferent to the matter, which is to recognize or refuse it the character of a rule admissible as universal in ethics, the ethics which since Kant is recognized as an unconditional practice of reason.

It is obviously necessary to recognize in it this character for the simple reason that its very proclamation (its *kerygma*) has the virtue of instituting at once — both this radical rejection of the pathological, of any concern for a good, for a passion, even for a compassion, that is, the rejection by which Kant liberates the field of the moral law — and the form of this law which is also its only substance, inasmuch as the will is only obligated to dismiss from its practice any reason which is not that of its maxim itself.

Certainly these two imperatives, between which moral experience can be stretched, to the breaking-point of life, are, in the Sadian paradox, imposed on us as upon the Other, and not as upon ourselves.

But this distance only exists at first sight, for the moral imperative does no less in a latent fashion, since it is from the Other that its commandment makes its demand on us.

One perceives here the naked revelation of what the parody made above of the obvious universality of the duty of the depositary would lead us to, namely that the bipolarity by which the moral Law institutes itself is nothing other than this splitting of the subject which occurs in any intervention of the signifier: namely that of the subject of the enunciation from the subject of the statement.

The moral Law has no other principle. Still it is necessary that it be patent, lest it lend itself to the mystification felt in the gag of “Long live Poland!”

In which the Sadian maxim, by pronouncing itself from the mouth of the Other, is more honest than appealing to the voice within, since it unmasks the splitting, usually conjured away, of the subject.

The subject of the enunciation detaches itself here just as clearly as from “Long live Poland!” where only that *fun* which is always evoked by its manifestation is isolated.

In order to confirm this perspective one need only refer back to the doctrine upon which Sade himself founds the reign of his principle. It is that of the rights of man. It is because no man can be the property of another man, nor in any way be his privilege, that he cannot make this the pretext to suspend the right of all to enjoyment over him [*droit de tous à jouir de lui*], each according to

his taste.³ The constraint he would undergo would not be so much one of violence as one of principle, the difficulty for whoever makes it a judgment, being not so much to make him consent to it, as to pronounce it in his place.

It is thus indeed the Other as free, it is the freedom of the Other, which the discourse of the right to *jouissance* poses as the subject of its enunciation, and not in a manner which differs from the *You are* [*Tu es*] which is evoked in the murderous capital [*fonds tuant*] of any imperative.

But this discourse is no less determining for the subject of the statement, in that each address suscitates him through its equivocal content: since *jouissance*, by shamelessly confessing itself even as it speaks, makes itself one pole of a couple of which the other is in the hollow which it is already drilling in the place of the Other in order to erect the cross of Sadian experience there.

Let us suspend saying what makes it work, in order to recall that pain, which here projects its promise of ignominy, only confirms the express mention that Kant makes of it among the connotations of moral experience. What it is worth for Sadian experience will be better seen by approaching it through what, in the artifice of the Stoics, would dismantle this experience: contempt.

Imagine a revival of Epictetus in Sadian experience: "See, you broke it," he says, pointing to his leg. Lowering *jouissance* to the destitution of such an effect where its pursuit stumbles, isn't this to turn it into disgust?

In which it appears that it is *jouissance* by which Sadian experience is modified. For it forms the project of monopolizing a will only after having already traversed this will in order to install itself in the most intimate part of the subject which it provokes beyond, by touching its modesty.

For modesty is amboceptive of the conjunctures of being: between two, the immodesty of the one being by itself the rape of the modesty of the other. A channel which would justify, were it necessary, what we first produced by the assertion, in the place of the Other, of the subject.

Let us interrogate this *jouissance*, precarious in that it hangs, in the Other, on an echo which it only suscitates as it abolishes it, by joining the intolerable to it. Doesn't it at last appear to us to exalt only in itself, in the manner of another, horrible freedom?

We will even see the uncovering of this third term which, according to Kant, would be in default in moral experience. It is namely the object, which, in order to assure it to the will in the fulfillment of the Law, he is constrained to send off into the unthinkability of the Thing-in-itself. This object, isn't it there in Sadian experience, descended from its inaccessibility, and unveiled as *Dasein* of the agent of torment?

Not without retaining the opacity of the transcendent. For this object is strangely separated from the subject. Let us observe that the herald of the maxim does not need to be anything more than a point of emission. It can be a voice on

3. Cf. the edition of Sade under review, vol. III, pp. 501 - 502.

the radio, recalling the right promoted by the supplemental effort to which, at Sade's call, the French would have consented, and the maxim become, for their regenerated Republic, organic Law.

Such vocal phenomena, notably those of psychosis, indeed have this aspect of the object. And psychoanalysis was not far in its dawn from referring the voice of conscience to them.

One sees what motivates Kant to hold this object as having eluded any determination by the transcendental aesthetic, even if it does not fail to appear in some protuberance of the phenomenal veil, lacking neither hearth nor home, nor time in intuition, lacking neither a mode which is situated in the unreal, nor effect in reality: it is not only that Kant's phenomenology is in default here, but that the voice, however mad, imposes the idea of the subject, and that the object of the law must not suggest a malignity of the real God.

