

Subj: **The New Marquis de Sade**

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Mainstreaming Evil - The New Marquis de Sade
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He was an eighteenth-century French aristocrat so utterly evil that his name spawned the adjective "sadistic." I'm talking about the Marquis de Sade, whose vivid writings associated sexual gratification with torture and cruelty.

What's really astounding is that this man, who was evil incarnate, is today being rehabilitated. In trendy academic circles, it has become chic to cast the Marquis de Sade as a herald of liberation.

And yet, Sade was an egocentric pervert who spent much of his life in prison for corrupting young girls, brutalizing prostitutes, and other acts too revolting to describe. His books feature graphic accounts of sexual perversion, exploitation, rape, and torture. Small wonder that his books circulated only underground.

But surprisingly, in the early twentieth century, literary critics began to revive Sade's works. In 1909 one writer called him "the freest spirit that has ever lived." And in the 1960s, a torrent of essays appeared transforming Sade from a moral monster into a master of French literature. Just in this past year, two flattering biographies appeared aimed at the general reader: One was titled, "The Marquis de Sade: A Life," the other, "At Home with the Marquis de Sade."

The appeal of Sade is not merely that his books are pornographic. As literary critic Roger Shattuck explains, Sade had a philosophical goal: namely, to "systematically invert every human virtue—above all, Christian virtue." In Sade's books, virtue is punished while vice is rewarded. Why? Because, as Sade argued, nature itself has no morality—and since humans are merely part of nature, that means morality is nothing more than a social construction. To be true to our real self, we ought to shrug off the shackles of conventional morality and be like the beasts-governed solely by instinct, by sex, and by cruelty. Thus Sade defended crime and violence as a necessary part of nature.

It is Sade's philosophy that appeals to modern writers. For example, the late deconstructionist writer

and homosexual activist Michel Foucault praised Sade for revealing the truth about our relationship to nature. As Foucault saw it, Sade was liberating our biological nature from the false constraints of social convention.

This is nothing less than an inverted form of salvation—liberation through cruelty and sexual excess.

The world is full of offers of false salvation, all speaking to a deep-rooted sense that something is wrong with the human condition—all offering some way to restore human nature to its wholeness. Sade was nothing less than an "evangelist," as Shattuck says, for a worldview—one that defines human beings as merely part of nature, and defines salvation as a return to nature: an amoral sphere red in tooth and claw. Sade's vision of cruelty and depravity was the logical consequence of the philosophy of naturalism—that nature is all that exists.

Francis Schaeffer urged Christians to practice pre-evangelism by pressing people to the logical consequences of their own beliefs. Many today accept some form of naturalism, and we need to press them to see the consequences of that belief—that humans are brutes and thus brutality is only natural.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in recent attempts to accept the vile Marquis de Sade as a beacon of liberation