Sade presents us with a conflict taken to the last degree. Here, self-deception is powerless, and Sade's persistent singularity expresses the very impossibility of his times. The human drama of the Enlightenment — this *is* Sade. His life and works are nothing but this: the brutal acknowledgement that Reason will not allow any reconciliation between social order and individual drives.

Simone de Beauvoir is correct in addressing Sade's intoxication of tyranny, for "there is," as she says in *Must we Burn Sade*, "no hint of ambition in him, no spirit of enterprise, no will to power, and I am quite prepared to believe that he was a coward." De Beauvoir's positioning of Sade as *man and writer* rather than *villain* or *idol* allows the text to "come back to earth among us."

In general, his existence he subordinates to eroticism, which perhaps "appeared to him to be the only possible fulfillment of his existence." But this eroticism isn't the simple expression of sexual drives; for Deleuze, Sade's understanding of *nature* distinguished between two different realms of phenomena: a *second nature*, concerned with the preservation of living organisms, in which all human and divine laws were grounded, and a *first nature*, the true principle of the universe, which demands "the wholesale annihilation of all life." Sade identifies his acts with the *absolute rationality* of *first nature*, against the *irrational principles* created in *second nature*.

Thus, what is taken to its logical conclusion by Sade is simply the Enlightenment equation between Reason and Nature: *all human drives are necessarily natural, and thus, they only express absolute reason*. And so, following Sade's twofold identification of the ego with *second nature* and of the superego with the *absolute reason* of *first nature*, the rational destruction of the ego requires its projection *onto a victim*.

But Sade's existence, however, was *repressed* by the Ancien Régime's demand for each individual to subjugate their drives to the sovereign — a demand Sade could only see as *irrational*. The progressiveness of the Enlightenment, so long as it remained a *lawful* question, would still fall short of

Sade's cry for *total rationality*. After having spent half his life in prison for a variety of sexual crimes, even in an era that claimed to organize itself around reason alone, he would once again find himself punished for his drives — and locked away.

Once the Law has been identified with *second nature*, it is necessarily discarded as *irrational* and *unjust*, whereas true justice rests in the *drive to annihilation* of *first nature*. "The most abominable murderer" as Sade has the Pope himself explain, "is but the spokesman of the desires of nature, the vehicle of her will." To submit to the Law, then, for Sade, was to submit to the rule of evil; a resignation that had always earned the hypocritical name of "virtue." Through the unfolding of Sade's cold and pure reason, virtue itself is exposed as nothing but vice, whereas what was named "vice," is shown to be *natural virtue*: "it is through goodwill," as Sade has Justine say, "that I became a whore, and through virtue, a libertine."

If Hobbes posited the *state of nature* as a *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and saw society as what makes men good, Rousseau proposed the opposite: *men are good by nature, but society corrupts them*.

Sade can only be understood through this naturalist inversion: the Hobbesian *state of nature* is assumed as *actually good*, and Nature must be followed. But then, what of the *good nature* of Rousseau? It falls within the realm described by Sade as "unintelligible nature," (second nature) which is opposed to *natural reason* (first nature). As he writes in *Aline et Valcour*, "let us dare do violence to this unintelligible Nature, the better to master the art of enjoying her." Natural reason is then tasked with the enslavement—the rationalization—of *unintelligible nature*.

Sade's realism is that of a *truant*. His thought responds to no external necessity and finds no purpose in the world. It is a sovereign thought, and like all sovereigns, beyond the Law. Pure thought, freed from all constraints, and thus, outside of all traditional reason, mores, codes, and rules — all of these, for Sade, are "conventions," and thus, *irrational*. This *pure thought* necessarily puts him at odds with

everything conventional and established — he might think *beyond the Law*, but he lives, rather, as an *outlaw*.

In the original Middle English sense, *truants* are those who beg by choice, rather than necessity. The connotation of *voluntary desertion from the social order* was retained by this term even in its contemporary usage, where it is now used of *absentee students*.

Truant realism dissolves all conventions. Its cynicism assaults all established pieties and social charades. But it is *not* Socratic, but rather — Thrasymachean. This cynicism operates outside of all traditional explanations, actively turned against the conventional reason of any social order or school of thought. And yet, its ground—which distinguishes it from bare madness—is the dominant thought of its era. It is *precisely* Enlightenment positivism, taken by Sade to its logical conclusion, which ultimately reveals "the brutality inherent in the positive," as Adorno and Horkheimer write. Every *custom* and *received idea* is brought before the tribunal of Reason and condemned as *irrational* — all that remains as *rational* is the brute given of reality.

This *truant realism* flowers into the *insanity of pure reason* — Sade's madness is entirely rational. His truant thought, lying outside all human conventions, assumes the *brutish realness* of the world which is precisely what conventions seek to *conceal*. Sade sees the *conventional order* as one prescribing "what ought to be happening," whereas the *natural, rational order* is that of "what is actually happening" — the trawling brutality of the 18th century. In the guilt-ridden violence of the given, what Sade denounces is *guilt*, not violence.