Assuredly Christianity has educated men to pay little attention to the *jouissance* of God, and that is how Kant slips by his voluntarism of the Law-for-the-Law, which really piles it on, so to speak, with respect to the ataraxia of Stoic experience. One might think that Kant is under pressure from what he hears too closely, not from Sade, but from some mystic nearer to home, in the sigh which stifles what he glimpses beyond having seen that his God is faceless: *Grimmigheit*? Sade says: Being-Supreme-in-Wickedness.

Pshaw! *Schwärmereten*, black swarms, we expel you in order to return to the function of presence in the Sadian fantasy.

This fantasy has a structure that one will find further along and in which the object is only one of the terms in which the quest which it figures can die out. When *jouissance* is petrified in it, it becomes the black fetish in which the form — most definitely offered in such a place and time, and still today, for one to adore the god — can be recognized.

It is this which befalls the executor in sadistic experience when, at its most extreme, his presence is reduced to being no more than its instrument.

But that his *jouissance* congeals there, does not withdraw it from the humility of an act to which he cannot but come as a being of flesh and, to the bones, the serf of pleasure.

This duplication does not reflect, nor reciprocate (why wouldn't it mutual-ate?) the one which occurs in the Other of the two alterities of the subject.

Desire, which is the henchman [*suppôt*] of this splitting of the subject, would doubtless put up with being called will-to-*jouissance*. But this appellation would not render desire more worthy of the will which it invokes within the Other, in tempting this will to the extremity of its division from its pathos; for to do this, desire sets forth beaten, promised to impotence.

Because it sets forth submitted to pleasure, whose law is to turn it always too short in its aim. A homeostasis which is always too quickly recovered by the living being at the lowest threshold of the tension upon which it subsists. Always precocious is the fall of the wing, with which he is given to sign the reproduction

of his form. Nevertheless this wing here has the task of raising itself to the function of figuring the link of sex to death. Let us leave it to rest behind its Eleusinian veil.

Thus pleasure, down there the stimulating rival of will, is here no more than a faltering accomplice. In *jouissance's* own time, it would be simply out of play, if fantasy did not intervene to sustain it by the very discord to which it succumbs.

To put it another way, fantasy constitutes the pleasure proper to desire. And let us come back to the fact that desire is not subject, in that it cannot be indicated anywhere in a signifier of any demand whatsoever, since it is not articulatable there even though it is articulated in it.

The taking of pleasure in fantasy is here easy to grasp.

Physiological experience demonstrates that the cycle of pain is longer in every respect than that of pleasure, since a stimulation provokes it at the point where pleasure ends. However prolonged one supposes it to be, it nevertheless has, like pleasure, its term: the fainting of the subject.

Such is the vital given from which fantasy will profit in order to fix, in the sensible of Sadian experience, the desire which appears in its agent.

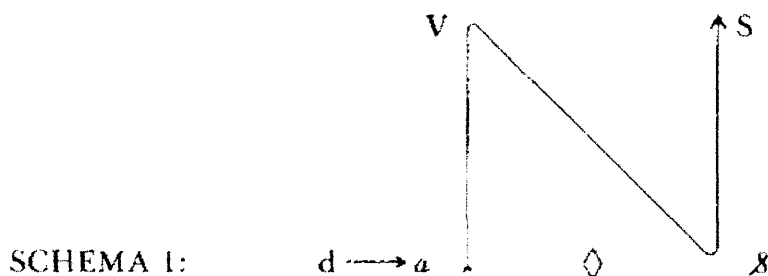
Fantasy is defined by the most general form which it receives from an algebra which we have constructed to this end, that is the formula ($\$ \diamond a$), in which the stamp is read "desire of," to be read identically in the retrograde direction, introducing an identity which is founded upon an absolute nonreciprocity. (A relation which is coextensive with the formations of the subject.)

Be that as it may, this form turns out to be particularly easy to animate in the present case. It articulates, in fact, the pleasure for which an instrument (*objet a* of the formula) has been substituted, with the sort of sustained division of the subject that the experience ordains.

Which is only obtained inasmuch as its apparent agent congeals in the rigidity of the object, in the aim that his subjective division be entirely sent back to him from the Other.

A quadripartite structure, given the unconscious, is always to be required in the construction of a subjective ordinance. Our didactic schemas satisfy this requirement.

Let us modulate the Sadian fantasy with a new one of these schemas:



The bottom line satisfies the order of the fantasy inasmuch as it supports the utopia of desire.

The sinuous line inscribes the chain which permits a calculus of the subject. It is directed, and its direction constitutes an order in which the appearance of the *objet a* in the place of the cause is made clear by the universality of its relation to the category of causality, which, in forcing the threshold of Kant's transcendental deduction, would inaugurate a new Critique of Reason hinging upon the impure.

There remains the V which, in this place, holding the high ground, appears to impose the will [*volonté*] dominating the whole affair, but whose form also evokes the union of what it divides while holding it together with a *vel*, that is to say in posing the choice which will make the S (barred S) of practical reason, out of the S, raw subject of pleasure ("pathological" subject).

It is thus indeed the will of Kant which is encountered in the place of this will which can be called-to-*jouissance* only to explain that it is the subject reconstituted from alienation at the price of being no more than the instrument of *jouissance*. Thus Kant, in being tortured [*mis à la question*] "with Sade," that is to say with Sade filling the office, for our thought as in his sadism, of an instrument, confesses to what is plain to see about the "What does it want?" which henceforth is not missing for anyone.

The graph may now be used in its succinct form, in order to find the way through the forest of the fantasy, which Sade in his work develops on the level of a system.

One will see that there is a statics of the fantasy, by which the point of aphanisis, supposed in S , should be indefinitely recessed in the imagination. Whence the hardly believable survival that Sade grants the victims of the trials and tribulations which he inflicts upon them in his fable. The moment of their death seems to be motivated only by the need to replace them in a combinatory, which alone requires their multiplicity. Unique (Justine) or multiple, the victim has the monotony of the relation of the subject to the signifier, in which, to trust our graph, she consists. Being the *objet a* of the fantasy, situating itself in the real, the troupe of tormenters (see Juliette) can have more variety.

The requirement, in the figure of the victims, for a beauty always classed as incomparable (as well as inalterable, as we have just said) is another affair, which cannot be taken care of with some banal postulates, quickly fabricated, on sexual attraction. One will rather see in it the grimace of what we have demonstrated, in tragedy, about the function of beauty: a barrier so extreme as to forbid access to a fundamental horror. Dream of the *Antigone* of Sophocles and of the moment when the *'Ερωξ ἀνίχεται μάχων*⁴ explodes.

This excursion would not be appropriate here, if it did not introduce what could be called the discordance of two deaths, introduced by the existence of

4. *Antigone*, verse 781

condemnation. The between-two-deaths of this side [*l'en-deçà*] is essential to show us that it is none other than the one by which the beyond [*l'au-delà*] sustains itself.

It can be clearly seen in the paradox which Sade's position with respect to hell constitutes. The idea of hell, a hundred times refuted by him and damned as the means of subjection used by religious tyranny, curiously returns to motivate the actions of one of his heroes, nevertheless among those most enamoured with libertine subversion in its reasonable form, namely the hideous Saint-Fond.⁵ The practices whose utmost tortures he imposes upon his victims are founded on the belief that he can render the torment they cause eternal for them in the beyond. A conduct and a belief whose authenticity the character underlines by his concealment of the former from the gaze of his accomplices, and by his difficulty in explaining the latter. Thus we hear him a few pages later attempt to render them plausible in his discourse by the myth of an attraction tending to bring together the "particles of evil."

This incoherence in Sade, neglected by Sadian specialists, who are sort of hagiographers themselves, would be clarified by noting the term, formally expressed in his writing, of the second death. The assurance which he expects from it against the horrific routine of nature (the one which, to listen to him elsewhere, crime has the function of breaking) would require it to be pushed to an extremity where the fainting of the subject would be doubled: with which he symbolizes in the wish that the decomposed elements of our body, in order not to reassemble, be themselves annihilated.

That Freud should nevertheless recognize the dynamism of this wish⁶ in certain cases of his practice, that he should clearly, perhaps too clearly, reduce its function to an analogy with the pleasure principle, regulating it upon a "death" "drive" (demand), this is what will not be consented to, especially by someone who has not even been able to learn in the technique which he owes to Freud, any more than in his schooling, that language has an effect which is not utilitarian, or ornamental at the very most. For him, Freud is useful in congresses.

Doubtless, in the eyes of such puppets, the millions of men for whom the pain of existing is the original evidence for the practices of salvation which they establish in their faith in Buddha, must be underdeveloped; or rather, as for Buloz, director of *La revue des deux mondes*, who puts it quite clearly to Renan⁷ when refusing his article on Buddhism, this after Burnouf, or some time in the '50s (of the last century), for them it is "impossible that there are people that dumb."

Have they not, if they think they have a better ear than the rest of psychiatrists, heard this pain in the pure state mould the song of some patients, who are called melancholics?

5. Cf. *Histoire de Juliette*, published by Jean-Jacques Pauvert, vol. II, pp. 196ff.

6. Subjective dynamism: physical death gives its object to the wish of the second death.

7. Cf. Renan's preface to his *Nouvelles études d'histoire religieuse* of 1884.

Nor gathered one of those dreams after which the dreamer remains overwhelmed, from having, in a condition which is felt as an inexhaustible rebirth, been in the depths of the pain of existing?

Or to put back in their place these torments of hell, which have never been imagined beyond those of which the traditional maintenance is assured in this world by men, would we beseech them to think of our daily life as something which ought to be eternal?