As a solitary, he explores the realm of "the other" — for him, "the Woman." And really, his concern is not so much with *women* as it is with the Woman: "how I wish," he writes, "that by strangling a single woman I could strangle them all!" It is the unity of the Woman as *otherness* that would have to be destroyed — precisely because the *ego* has been projected, as *the other*, onto a victim.

Aristotle's natural system of relations among beings posited three relations: Slave-Master, Teacher-Student, Father-Son. This systematic approach places singularities in arbitrary categories of definitive beings, a historic curse bestowed upon us, which subjects the human to the fiction of *actualization*. Within this fiction, women could be neither teacher, father, master, nor son, student, or slave — the Woman takes place in a space of *social abjection*. Its *otherness* lies in its inclusion within a social order from which it has been preemptively excluded.

It is precisely in this space of absolute otherness that the cold rationality of Sadism can act out its process. The *insanity of pure reason* opens a window outside of conventional thought, onto the *actual reality* of Enlightenment positivism — the abyss of the positive. Sade shows the *rationality* of first nature as the annihilation of the *other* in which the ego annihilates itself. "This," he proudly announces, "is what Reason looks like."

The complete honesty Sade can claim for himself lies in his *total assumption* of the Enlightenment project — here, nothing is either good or evil. "It is what it is."

The alienation Sade endures through his egoist embrace of self-consciousness constantly distances him from the general, moderate Enlightenment current throughout most of society. It is because Sade's Enlightenment is so abysmally radical, that he can feel nothing but hatred and disgust for the hypocrisy of those men who claim *pure reason*, and yet cling to the *prejudices* of conventional wisdom. "It is because he did nor hush up the impossibility of deriving from reason a fundamental argument against murder, but proclaimed it from the rooftops, that Sade is still vilified."

As the Enlightenment unravels as a domination of the phenomenal world by the noumenal, a similar process is at play in Sade, who seeks to rid the positive of all illusions. If Enlightenment "virtue" makes a claim to rationality, it also allows itself to be subjected to rational enquiry; this is where Sade

begins. Virtue that claims a rational ground for itself will be exposed as *vice*; and virtue that makes no claim to rationality is discarded as *irrational*: "anything which is beyond the limits of human reason is either illusion or idle fancy," he writes. And pure reason is not *moral*. What Sade exposes is the inability of the Enlightenment to ground any of its moral claims.

"Everything," he concludes, "is simply what it is and what you see." There is no degree of anomie before which Sade recoils. He displays the world in all its exposure, its coldness and cruelty, its sexuality, misogyny and hate, lashing out at every "illusion or idle fancy," every moral justification, every virtuous pretense. As Marx once said of Napoleon, "he was no terrorist with his head in the clouds."

Justine embodies virtue itself. Following her parent's death, she is left alone in a cruel world and its destitution, homeless. It is her very purity that guides her down her path; as a religious virgin, she is corrupted to become less than nothing.

The misfortunes of her journey arise through her excessive virtue, a virtue relentlessly punished by every stratum of society: thieves, nobles, wanderers, doctors, monks, businessmen, priests. Authority constantly dominates her existence. Sade leaves little to the imagination in his illustration of Man as nothing more than a tyrant. But what troubles Sade is the *hypocrisy* of tyranny — the veil of justification that conceals a brutal reality. Justine's *crime* is her belief in this deception—in virtue—a deception that she helps propagate, and for which she is *justly punished*.

And so, Sade's dissolvent does not strive against tyranny—with which he has no qualms—but rather, against specious justifications. He shows domination as a *given*, and only protests against its air of legitimacy. "Monarchs can think they are authorized to sacrifice twenty of thirty thousand of their subjects in a single day in their own interest, why should a father not be master of the lives of his children?"

Like Pascal, who exposed the absurdity of sovereign power while preaching submission to it, Sade's *dying man*, in the midst of a long tirade against religious oppression, suddenly exclaims that "kings and their majesty are the only things that I take on trust and respect."

The Enlightenment as a process never granted volition to women and more generally to any *other* of Man. It follows that the most unbridled form of the Enlightenment, Sadism, should realize itself as a savage domination of *otherness*.

The Enlightened perception of Nature submits everything to its totalizing categories; Reason simultaneously becomes a means of oppression and its justification.

Life itself is restricted to what human reason can grasp, and what can be imposed by those fortunate enough to wield Reason. Everything that *is*, is rational; what *is not*, is irrational — there is nothing critical to Sade's statement that "women are everywhere treated like beasts that one makes use of when required." *It is what it is*, and thus, *rational* — for one to follow their natural drives is the purest form of Reason. Never does Sade question the *historicity* of those "drives."

Sade's positing, whether he knew it or not, was that of all Western metaphysics: the identity of Being and the Logos. From Hegel's *identity of the practical and theoretical idea* to Parmenides' τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, "this identity remains the watchword." The horror of Sade does not rest in his life of depravity, but rather, in the inability of Reason to mount a case against it.