There is nothing to be hoped for, even from despair, against a stupidity, finally sociological, and which we only mention in order that no one on the outside expect much, concerning Sade, from the circles where there is a more assured experience of the forms of sadism.

Notably about the equivocality of what circulates concerning the relation of reversion which would unite sadism to an idea of masochism of which it is hard to imagine from the outside the pell-mell it supports. It would be better to find in it the worth of a little story, a famous one, about the exploitation of man by man: the definition of capitalism as one knows. And socialism? It's the opposite.

Involuntary humor, this is the tone from which a certain diffusion of psychoanalysis takes effect. It fascinates by being also unperceived.

There are still some scribblers who strive for a more fashionable look. They go in for existentialist custom tailoring, or more soberly, personalist ready-made. This leads to the statement that the sadist "denies the existence of the Other." This is precisely, it will be admitted, what has just appeared in our analysis.

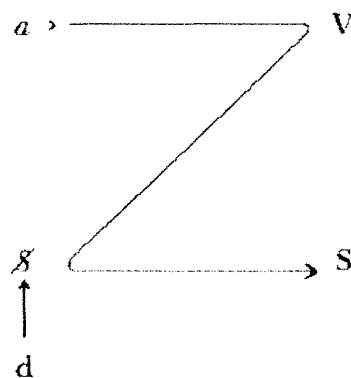
To follow it, isn't it rather that sadism rejects the pain of existing into the Other, but without seeing that by this slant he himself changes into an "eternal object," if Mr. Whitehead is willing to give us back this term?

But why couldn't we hold it as a common good? Isn't that, redemption, immortal soul, the status of the Christian? Not so fast, so as not to go too far.

Let us rather perceive that Sade is not duped by his fantasy, to the extent that the rigor of his thought passes into the logic of his life.

For here we propose a duty to our readers.

The delegation which Sade makes to all, in his Republic, of the right to *jouissance*, is not translated on our graph by a symmetrical reversion upon any axis or center, but merely by a rotation of a quarter of a circle, that is:



SCHEMA 2:

V, the will-to-*jouissance*, no longer permits the contestation of its nature, for it has passed into the moral constraint here implacably exercised by the Présidente de Montreuil upon the subject of whom it is evident that his division does not require being joined in a single body.

(Let us remark that only the First Consul⁸ seals this division with his administratively confirmed effect of alienation.)

This division here reunites, as S, the raw subject incarnating the heroism proper to the pathological, in the species of the fidelity to Sade which those who were at first complacent toward his excesses will demonstrate, his wife, his sister-in-law—his valet, why not?²—other devotions effaced from his history.

For Sade, the S (barred S), we see at last that, as subject, it is in his disappearance that he signs, things having reached their term. Unbelievably, Sade disappears without anything, even less than in the case of Shakespeare, remaining of his image, after in his will he had ordered that a thicket efface even the trace upon the stone of a name that would seal his destiny.

*Mη γένου,*⁹ not to be born, his malediction, less holy than that of Oedipus, does not bear him among the Gods, but is eternalized:

a) in the work of which, dismissing it with the back of his hand, Jules Janin shows us the unsinkable survival, having it saluted by the books which mask it, if we believe him, in every respectable library, Saint John Chrysostom or the *Pensées*.

Sade's work is boring, you agree in saying, yes, as thick as thieves, Mister Judge and Mister Academician, but still able to make you one by the other, one and the other, one in the other, get upset.¹⁰

For a fantasy is indeed quite upsetting since one does not know where to set it, because it is there, wholly in its nature as fantasy which only has reality as discourse and which expects nothing from your powers, but which demands that you set yourself straight with respect to your desires.

Let the reader now approach with reverence these exemplary figures which, in the Sadian bedroom, arrange and undo themselves in a fairground rite. "The posture breaks up."

Ceremonial pause, sacred scansion.

Salute the objects of the law, of which you know nothing, for lack of knowing how to find your way among the desires of which they are the cause.

*It's good to be charitable
But with whom? That's the point.*

8. It should not be understood by this that we are crediting the legend according to which he personally intervened in Sade's detention. Cf. Gilbert Lély, *Vie du Marquis de Sade*, vol. II, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, pp. 577-580, and footnote 1 of p. 580.

9. Choir of *Oedipus at Colonus*, verse 1225.

10. Cf. Maurice Garçon, *L'affaire Sade*, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1957. He cites J. Janin in *La revue de Paris* of 1834 in his plea, pp. 84-90. Second reference: Jean Cocteau, as cited witness, writes that Sade is boring, not without having recognized in him the philosopher and the moralizer.

A certain M. Verdoux resolves it every day by putting women in the oven until he himself ends up in the electric chair. He thought that his dear ones wanted to live comfortably. More enlightened, the Buddha allowed those who did not know the road to devour him. Despite this eminent patronage, which could very well only be based on a misunderstanding (it is by no means sure that the tigress likes to eat Buddha), M. Verdoux's abnegation derives from an error which merits severity since a small grain of *Critique*, it's not expensive, would have allowed him to avoid it. No one doubts that the practice of Reason would have been more economical as well as more legal, should his dear ones have had to go without.

"But what," will you ask, "are all these metaphors and why. . . ."

Molecules, monstrously assembling here for a spintrian *jouissance*, awaken us to the existence of others, more commonly encountered in life, whose equivocalities we have just evoked. Suddenly they are more respectable than the latter, appearing purer in their valencies.

Desires . . . here alone to bind them, and exalted by making manifest that desire is the desire of the Other.

Whoever has read us this far knows that desire, more exactly, is supported by a fantasy which has at least one foot in the Other, and precisely the one that counts, even and particularly if it happens to limp.

The object, as we have shown in Freudian experience, the object of desire where it proposes itself in its nakedness, is only the slag of a fantasy in which the subject does not return from his syncope. It's a case of necrophilia.

Its vacillation complements that of the subject, in the general case.

It is in this that it is just as ungraspable as the object of the Law is according to Kant. But here the suspicion imposed by this connection begins to appear. Doesn't the moral law represent desire in the case where it is not the subject but the object which is in default?

The subject, by being the sole party to remain, in the form of the voice, within, with neither head nor tail to what it most often says, doesn't he seem to signify himself enough by the bar with which he is bastardized by the signifier $\$$, dropped from the fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) from which it both derives and drifts away [*dont il dérive, dans les deux sens de ce terme*]?

If this symbol returns to its place the inner commandment at which Kant marvels, it opens our eyes to the encounter which, from the Law to desire, goes further than the elusion of their object, for the one as for the other.

It is in this encounter that the equivocality of the word *freedom* plays: upon which, laying a heavy hand, the moralist always appears even more impudent than imprudent.

Let us rather listen to Kant himself illustrate it one more time:¹¹ "Suppose,"

11. Barni, p. 173. It is the Remark to Problem II (*Aufgabe*) of Theorem III of the first chapter of the *Analytic*, Vorländer edition, p. 25.

he says, "that someone says his lust is irresistible when the desired object and opportunity are present. Ask him whether he would not control his passion if, in front of the house where he has this opportunity, a gallows were erected on which he would be hanged immediately after gratifying his lust. We do not have to guess very long what his answer would be. But ask him whether he thinks it would be possible for him to overcome his love of life, however great it may be, if his sovereign threatened him with the same sudden death¹² unless he made a false deposition against an honorable man whom the ruler wished to destroy under a plausible pretext. Whether he would or not he perhaps will not venture to say; but that it should be possible for him he would certainly admit without hesitation. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he knows he ought, and he recognizes that he is free — a fact which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him."

The first response here supposed of a subject about whom we are first warned that for him much happens in words, makes us think that we have not been given it to the letter, even though that's the whole point. It's that, in order to compose it, one would rather rely on a personage whose scruples we would be bound [*en tout cas*] to offend, for he would never [*en aucun*] stoop to eating that kind of bread. He is namely that ideal bourgeois before whom elsewhere, doubtless in order to check Fontenelle, the overly gallant centenarian, Kant declares that he tips his hat.¹³

We will thus exempt the naughty boy from testifying under oath. But it might happen that a supporter of passion, and one who would be blind enough to mix a point of honor in with it, could give Kant problems, forcing him to recognize that no occasion will more certainly precipitate some men toward their end, than to see it offered as a challenge to, or even in contempt of, the gallows.

For the gallows is not the Law, it can't even be driven around by it. The only bus is the paddy wagon, and the police might well be the state, as is said among the followers of Hegel. But the Law is something else, as has been known since Antigone.

Kant's apologue doesn't even contradict this: the gallows only comes into it in order for him to tie up on it, along with the subject, his love of life.

And it is this to which desire in the maxim *Et non propter vitam vivendi perdere causas* can pass in a moral being, and, precisely because he is moral, pass to the rank of a categorical imperative, however little he may be up against the wall. Which is precisely where he is now being pushed.

Desire, what is called desire suffices to make life have no sense in playing a coward. And when the law is truly there, desire doesn't hold, but that's because the law and repressed desire are one and the same thing; this is even Freud's discovery. We score a point at halftime, professor.

12. The text reads: with a death without delay.

13. Cf. p. 253 of Barni's translation with p. 90 in Vorländer's edition.

Let us place the credit for our success in the ranks of the pawns, queen of the game as we know. For we have brought into play neither our Knight, with which we could have easily won the game, for it would have been Sade, whom we believe to be well-qualified in this matter — nor our Bishop [*Fou*], nor our Rook [*Tour*], the rights of man, freedom of thought, your body is your own, nor even our Queen [*Dame*], an appropriate figure to designate the prowesses of courtly love.

This would have meant moving too many people, for a less certain result.

For if I argue that Sade, for a few jokes, ran the risk, in full knowledge (see what he makes of his “escapades,” legal or not), of being imprisoned during a third of his life, jokes which doubtless were a little too much in earnest, but all the more demonstrative with respect to their recompense, I draw upon myself Pinel and his pinellry which comes up again. Moral insanity, it opines. A lovely business, in any case. I am here recalled to reverence for Pinel, to whom we owe one of the *most noble steps of humanity*. — Thirteen years of Charenton for Sade, in fact, come from this step. — But it wasn't his place. — That's just it. It is this very step which leads him there. For as to his place, everything which thinks agrees about this, it was elsewhere. But see: those who think well, think it was outside, and the well-thinkers, since Royer-Collard, who demanded it at the time, saw it in jail, even on the scaffold. It is precisely in this that Pinel is a moment of thought. Willingly or unwillingly, he is the guarantee for the prostration to which, to the left and to the right, thought submits the liberties which the Revolution had promulgated in its name.

For in considering the rights of man from the point of view of philosophy, we see the appearance of what in any case everyone now knows of their truth. They are reducible to the freedom to desire in vain.

A fine triumph indeed, but an opportunity to recognize in it our reckless freedom of a moment ago, and to confirm that it is indeed the freedom to die.

But also to draw upon ourselves the frowns of those who don't find it very nourishing. They are numerous these days. A renewal of the conflict between needs and desires, where as if by chance it is the Law which empties the shell.

For the move which would check the Kantian apologue, courtly love offers no less tempting a path, but one which requires being erudite. Being erudite by position, one draws the erudite upon oneself, and as for the erudite in this field, bring on the clowns.

Already Kant would for next to nothing make us lose our seriousness, for lack of the least sense of the comic (the proof is what he says of it in its place).

But someone who lacks it, himself, totally and absolutely, if you've remarked, is Sade. This threshold would perhaps be fatal to him and a preface is not made for disservices.¹⁴

Thus let us pass to the second moment of Kant's apologue. It is no more

14. What would I have written for a postface?

conclusive to his ends. For supposing that his helot has the least idea of what's happening, he will ask him [i.e., Kant] if by chance it would be his duty to bear true witness, in case this were the means by which the tyrant could satisfy his wishes.

Should he say that the innocent is a Jew for example, if he truly is, before a tribunal, such as has been seen, which would find in this something to condemn—or yet that he is an atheist, just when it is possible that he himself is a man who would better understand the weight of the accusation than a consistory, which only wants a dossier—and the deviation from the “line,” will he plead it not guilty in a place and time when the rule of the game is self-criticism—and then what? after all, is an innocent ever spotless, will he say what he knows?

One can erect as a duty the maxim of countering the desire of the tyrant, if the tyrant is the one who arrogates to himself the power to enslave the desire of the Other.

Thus upon the two lengths (and the precarious mediation), from which Kant makes himself a lever in order to show that the Law puts into balance not just pleasure, but also pain, happiness, or even the pressure of poverty, even love of life, everything pathological, it turns out that desire can not only have the same success, but can obtain it with greater legitimacy.

But if the advantage which we have allowed the *Critique* to take from the alacrity of its argumentation owed something to our desire to know what it wanted to get at, could not the ambiguity of this success turn back its movement toward a revision of the extorted concessions?

Such as, for example, the disgrace which, somewhat hastily, was brought upon all objects that propose themselves as goods, as being incapable of causing the harmony of wills: simply by introducing competition. Thus Milan, in which Charles V and François I knew what it cost them both to see the same good.

This is indeed to misrecognize the nature of the object of desire.

Which we can only introduce here by recalling what we teach about desire, to be formulated as desire of the Other, since it is originally desire of its desire. Which makes the harmony of desires conceivable, but not without danger. For the reason that in linking up in a chain which resembles Breughel's procession of the blind, they may indeed all be holding hands, but none knows where all are going.

In reversing direction they will all gain the experience of a universal rule, but will know no more about it.

Would the solution consonant with practical Reason then be that they all go round in circles?

Even lacking, the gaze is there indeed an object which presents each desire with its universal rule by materializing its cause, by binding it to the division “between center and absence” of the subject.

Let us thenceforth limit ourselves to saying that a practice such as psycho-

analysis, which recognizes in desire the truth of the subject, cannot misrecognize what follows without demonstrating what it represses.

Displeasure is recognized by psychoanalytic experience as giving a pretext to the repression of desire, in that it is produced on the path of its satisfaction: but also as giving the form this satisfaction itself takes in the return of the repressed.

Similarly pleasure's aversion to recognize the law is doubled, by supporting that desire to satisfy it which is defense.

If happiness is the uninterrupted agreeableness, for the subject, of his life, as the *Critique*¹⁵ quite classically defines it, it is clear that it is refused to whom-ever does not renounce the path of desire. This renunciation can be willed, but at the price of the truth of man, which is made clear enough by the reprobation incurred before the common ideal by the Epicureans, and even by the Stoics. Their ataraxia destitutes their wisdom. They are given no credit for lowering desire, for not only is the Law not held to be raised accordingly; but it is thus, whether one knows it or not, that it is felt to be thrown down.

Sade, ex-noble, takes up Saint-Just where one should. That happiness has become a factor in politics is an improper proposition. It has always been one and will bring back the scepter and the censor which get along with it very well. It is the freedom to desire which is a new factor, not because it inspires a revolution —it is always for a desire that one struggles and that one dies — but because this revolution wills that its struggle be for the freedom of desire.

The result is that it also wills that the law be free, so free that it must be a widow, the Widow par excellence, the one who sends your head into the basket however little it faltered in the affair. Had Saint-Just's head remained inhabited by the fantasies of Organt, he would perhaps have made of Thermidor his triumph.

The right to *jouissance*, were it recognized, would relegate the domination of the pleasure principle to a forevermore outdated era. In enunciating it, Sade causes the ancient axis of ethics to slip, by an imperceptible fracture, for everyone: this axis is nothing other than the egoism of happiness.

It cannot be said that all reference to it is extinguished in Kant, in the very familiarity with which it keeps him company, and even more in its offspring, which one seizes in the requirements from which he deduces as much a retribution in the beyond as a progress here below.

Let another happiness be glimpsed, whose name we first said, and the status of desire changes, imposing its reexamination.

But it is here that there is something to be judged. To what point does Sade lead us in the experience of this *jouissance*, or at least its truth?

15. Theorem II of the first chapter of the *Analytic*, in Vorländer's edition, p. 25, completely mistranslated by Barni, p. 159.

For these human pyramids, fabulously demonstrating *jouissance* in its cascading nature, these tiered fountains of desire built for *jouissance* to cast upon the d'Este gardens the iridescence of a baroque voluptuousness, the higher they make it gush into the sky, the closer we are drawn by the question of what is dripping there.

Of the unpredicable quanta with which the love-hate atom shimmers near the Thing whence man emerges with a cry, what is felt, beyond certain limits, has nothing to do with what supports desire in fantasy, which is precisely constituted by these limits.

These limits, we know that in his life Sade went beyond them.

And doubtless he would otherwise not have given us this blueprint of his fantasy in his work.

Perhaps we should be astonished by putting into question what, of this real experience, the work would also translate.

To limit ourselves to the bedroom, for a sharp enough glimpse of the sentiments of a girl toward her mother, the fact remains that wickedness, so justly situated by Sade in its transcendence, teaches us nothing very new about the modulations of her heart.

A work which wills itself to be wicked [*méchante*] could not permit itself to be a mediocre [*méchante*] work, and it must be said that the *Philosophy*, by a whole side of good work, lends itself to this witticism.

There's a little too much preaching in there.

Doubtless it is a treatise on the education of girls¹⁶ and as such submitted to the laws of the genre. Despite the advantage it gains by exposing the anal-sadistic which clouded over the subject in its obsessional insistence in the two preceding centuries, it remains a treatise on education. The sermon is excruciating for the victim, self-infatuated on the part of the instructor.

The historical, or rather, erudite information is grey and makes one regret a La Mothe le Vayer. The physiology is composed of old wives' tales. As far as the sexual education is concerned, it sounds like a contemporary medical pamphlet; no more need be said.

Stronger commitment to scandal would mean going on to recognize in the impotence in which the educative intention is commonly deployed, the very one against which the fantasy makes all its efforts here: whence is born the obstacle to any valid account of the effects of education, since the part of the intention which caused the results cannot be avowed.

This trait could have been priceless, one of the laudable effects of sadistic impotence. That Sade missed it means that something remains to be thought.

His failing is confirmed by another no less remarkable: the work never presents us with the success of a seduction in which the fantasy would nevertheless be crowned: that by which the victim, be it in her final spasm, would come to

16. Sade expressly indicates it in his complete title.

consent to the intention of her tormentor, or would even enroll herself on his side by the verve of her consent.

This demonstrates from another point of view that desire is the other side of the law. In the Sadian fantasy, one sees how they sustain each other. For Sade, one is always on the same side, either the good or the bad; no affront can change anything. It is thus the triumph of virtue: this paradox only recovers the derision proper to the edifying book, which Justine aims at too much not to espouse it.

Apart from the lengthening nose which gives away the lie, found at the end of the posthumous *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man* (admit that here is an unpropitious subject for other graces than divine grace), one sometimes feels the lack in the work of a *mot d'esprit*, and more largely of the *wit* whose necessity Pope had spoken of almost a century before.

Evidently, all this is forgotten by the invasion of pedantry which weighs upon French literature since *WWII*.

But if you need a strong stomach to follow Sade when he extols calumny, the first article of morality to be instituted in his Republic, one might prefer that he put something of the spiciness of a Renan into it. "Let us congratulate ourselves in like manner," the latter writes, "that Jesus encountered no law which punished the invectives uttered against one class of citizens. Had such a law existed, the Pharisees would have been inviolate."¹⁷ And he continues: "His exquisite irony, his arch and provoking remarks, always struck home. The Nessus-shirt of ridicule which the Jew, son of the Pharisees, has dragged in tatters after him during eighteen centuries, was woven by Jesus with a divine skill. Masterpieces of fine raillery, their features are written in lines of fire upon the flesh of the hypocrite and the false devotee. Incomparable traits, worthy of a son of God. A god alone knows how to kill after this fashion. Socrates and Molière only touched the skin. He carried fire and rage to the marrow."¹⁸

For these remarks take their value from the well-known result, we mean the vocation of the Apostle to the rank of the Pharisees and the triumph, universal, of Pharisaic virtues. Which, one will agree, leads to a more pertinent argument than the rather paltry excuse with which Sade is content in his apology for calumny: that the honest man will always triumph over it.

This platitude does not prevent a somber beauty from emanating from this monument of defiance. This beauty bears witness for us to the experience for which we search behind the fabulation of the fantasy. A tragic experience, for it projects its condition in a lighting beyond all fear and pity.

Bewilderment and shadows, such is, contrary to the joke [*mot d'esprit*],¹⁹ the conjunction whose carbon brilliance fascinates us in these scenes.

This tragic is of the type which will sharpen its image later in the century in

17. Cf. *Vie de Jésus*, 17th edition, p. 339.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

19. One knows how Freud takes off from the "bewilderment and illumination" of Heymans.

more than one work, erotic novel or religious drama. We would call it the senile tragic, of which it was not known before us, except in schoolboys' jokes, that it was within a stone's-throw of the noble tragic. One should refer, to understand us, to Claudel's trilogy of the *Père humilié*. (To understand us, one should also know that we have shown in this work the traits of the most authentic tragedy. It is Melpomene who is age-ridden, with Clio, without anyone seeing which one will bury the other.)

Thus we are in a position to interrogate the *Sade, mon prochain* whose invocation we owe to the perspicacity of Pierre Klossowski. Extreme, it dispenses him from having to play the wit [*des recours du bel esprit*].²⁰

Doubtless it is his discretion which leads him to shelter his formula behind a reference to Saint Labre. We do not find this reason compelling enough to give him the same shelter.

That the Sadian fantasy situates itself better in the bearers of Christian ethics than elsewhere is what our structural landmarks allow us to grasp easily.

But that Sade, himself, refuses to be my neighbor, is what needs to be recalled, not in order to refuse it to him in return, but in order to recognize the meaning of this refusal.

We believe that Sade is not close enough to his own wickedness to recognize his neighbor in it. A trait which he shares with many, and notably with Freud. For such is indeed the sole motive of the recoil of beings, sometimes forewarned, before the Christian commandment.

For Sade, we see the test of this, crucial in our eyes, in his refusal of the death penalty, which history, if not logic, would suffice to show is one of the corollaries of Charity.

Sade thus stopped, at the point where desire is knotted together with the law. If something in him held to the law, in order there to find the opportunity Saint Paul speaks of, to be sinful beyond measure, who would throw the first stone? But he went no further.

It is not only that for him as for the rest of us the flesh is weak, it is that the spirit is too prompt not to be lured. The apology for crime only pushes him to the indirect avowal of the Law. The supreme Being is restored in Maleficence.

Listen to him bragging of his technique, of immediately putting everything which occurs to him into operation, thinking moreover, by replacing repentance with reiteration, to have done with the law within. He finds nothing better to encourage us to follow him than the promise that nature, woman that she is, will magically always yield to us more.

It would be a mistake to trust this typical dream of potency.

It sufficiently indicates, in any case, that it would not be possible for Sade, as

20. This phrase was addressed to a future academician, himself an expert in maliciousnesses, whom I have perceived to recognize himself in the one which opens this article.

is suggested by P. Klossowski even as he notes that he does not believe it, to have attained the sort of apathy which would be "to have reentered the bosom of nature, in a waking state, in our world,"²¹ inhabited by language.

Of what Sade is lacking here, we have forbidden ourselves to say a word. One may sense it in the gradation of the *Philosophy* toward the fact that it is the curved needle, dear to Buñuel's heroes, which is finally called upon to resolve a girl's *penisneid*, and quite a big one.

Be that as it may, it appears that there is nothing to be gained by replacing Diotima with Dolmancé, someone whom the ordinary path seems to frighten more than is fitting, and who—did Sade see it?—closes the affair with a *Noli tangere matrem*. V . . . ed and sewn up, the mother remains forbidden. Our verdict upon the submission of Sade to the Law is confirmed.

Of a treatise truly about desire, there is thus little here, even nothing.

What of it is announced in this crossing taken from an encounter, is at most a tone of reason.

R. G. September 1962

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21. Cf. the footnote on p. 94. *Sade, mon prochain*.